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Teaching not knowing: Reflections on a writing practice

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TEACHING NOT KNOWING: REFLECTIONS ON A WRITING PRACTICE

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Reading and Writing Instruction

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April 5, 2004

Date

I dedicate this work to Elizabeth Moulton Frost Bussone,
my mother and best friend.

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ABSTRACT

TEACHING NOT KNOWING: REFLECTIONS ON A WRITING PRACTICE

BY

Terry A. Moher

University of New Hampshire, May 2004

Donald M. Murray (1994) proposes that the practice of teaching composition engages us in a process of “teaching not knowing.” In this inquiry, I draw from theories in composition, psychology, epistemology, ethics, and communication to portray and describe this practice in my high school classroom. Studying my students’ writing processes and our interactions in writing conferences, I describe a philosophical stance that approaches teaching writing as improvisational, dialogic and relational. This reflection explores the conditions and attitudes which enhance our capacities to teach writing processes and adopts discourse outside of composition theory that may inform our practices in teaching writing.

This study suggests that a professional practice, unique and constantly in process, focuses beyond the application of techniques to ethical relations with persons. The implications of “teaching not knowing” offer insight into ways of being with students which foster their capacity for agency and their potential for learning. The teaching of writing, and the meanings engendered in our professional discourse, extend far beyond what some consider the “basics,” to an understanding of persons, of relations that invite learning, and of intuitive practices developed within a reflective practitioner’s daily experience.

INTRODUCTION

When we go about the spontaneous, intuitive performance of the actions of everyday life, we show ourselves to be knowledgeable in a special way. Often we cannot say what it is that we know. When we try to describe it we find ourselves at a loss.... Our knowing is ordinarily tacit, implicit in our patterns of action and in our feel for the stuff with which we are dealing. It seems right to say that our knowing is *in* our action. (Donald Schon, *The Reflective Practitioner*, p. 49)

Research as Reflective Practice

I began this inquiry over two decades ago as a teacher with questions from my secondary English classroom. I had majored in literature in both undergraduate and graduate programs and, like many, I came to teaching with little experience of how to teach writing. I wanted to learn how to teach in ways I had not experienced as a learner. A colleague, Dennis Robinson, and I shared ideas, insights, and a bit of cynicism about the ways in which writing was being taught, (or, rather, not taught). He introduced me to the Phillips Exeter Academy Writing Project and to the University of New Hampshire, and I felt at home immediately in the community spaces these writing programs offered teachers. It was there I learned what collegiality is truly about. I have pursued the problems and issues of teaching writing across these years, not coincidentally paralleling the path of what became known as “the writing process movement.”

My research emerges both from the years of informal study of teaching writing within the setting of my everyday classroom work and the collegial conversations shared with Jerry Kelly, John Ferguson, Mary McIver, Christine Knapp, and other great teachers, as well as from the more formal inquiry in which I have been engaged in this doctoral program. My knowledge of teaching writing has evolved over the course of 25 years as I acquired a knowledge of learners and their processes of learning: observing in hindsight the learning that my students have achieved; “looking and looking again”

(Berthoff) at their work; listening closely to their voices; and attempting to weave an array of theories into the text of my practice. Glenda Bissex writes, "A teacher-researcher may start out not with a hypothesis to test, but with a wondering to pursue" (1989, p. 3). Such wondering grew out of my first experiences in Tom Newkirk's New Hampshire Writing Project. There, Tom Carnicelli, in addressing the problems of teaching writing in secondary classrooms, offered a model for the kinds of inquiry I would pursue over the next two decades, and which I continue today. As Nancy Martin points out, "Generally, teachers have been trained as doers of other people's directions" (1987, p. 22). My experiences in the NHWP, in my high school classroom, and in this doctoral program have offered the antithesis of that initial training, leading me into inquiries of pedagogical, cognitive, epistemological and ethical issues that would allow me to integrate theory and practice. I feel privileged and fortunate to have been, simultaneously, part of the academic community of the University and a practitioner in the classroom.

Though I began this research primarily to enhance my understanding of my own evolving practice, I recognize that other teachers have been my audience, as well. One of my initial goals has been to develop a conceptual language made more explicit by examples that would render both theory and practice accessible to us as teachers of writing, encouraging professional discourse that might guide us further toward questions and knowledge about our discipline.

I begin this work with the voices of those who define and describe educational research in terms which resonate most clearly with my own work, teaching secondary English. Michael Polyani proposes, "A theory is something other than myself" (1962, p. 4). The theoretical work which I attempt in this dissertation integrates "something other than myself" and my own experience; both standpoints meet in the space of my classroom, where I continue to teach and learn everyday, and where I continue to

pursue research as an integral part of my practice. Anne Berthoff redefined for me effective teacher research, a quality integral to effective teaching practice:

Research would come to mean looking and looking again at what happens in the English classroom. We do not need new information—we need to think about the information we have. We need to interpret what goes on when students respond to one kind of assignment and not to another, or when some respond to an assignment and others do not. We need to interpret things like that—and then to interpret our interpretations. ... What we need is ... questions we can invent about what we think we are doing, questions that will help us, too, in devising the criteria for evaluating what we are getting. (1987b, p. 30)

Both Schon and Berthoff affirm a kind of research-practice in which many of us engage on a daily basis—thinking about the information we have in our daily teaching and attempting to understand the processes by which individual students gain access to knowledge. In “A Quiet Form of Research,” James Britton maintains that educational research must emphasize “the minutiae of behavior of a particular teacher in moment-by-moment interaction with a particular group of students in a particular school and locality on a particular occasion...” (1987, p. 15). He advised, however, that while *description* often serves us well in our research, *prescription* can impede our professional purposes (p. 13). This dissertation presents a portrait of a classroom practice of teaching writing and, through this description, attempts to embed theoretical perspectives that may inform our proficiency in developing a more useful professional discourse. I want to emphasize that it is not in any way prescriptive. Mine is a unique and evolving practice, and my purpose is to open (and re-open) dialogue about teaching composition.

Stephen North explored the notion of “practice as a mode of inquiry” (1987, p. 21). I bring to this study of composition theory what North calls “practitioners’ lore,” specifically that “*private* knowledge” (p. 28) which is “organized within an experience-based framework” (p. 23). As North states, “Writing and the teaching of writing are activities as complex as any human beings undertake. All of what is involved cannot be articulated, let alone codified” (p. 30). This work does not attempt to offer what North refers to as “replicability”; it is not an inquiry concerned with “degree of certainty”

(p. 155). In fact, it is the degree of *uncertainty* which I consider essential to this practice. In his article "Reflective Practice," Robert Tremmel explains the "quest for uncertainty" (1993, p. 437) that Donald Schon advocates in his work, a quest that requires a mind "that has the capacity to reach into the center of confusing situations, to see itself, and to shift the base of its operations or pull up stakes altogether and follow the flow of the action" (1983, p. 437).

In *The Reflective Practitioner*, Donald Schon raises "the question of the relationship between the kinds of knowledge honored in academia and the kinds of competence valued in professional practice" (vii). It is a fundamental and profound question about relationships between theory and practice, between epistemology and pedagogy. Schon calls for an "inquiry into the epistemology of practice." He asks, "What is the kind of knowing in which competent practitioners engage?" (viii):

I begin with the assumption that competent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit. Nevertheless, starting with protocols of actual performance, it is possible to construct and test modes of knowing. Indeed, practitioners themselves often reveal a capacity for reflection on their intuitive knowing in the midst of action and sometimes use this capacity to cope with the unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice. (ix)

Schon's fundamental premise lies in the claim that *each* situation of practice is unique, *each* characterized by "uncertainty, disorder, and indeterminacy" (in Erickson, 1958, p. 16). He turns to psychologist Eric Ericson's perception of each patient as "a universe of one" (1958, p.16) as an appropriate analogy for teaching. Writing process pedagogy, as I am attempting to describe it as a practice, engages us as educators in relation with each student "as a universe of one." The writing conferences led me to acknowledge the nature of a new space into which each student carries these characteristics of "uncertainty, disorder and indeterminacy." My competence within this space relies upon my capacity to meet each student and those characteristics she brings to it as a unique experience, to acknowledge each person and to open possibilities for her development as a learner and as a "person in process" (Anne Herrington and Marcia Curtis, 2000).

Tremmel explains the insignificance of “technical rationality” to Schon’s theory of practice: “When we are immersed in practice, technical rationality can only tell us what we already know. The beginning point, Schon says, should be to respond artistically to what we are doing and to bring our insights from that to bear on what it is we do not know” (p. 437). My own focus on technique gradually began to dissipate as I became more comfortable working intuitively with each student and each piece of writing. For years I felt vulnerable (and still do to some extent, even after 25 years) to the administrative demands to identify exactly what I am going to teach, what I am going to do, and what my students will know. The epistemology of schooling presumes precise control of each of those facets of teaching—including are students—all of which are expected to be known in quantifiable terms, consistent across disciplines, and unchanging in their processes. Such an epistemology precludes the possibilities of teaching and learning which intuitive and reflective practices invite. As Schon states, “An artful practice of the unique case appears anomalous when professional competence is modeled in terms of application of established techniques to recurrent events” (p. 19). Techniques cannot be the end for which we strive as educators. Techniques, in and of themselves, can too easily become reified, losing the outcomes for which we devise them. They do not in themselves afford the resilience essential to our practices. The term “conference techniques” has become for me something of an oxymoron. Years ago a teacher asked me to list for her the questions that I use in my writing conferences. I started to, and in the process realized that, like a conversation (or dialogue), each conference presented something unique. The amenities of the conference, (How’s it going? What are you working on? What problems have you encountered?), merely initiate conversational techniques to invite students to enter a dialogic space as they begin to reflect on both their written and non-written texts and the possibilities of both.

In *Radical Presence: Teaching as Contemplative Practice*, Mary Rose O'Reilley claims, "Our most productive comments can do no more than hold open a space into which the student may in time grow" (1998, p. 32). I cannot presume the learning that will or should happen for each of my students, what they need or what they know. My repertoire of techniques, as Schon points out, may even inhibit my ability to work as effectively with individual students. Relying on a set of techniques means that I may not be open to the possibilities of response that may ensue within a conference and that might encourage the writer to pursue subtle or obscure paths, ideas not yet clear to him or her, or to me. Parker Palmer calls ours "an age that puts more faith in the powers of technique than in the powers of the human heart..." (1998b, ix). And O'Reilley affirms, "Let methodology follow from the particular (this student, this hour, this blue spruce) rather than from the world of theory" (p. 14). Again, Schon addresses the dilemma we face in these kinds of practices:

Professionals have been disturbed to find that they cannot account for processes they have come to see as central to professional competence. It is difficult for them to imagine how to describe and teach what might be meant by making sense of uncertainty, performing artistically, setting problems, and choosing among competing professional paradigms, when these processes seem mysterious in the light of the prevailing model of professional knowledge. (p. 20)

Our professional integrity becomes undermined by our inability to articulate that in which we have gained competence and expertise. This has been a personal dilemma for me throughout most of my teaching career. I entered this doctoral program in search of the knowledge to access language and theory that might support what I have come to know in my practice. Schon articulates the complexities of such an attempt:

When a practitioner reflects in and on his practice, the possible objects of his reflection are as varied as the kinds of phenomena before him and the systems of knowing-in-practice which he brings to them. He may reflect on the tacit norms and appreciations which underlie a judgment, or on the strategies and theories implicit in a pattern of behavior. He may reflect on the feeling for a situation which has led him to adopt a particular course of action, on the way in which he has framed the problem he is trying to solve, or on the role he has constructed for himself within a larger institutional context. (p. 62)

Attempting to articulate and demonstrate the processes in which I engage in my professional practice has proven to be a humbling and challenging experience. My efforts have been sustained by the voices of others: composition scholars, teachers at the University of New Hampshire, theorists in various fields, colleagues, and, most importantly, students. I have found it compelling, as well, working with talented and intelligent young teachers and interns entering our profession who would benefit from a knowledge of their theoretical ancestors and an ability to articulate their own tacit “systems of knowing-in-practice” in order to be able to confront in the future the dilemmas of teaching in institutions which do not understand or value such professional competence

An Ideology of Not Knowing

At the heart of this work is an insight into a practice to which Don Murray refers as “teaching not knowing.” In *Taking Stock: The Writing Process Movement in the 90's*, Murray’s article “Knowing Not Knowing” inspired my use of this term as a point of inquiry into teaching writing. Murray writes,

I considered the writing process as a way of separating the knowing from the not knowing, or, to put it differently, a way of organizing knowing so the writer could be launched into the more important world of not knowing. The process was, after all, a process of learning, exploration, speculation, discovery: the goal was always surprise, the purpose was to write to know.

This is the essential challenge of teaching composition: how do we teach not knowing? (1994, p. 60)

His compelling question has driven this study: How do we teach not knowing? Implicit in the question are other questions at the heart of my practice: How have I come to understand the processes of writing? What do they look like in the classroom? How do I prepare myself and my students to believe and engage in a practice of not knowing? How do I justify it in a system of schooling which devalues “process” and its implications for education? In what ways is resistance an essential aspect of this practice? What kinds of relations are critical to such a practice? In what ways do I approach teaching

and learning differently from my traditional training? And what is implied about the concept of literacy in such a practice?

An ideology is defined as “visionary theorizing” (*The Random House Dictionary*). Don Murray’s work offers an ideology by which many of us were able to create and develop true pedagogical practices, not merely adapted techniques and strategies. At the center of his work is the notion of surprise, a “not knowing” that Annie Dillard refers to as “an epistemological tool” (1989, p. 2). Murray emphasizes that “the process changes according to the cognitive styles of the writer, ... according to the writing task, ... with experience...” (p. 61), always impressing upon us the plurality of anything he attempts to name in teaching writing.

Harlene Anderson, in her work as a therapist, defines a theory of not-knowing in therapy that resonates with Schon’s “reflection-in-action” and Murray’s “teaching not knowing.” I turn to her work as a definitional model for “not knowing” in this dissertation:

Knowing—the delusion of understanding or the security of methodology—decreases the possibility of seeing and increases our deafness to the unexpected, the unsaid, and the not-yet-said (Anderson & Goolishian, 1988b). If we always see and hear things we are accustomed to, then we will miss, neither see nor hear, that which is different and unique.

Not-knowing refers to a therapist’s position—an attitude and belief—that a therapist does not have access to privileged information, can never fully understand another person, always needs to be in a state of being informed by the other, and always needs to learn more about what has been said or may not have been said. In *not-knowing* a therapist adopts an interpretive stance that relies on the continuing analysis of experience as it occurs in context and as it is related and narrated by a client. Interpretation is always a dialogue between therapist and client and not the result of predetermined theoretical narratives essential to a therapist’s meaning, expertise, experience, or therapy model. Several aspects of not-knowing enable a therapist to be continually informed by his or her client and to have forever developing understanding. (1997, p. 134)

The theorists and writers with whom I converse in this work speak again and again of the necessity of acknowledging uncertainty in our pursuit of teaching and of learning. Their voices—in composition theory, in therapy, in communication, in ethics and epistemology, even in jazz improvisation—all echo a rhetoric of uncertainty, of surprise, of the unexpected, of the unknown, of the not-yet-known. This language pervades an

ideology of teaching not knowing which I attempt to articulate, interpret and demonstrate in my own practice. H. Anderson acknowledges our stance in not knowing and the quality of uncertainty which we must learn to accept as a disconcerting, if not precarious, position:

To be uncertain requires that we leave our dominant professional and personal discourses—what we know or think we know—suspended, hanging in front of us; that we be continually aware of, reflect on, and be open to examination by ourselves and others. This requires being able not to understand too quickly, to let go of early assumptions and stereotyping thoughts, to avoid premature understanding, to doubt what we think we know, and to prevent valuing our knowledge over a client's. (1997, p. 134)

Such a stance may appear to compromise our professional integrity. From traditional positions, in particular, we may risk appearing unknowledgeable, lacking discipline and rigor in our classrooms. Yet, in another voice, Barbara Osburg, a high school teacher, writes about uncertainty through the lens of “honorable confusion”:

Confusion is very important and not to be avoided or controlled. It is something significant, to be savored—a sign that we are alert to the possibilities, aware of the amazing variety of choices, conscientiously considering the various options, perspectives, biases—the many truths which may all be true.

We need to come to life and to teaching with doubts and hesitations and investigations and continued incredulity. Only in that way are we seeking the ineffable truth of things. Only in that way are we open and ready for the serendipitous moments of miracle. (1995, p. 57)

Such an articulate, ethical and humble attitude toward the complexities such teaching implies can only serve to enhance our own competent practices and to help us develop discourses which might certainly influence, and perhaps invite into them, those who hold to traditional epistemological modes of education.

Techniques and Practices

In teaching writing, we are tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student's place and mode of operation in it...we are not simply offering training in a useful technical skill...We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering it and making sense of it. (James Berlin, 1982)

Lad Tobin charges that advocates of process pedagogy “reified many of the materials and methods of our approach” (1994, p. 8). For purposes of this dissertation, I would like to adapt William Spohn's distinction between techniques and practices in order

to address this issue. According to Spohn, an ethicist, practices are “complex social activities that address certain fundamental needs and human values. Such practices are activities that are worthwhile in themselves” (2000, p. 338). Spohn further delineates a practice as a pursuit which “launches us on a journey in which we do not know what to expect and cannot determine what the outcome should be” (p. 338). Techniques, on the other hand, “are not worthwhile in themselves, they are worthwhile because they produce certain results. Although a technique requires certain skills, skills are a means to an end beyond the technique” (p. 330). Practices, unlike techniques, move us toward other ways of being:

While techniques do something *for* you, practices are sufficiently challenging and rewarding that they do something *to* you; they change you. The discipline of writing novels or being a good friend trains our motives and expands our capacities. If the practice is sufficiently complex and challenging, it can even transform us, changing the deep values of our hearts. It changes the practitioner at the deepest level of imagination and aspiration. (p. 330-331)

Berthoff writes, “Theory can help us figure out why something works so we can repeat it, inventing variations” (1987, p. 32). Our conversations as teachers too often tend to be about techniques, ways of getting at skills, methods that ‘work.’ One reason is that we have little language with which to talk about practices. Schooling requires that we record the language of the predictable: the skills, strategies, information, content, definitions, concepts needed to prove, somehow, that our students are learning. It also scrutinizes the product without reference to the journey. The present emphasis on assessment and accountability continues this traditional mode of schooling. We attend workshops and conferences which give us techniques and strategies that have been shown to produce immediate results, the business of education. Using portfolios or free-writing or conferences, however, do not necessarily comprise practices. They may be merely techniques that produce something in and of themselves, moving learners no further, having an immediate effect, yet not significant to ongoing learning. John Dewey requires of an educative experience that it move the students toward future opportunities

for learning, creating “enduring attitudes...[which] are fundamentally what count in the future” (1938, p. 48). Dewey distinguishes traditional notions of learning as the “acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of the elders. Moreover, that which is taught is thought of as essentially static. It is taught as a finished product, with little regard either to the ways in which it was originally built up or to changes that will surely occur in the future” (p. 19). He explains that “the fundamental unity of the newer philosophy is found in the idea that there is an intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education” (p. 20).

Parker Palmer endorses our need for on-going professional dialogue about practices among teachers, as opposed to the tentative and simplistic nature of techniques:

Our tendency to reduce teaching to questions of technique is one reason we lack a collegial conversation of much duration or depth. Though technique-talk promises the ‘practical’ solutions that we think we want and need, the conversation is stunted when technique is the only topic: the human issues in teaching get ignored, so the human beings who teach feel ignored as well. When teaching is reduced to technique, we shrink teachers as well as their craft—and people do not willingly return to a conversation that diminishes them. (1998, p. 145)

Peter Elbow claims that in the discipline of English, “we are teaching pervasive and universal practices rather than just information you can easily summarize, test, and grade for” (1973, p. 113). Harlene Anderson considers the nature of questions a fundamental quality in developing a practice of “not-knowing”: questions which are based on a “knowing” stance, she asserts, are “based on a methodology, or generated by techniques or present questions for information gathering or validating hypotheses to which we think we know the answer before asking the question” (1997, p. 146). The purpose of such “content questions,” she explains, is to arrive at “data and information.” Her work in therapy emphasizes, instead, what she refers to as “process questions,” questions created to “facilitate dialogue” (p. 160).

In *The Dialogic Curriculum*, Patricia Stock states, “The practice of education begins and ends in ordinary language and experience, in teachers’ and students’ dialogic

exchange and interactions with one another" (1995, p. 10). These theorists emphasize dialogic inquiry as integral to education. Within such dialogue, Jerome Bruner states, "meaning is rendered *public* and *shared*. Our culturally adapted way of life depends upon shared meanings and shared concepts and depends as well upon shared modes of discourse for negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation" (1990, pp. 12-13) Implicit in this concept of shared meanings are the relations which develop them. Central to dialogic inquiry is the nature of relations between and among persons.

Practices contain an ethics; they are about relations. Techniques do not. Doctors, lawyers and psychologists all claim their practices; each engages in relationships with patients and clients (Schon, 1983). Teachers engage, as well, in similar relations with students. Practices, unlike techniques, implicate both practitioner and client/student in ongoing, evolving processes. In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer states, "To educate is to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world" (1998a, p. 6). He warns against "methodological reductionism," which diminishes the work of being in relation.

This "self-protective" split of personhood from practice is encouraged by an academic culture that distrusts personal truth. Though the academy claims to value multiple modes of knowing, it honors only one—an "objective" way of knowing that takes us into the "real" world by taking us "out of ourselves."

... The academic bias against subjectivity not only forces our students to write poorly...but also deforms their thinking about themselves and their world. In a single stroke, we delude our students into thinking that bad prose can turn opinions into facts, and we alienate them from their own inner lives. (1998a, pp. 17-18)

Education lacking personal and relational promise compromises the quality of both intellectual and emotional growth. As Spohn claims, practices engage us in processes that continually change or transform us.

I propose that teaching writing as process may be understood in light of these definitions of what a practice is and does. What have been "reified" (Tobin) are the techniques, many of which were not integrated into pedagogical practices. How can we as a teaching profession come to recognize such practices? What constitutes a practice

and how can we model and teach practices, rather than techniques, in teacher education? How might we ensure that we are developing effective and ethical practices and not merely using techniques that “work”? And how do we recognize and create transformation in our everyday teaching lives?

The complexities of describing our practices and the processes which comprise them are daunting. In the field of composition, language itself has often inhibited our abilities to render theoretical ideas into practices. Our acknowledgment and valuing of process is critical to the teaching of writing; yet placing an emphasis on processes as inherent to my pedagogical practice belies the very structures of the system in which I teach.

To our professional detriment, many secondary teachers consider themselves atheoretical—partly because they have never been initiated into the discourse of theory, partly because they consider their primary concern to be pedagogical. Bronwyn Norton Peirce points to “what Simon (1987, 1988) calls a pedagogy of possibility” and the distinction R. Simon makes “between teaching and pedagogy”:

“Usually, talk about teaching refers to specific strategies and techniques to use in order to meet predefined, given objectives...however, it is an insufficient basis for constituting a practice whose aim is the enhancement of human possibility. (p. 2)” (1992, p. 160).

A pedagogy requires understandings about *why* certain methods and approaches produce certain results—the epistemological and cognitive underpinnings of teaching and learning. Palmer asserts that for the most part, pedagogies have to do only with techniques: “They leave the underlying epistemology unexamined and unchanged; they are not well grounded in an alternative theory about the nature of knowing” (1993, p. 30). In the realities of our schools, conversations among colleagues cannot effectively address these issues without a theoretical discourse. The ability to conceptualize, analyze, and articulate theory is, I believe, critical to our positions as educators, now more than ever. Brent Davis and Dennis Sumara identify one aspect of this concern in the realm of teacher education: “Teaching has been cast as a complicated rather than as

a complex phenomenon—one that can be understood by analyzing its component parts and one that, for all intents and purposes, does not vary across time, setting, and persons” (2000, p. 121). Our ability to demonstrate multiple and complex ways in which we can come to understand practice and theory as intertwined, recursive processes would prove invaluable to teachers in training, involving them (and us all) in what Donna Qualley calls “reflexive inquiry,”

...this method for teaching and learning in which both teachers and students continually attempt to move beyond the bounds of their current understandings by making repeated, dialogic excursions into the realm of the other, and then spiraling back once again to confront their own provisional insights. (1997, p. 6)

When we engage in such practices, we do far more than merely collect techniques to control curriculum and students.

Writing Process Pedagogy

In his introduction to *Taking Stock: The Writing Process Movement in the '90s*, Tobin acknowledges the work of its authors in attempting “an understanding and acceptance of basic process philosophy...looking critically at the past and imaginatively at the future. These articles,” he writes, “locate and re-locate writing process pedagogy in terms of both contemporary theory and the author’s own experiences” and “speak eloquently for a new process movement, one that more fully integrates abstract theory and down-to-earth practice” (1994, p. 11). The hundreds of articles and books I’ve read over the years which have portrayed some qualities or beliefs or characteristics of what a writing process pedagogy means have each offered passionate, committed perspectives about our profession that in some way enhanced my own developing practice. Some contradicted others, some offered insights into omissions, some remained too specific for my tastes, but all offered me insights into how teachers and theorists were transforming their own understandings of teaching writing. I, too, have walked along a continuum of sorts, moving back and forth as I interpreted and reinterpreted my own philosophy of what it means to teach writing. My practice comes

out of the initial stages of the “process movement” in the early ‘80s and yet the descriptions and premises of both teachers and theorists continue to be divergent. And rightly so. As Kay Halasek notes, “Just as our language is already someone else’s, so, too, are our pedagogies. They are not static; not *pure*, except in the abstract, but dependent, dialogic, working from, across, and through one another” (1999, p. 177). Furthermore, as Dewey wrote in 1929, “No conclusion of scientific research can be converted into an immediate rule of educational art. For there is no educational practice whatever which is not highly complex; that is to say, which does not contain many other conditions and factors than are included in the scientific finding” (p. 19).

The language of process philosophy has been, for many of us in the classroom, inadequate—at times ambiguous, often misleading in its descriptions and definitions, and at times discouraging in its practical realities. In my practice as a teacher of literacy in a secondary school and in working in the New Hampshire Writing Program with teachers to translate practice into theory, I have struggled for language with which to discuss the teaching of writing that would open our conceptualizations of what it means to teach and to learn. The terminology (ownership, conference, revision, voice, free-writing, portfolio, product, even process itself) seemed elusive. Meanings in practice remained unclear, impractical and bewildering for many teachers. And many teachers came to reject a process approach as too difficult, even impossible, within the limitations of the structures of school. And often they were. I understood their reasons as teachers chose to abandon what they felt had initially offered exciting possibilities for their work. Expanding our understanding of both theory and practice in teaching writing by “looking and looking again” at various classroom practices may help us to develop and sustain strong professional practices.

When I entered this program, I believed that my ability to understand and articulate what it means to teach writing would come from theoretical study. I was naive, however, not yet having understood the dialectical relationships between theory and

practice, between epistemology and pedagogy. In fact, only recently have I come to perceive theory itself as a process. John Stewart and Karen Zediker articulate this distinction beautifully:

[I]t is important to distinguish the product “theory” from the process of “theorizing,” understood as focused and systematic reflection designed to enhance understanding. Importantly, when one shifts emphasis from theory to theorizing, practice becomes an inherent part of the whole. This happens because “theory” is a set of conclusions that can be considered separate from what they are “about.” But “theorizing” necessarily engages the experiences—the practices—that are trying to be understood. So theory becomes practice-made-articulate; it consists of discursive accounts of practical actions. In this sense, the shift from theory to theorizing begins to engage theory-practice as a tension rather than a dichotomy. (1999, p. 239)

These distinctions dramatically shift my understanding of the dialectical tensions necessary within a conceptualization of theory-practice, rather than struggling to look constantly to one or the other for definitive answers. Nor were we, as teachers of writing, often able to avoid the dichotomies which created unhealthy tensions within the field of composition. The questions we posed one another served only to exacerbate the issues: Which is more important, the process or the product? Which should we grade? Do we attend to the writer or the writing? How can we grade, or even respond to, deeply personal or emotional writing? Is narrative as intellectual or rigorous an endeavor as analytical writing? How do we get students to revise, and whose ownership is it anyway? What are our relationships to our students and to their writing in this context?

Tom Newkirk often helped to refocus many of these questions with insights that moved us beyond simplistic dichotomies, “to see terms not as mutually exclusive choices, but as complementary principles” (1989, p. 187). In his introduction to *To Compose, Teaching Writing in High School and College*, Newkirk addressed the nature of a question I had asked a student-writer who was struggling with writing about her place in her family. Newkirk proposed that

...it is a question that helps in the formation of an individual intellectual identity. If the question is political, it is in the sense that it promotes a decentralization of authority. It is a destabilizing question because it asserts that the responsibility for answering is the student's and not her guidance counselor's or teacher's or parents' or sister's. The role of the teacher is to pose the question, to raise the unexplored issue, and then to be silent. (xvii)

His perception shifted my understanding of the nature of such "process questions" (H. Anderson) and their effects on writers, as well as their writing; furthermore, it complicated our roles and responsibilities in this process. How, for instance, were we as teachers to know the proper "destabilizing question"? From what sources do we "raise the unexplored issue," and how do we recognize it? What role might intuition play? And is silence necessarily our final response? I propose in this study that we cannot assume answers, prior to our conversations and conferences with our student-writers, and in that sense we position ourselves differently when we enter the realm of not knowing with them. And if this is so, then what might be required of us as teachers of such processes that is not in traditional writing pedagogies?

It is worthwhile to consider the ways in which Harlene Anderson discusses what a practice of "not-knowing" demands in terms of therapy:

A therapist genuinely wants to learn how a client makes sense of things: to grasp the current story, not determine its cause; to learn what, for a client, gives it shape. A therapist does not know a priori the intent of any talk or action, but must rely on a client's explanation, learning the significance of what a client is saying from him or her. (1997, p. 137)

The nature of this relationship between therapist and client addresses similar concerns for the writing teacher and student. Although at one time I disavowed any connection between what I do and what therapy is about, I have come to acknowledge, and to learn from, the many ways in which our professional work parallel one another. As Lad Tobin suggests in *Writing Relationships*, I was denying a responsibility that remains part of the best work we do. What is that? I would claim that it is to engage my students in processes of *not knowing*, in seeking out who they are and who they might become, as "persons in process" (Herrington and Curtis). Tobin makes several significant points for consideration in this study: "that establishing, monitoring, and maintaining productive

relationships in the classroom...is the *primary* thing we must do if we want to be successful writing teachers" (1993, p. 15); that "rather than dichotomizing the teacher's and the student's roles, we need to see how they are inseparably related" (p. 20); and "that therapeutic models help explain and explore the teacher-student relationship" (p. 20). I will attempt in this dissertation to explore these suggestions and to consider them within this perception of "theory-practice."

In their work *Persons in Process*, Herrington and Curtis suggest the need to consider connections between psychology and writing, and their fine distinctions help ease for me the sense of vulnerability we inevitably feel as teachers of writing: "A client's way of 'being in the world' is the psychotherapist's domain; a student's way of 'being in writing' is mine. Yet teachers and therapists alike are both educators as well as interpreters of sorts, and the separate contexts in which we work seem to me parallel, if not entwined" (2000, p. 25). In his study of the healing powers of writing, James Pennebaker concludes that both writing and therapy "encourage self-reflection and the attainment of insight about thoughts and moods" and "promote the acknowledgement and understanding of emotion" (1997, p.197). Throughout this work, I explore ways in which the language and conceptualization of therapy, as well as other disciplines, can enhance our knowledge and articulation of teaching writing.

Ancestors

Tobin alleges, with reason, that "the writing process has become an entity, even an industry, with a life of its own, certainly a life apart from its first theorists" (1994, p. 8). Emig, too, expresses the problems of losing sight of one's ancestors and traditions:

At the moment I am quite upset with many of the studies in English education for their anti- or atheoretical nature. Persons don't seem to belong to any tradition. They don't have a point of view ... I find an immense inability in too many of our young people working in the field to acknowledge their origins; and I think it's a function of trivializing education. There are 'the experts,' too; but they don't know who their ancestors are. If you don't, you don't have a tradition; if you don't have a tradition, you're not a part of an intellectual enterprise. (1983, p. 157)

These initial chapters locate my practice in the language and theories of these early practitioners, my “ancestors.” I connect them to more recent voices from other disciplines whose language and rhetoric may enhance our professional capacities, particularly for teaching writing. Their voices are prominent in this dissertation. They have become an integral part of the development of my own professional practice. Their prodigious and profound works are permeated with referents to surprise, to the unexpected, discovery, the unconscious, to digression, mystery, uncertainty, ambiguity, the unknown, to what Murray names “experiments in meaning” (1989, p. 23). Murray characterizes writing as “an exploration of a problem we have not solved with language before” (p. 20). He asserts that “as a society we need to rid ourselves of our learned fear of surprise and embrace the unexpected in our classrooms, on our pages, and in our lives” (p. xi).

In a study of the ethical and epistemological practices (and mispractices) in education, Palmer makes similar claims: “If we are to open space for knowing, we must be alert to our fear of not knowing ... we must see that not knowing is simply the first step toward truth, that the anxiety created by our ignorance calls not for instant answers, but for an adventure into the unknown” (1993, p. 72).

We came to understand the potential that writing held for learning, for coming to know, for giving language to tacit knowledge, for conceptualizing meaning—its heuristic powers—as well as for communicating what is already known. More importantly, now, we need to explore the implications for how we create such practices.

Improvisation and “The Craft of Spontaneity” (Murray, 1994)

Before I move to the next chapter, please allow me the luxury of a digression. In an earlier paper given at American Educational Research Association Conference with Paula Salvio some years ago, I introduced my classroom work with the analogy of “fugue.” Having trained for thirteen years in classical piano, I was comfortable with the concept of the fugue, defined in my *International Library of Music* (in which my parents

invested when I was twelve) as “a composition in which a certain phrase called the subject is announced and discussed by a number of voices in turn separately and simultaneously” (p. 170). Integral to the fugue is counterpoint, described in the same text as “a babel of conflicting voices, each one clamoring for the attention” (p. 166).

I have since come to see the composition of fugue as insufficient to what I am coming to know through this work. The rigid form and conventional rhythm of fugue is complicated, but predictable. I had always been most comfortable, personally, with the characteristics I find inherent to the form of fugue (both in music and in my life): its timed, consistent, predictable rhythms, (I practiced it to the metronome), its prescriptive roles and designed interactive composition. Its formalized arrangement precludes the characteristics of surprise, uncertainty, tension, dissonance. It has been through the process of learning how to teach that I have become familiar with these latter qualities.

Jazz improvisation is not my training. My study of fugue, as well as other classical forms, trained me in perfecting the technique and expression of the composition set in front of me. Jazz is, in significant ways, the antithesis of classical study, though no less disciplined or rigorous. In an article from *Organization Science*, Frank Barrett beautifully articulates the qualities of improvisation in jazz. I want to turn to this article to study its implications for understanding writing as an improvisational performance. Barrett uses several terms on which I will draw to explore how writing engages the creative potential of improvisation as jazz musicians understand and exercise it. Jazz improvisation, as Barrett defines it, serves as a much more precise metaphor of what this study of the processes of writing has revealed to me.

According to Barrett, jazz players engage themselves in “fabricating and inventing novel responses without a prescribed plan and *without certainty of outcome* [emphasis added]; discovering the future that their action creates as it unfolds” (1998, p. 605). Throughout his article, the language of improvisation informs my own understanding of what writers do and what teachers of writing may do to enhance our learning of those

processes. The notion of surprise is critical to improvisation: Jazz improvisers make a profession of “surprising themselves and others with spontaneous, unrehearsed ideas” (p. 606). And because of the “highly exploratory and tentative nature of improvisation, the potential for failure and incoherency” is ever present. Jazz musicians learn to become comfortable in this space of “between,” as Donna Qualley terms it. (1997, p. 22) Barrett describes that space of ‘between’ as improvisational :

[T]oo much reliance on learned patterns (habitual or automatic thinking) tends to limit the risk-taking necessary for creative improvisation; on the other hand too much regulation and control restrict the interplay of musical ideas. In order for musicians to “strike a groove,” they must suspend some degree of control and surrender to the flow of the music. (p. 607)

And like quick writing experiences, as my young writers have demonstrated, the experience of improvisation “involves exploring, continual experimenting, tinkering with possibilities without knowing where one’s queries will lead or how action will unfold” (p. 606). I assist my student writers in their attempts to sustain that delicate point of balance between not knowing and knowing, as Barrett expresses it, “existing on the edge of the unknown” (p. 606). In subsequent chapters I will use concepts of improvisation as Barrett presents them to inform our understanding of teaching writing.

An Epistemology of Practice (Schon, 1983)

Schon calls for an inquiry into an “epistemology of practice implicit in the artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict” (1983, p. 49). Murray asserts “our obligation to show how the theory can be put into practice. We must show that our students are able to write more effectively and produce pieces of writing that find their own meaning because they understand what happens during the writing act” (1982, p. 25). These appeals are related in their assumptions about the connections between theory and practice. My hope is that in attending to these, this work creates a dialogic encounter among the many voices in this text, those of my students and their writing in the everyday experience of my classroom and those of composition scholars, therapists,

ethicists, and others whose language may offer insight into a practice of not knowing and a glimpse into the tacit knowledge of such teaching practices.

Chapters

In the first chapter I explore the nature of what Adam Phillips calls “licensed digression” (1994, p.68), and the ways in which free-writing allows student writers to open possibilities for making meaning. I am a reader by training and am comfortable in the realm of literary analysis. In this chapter in particular I use the literary work, *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, to offer a set of exemplars through which I tell my story about teaching. I follow Holden Caulfield as a figure through whom I can explore the positions of my own students to whom I need to listen and to attend, particularly those who reveal the kinds of resistance of which we need to learn to be respectful, to acknowledge and better understand. Holden is something of an interlocutor for me, a character who possesses a tacit sense of what it means to live in the realm of not knowing, of digression and the freedom to explore personal meaning. And Holden’s presence informs my own students’ work as they demonstrate the power of free-writing.

In the second chapter I use my students’ writing to demonstrate the possibilities that journal writing offers to literary analysis and ways to read and interpret my students’ journal writing as “moments of movement” (Rogers, 1961, p.129) in which creativity and improvisation augment possibilities for analysis and interpretation. My students’ names have been changed, and their writing remains unedited. Grammatical, syntactical and spelling errors remain uncorrected and in their original form.

In the third chapter, I study the nature of “dialogic tension” in conferences and the revision work that results when students become agents in their own learning. Tobin refers to the conference as “a process—not static, not a noun, not a thing, but rather active, dynamic, organic...” (1990, p. 98). My students’ work demonstrates the dynamic nature of that process. Chapter 4 offers ways of perceiving, acknowledging and addressing forms of student resistance. Chapter 5 presents transcripts from writing

conferences in an attempt to demonstrate an array of relationships and responses in which I engage with student writers. Chapter 6 attempts a working understanding of the nature of intuition and its powers for listening and responding. I hope to encourage further study of the concepts of “relational responsibility” (McNamee, Gergen & Associates, 1999); “knowledge of persons” (Code, 1993; Vendler, 1984); “persons in process” (Herrington & Curtis, 2000); and “empathic understanding” (Rogers, 1994; Eisner, 1990; McNamee 1999; Noddings, 1984; Vaughan, 1979) as we might adapt them to our teaching practices.

CHAPTER 1

"LICENSED DIGRESSION" [Phillips, 1994]

"A Course in Creative Writing"

They want a wilderness with a map—
But how about errors that give a new start?—
or leaves that are edging into the light?
or the many places a road can't find?

Maybe there's a land where you have to sing
to explain anything: you blow a little whistle
just right and the next tree you meet is itself.
(And many a tree is not there yet.)

Things come toward you when you walk.
You go along singing a song that says
where you are going becomes its own
because you start. You blow a little whistle—

And a world begins under the map.

--William Stafford

Conflicting Pedagogies

Holden Caulfield¹ would like this poem. He would appreciate the logic of Stafford's writing course, a logic different from that of his teachers—from that of many of our own teachers, and theirs. "They want a wilderness with a map." The poem implies the paradox of creativity and the essential element of "not knowing" inherent in the processes of writing, Don Murray's fundamental claim. In a retrospective article, Murray writes in *Taking Stock: The Writing Process Movement in the 90's* of this "world of not knowing" that we teach:

I considered the writing process a way of separating the knowing from the not knowing, or, to put it differently, a way of organizing knowing so the writer could be launched into the more important world of not knowing. The process was, after all, a process of learning, exploration, speculation, discovery: the goal was always surprise, the purpose was to write to know. (p. 60)

How does one possess a map *and* preserve a wilderness? How can one chart what is not yet known? In a reference to *The English Patient*, Paula Salvio writes, "Maps implode time and geography; they compress the world into a two dimensional sheet of paper" (1994, p. 22, from an early draft titled "On the Forbidden Pleasures of Reading in Time")

What is charted is never the same.

Holden understands the sensibilities that lie beneath the map: the "errors that give a new start," the world that "begins under the map." He recognizes the emotional and psychological movement that a reserved classmate experiences unwittingly, as his story moves away from the initial topic he had chosen, "edging into the light":

"They kept yelling 'Digression!' at him the whole time he was making it, and this teacher, Mr. Vinson, gave him an *F* on it because he hadn't told what kind of animals and vegetables and stuff grew on the farm and all. What he did was, Richard Kinsella, he'd *start* telling you all about that stuff—then all of a sudden he'd start telling you about this letter his mother got from his uncle, and how his uncle got polio and all when he was forty-two years old, and how he wouldn't let anybody come to see him in the hospital because he didn't want anybody to see him with a brace on. It didn't have much to do with the farm—I admit it—but it was *nice*. It's nice when somebody tells you about their uncle. Especially when they start telling you about their father's farm and then all of a sudden get more interested in their uncle. I mean it's dirty to keep yelling 'Digression!' at him when he's all nice and excited.... I don't know. It's hard to explain."
(*Catcher in the Rye*, pp.183-184)

It *is* hard to explain. Holden can't explicitly defend his tacit sense about how a text and its meaning begin to take shape, or a capacity for empathy which others don't possess or value. But he understands the processes of each in ways his English teachers do not. Antolini, the one teacher in whom Holden has put his faith, offers a traditional perspective:

"Holden...One short, faintly stuffy, pedagogical question. Don't you think there's a time and place for everything? Don't you think if someone starts out to tell you about his father's farm, he should stick to his guns, *then* get around to telling you about his uncle's brace? Or, if his uncle's brace is such a provocative subject, shouldn't he have selected it in the first place as his subject—not the farm?" (p. 184)

The map. Antolini adheres to a strict rationale that one chooses the topic before one speaks or writes. One communicates only what one *already* knows. Even in a

“spontaneous” speech, Antolini and Vinson expect that nothing should stray from the map. They remain locked into the “If...then” syllogism, as Antolini puts it, a logical plan for communicating with others. They see no validity in the process that happens when Richard Kinsella discovers what is for him, and for Holden, a more compelling subject. The exploration, if any, was to have taken place beforehand. Furthermore, Richard was *supposed to* follow the map of the topic methodically, logically, intellectually—not emotionally, not relationally, certainly not psychologically. He was to have chosen a topic he knew about; he knew the names and kinds of animals on the farm, “the vegetables and stuff”—the most minimal challenge a student might undertake. Vinson’s class prohibited his venturing into the wilderness, a place for him yet unknown: the nature of his uncle’s suffering, particularly the psychological response to his brace, the web of relationships among his uncle, his mother, and Richard—and Holden, his audience—These were not properly mapped out.

But how about errors that give a new start?—
or leaves that are edging into the light?
or the many places a road can’t find?

Antolini’s “pedagogical question” implies much about the epistemological assumptions of his professional practice. The question is rhetorical and attempts to justify his understanding of the way in which language communicates. Furthermore, it offers insight into a practice of control and mastery in contrast to Holden’s own way of being through relation and vulnerability.

In “The Relation of Thought and Language” in her work *The Web of Meaning*, Janet Emig offers an historical analysis of those pedagogical assumptions. Addressing the notion of the traditional (18th and 19th century) textbook writers, Emig states, “For the textbook writers, planning when defined as the clarification of the writer’s conception, is clearly the major act in composing; the writing out that follows is a subordinate affair” (p. 18). The sole purpose of writing is to communicate what is *already* known; thus, the premise that “the act of writing does not or cannot facilitate the writer’s understanding of

his subject” (p. 10). Quoting a 1784 text, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belle Lettres* by Hugh Blair, Emig points to its emphatic attention to “preparedness of thought”:

...Previously to writing or speaking, we should obtain a clear view of the end to be aimed at; the problem to be solved, or the proposition to be proved; the goal at which we would arrive, should be distinctly and precisely comprehended and announced; and holding this steadily in view, the style and reasoning should be adapted to it. (pp. 9-10)

Richard Kinsella broke this rule. Vinson's assignment required adherence to a precise map that prohibits most if not all novice writers from achieving a more complex handling of a subject beyond merely reiterating what they already know, what is already evident to them and to their readers. Emig continues to trace this notion of “preparedness of thought.” An 1827 work by Samuel P. Newman, *A Practical System of Rhetoric*, reiterates this precedence of planning:

Never attempt to write on any subject until you fully understand it. (The reason for this rule may be simply stated. We write to convey knowledge to others. But the attempt must be vain and absurd, if we do not understand what we wish to convey. (p. 10)

Richard Kinsella's attempt, according to his intended audience, Holden, was anything but “vain and absurd.” Holden was moved by Richard's touching story in ways that he obviously would not have been by the simplistic topic (for an audience of adolescent boys) of the animals on the farm.

And Richard G. Parker, in *Aids to English Composition* (1873), uses the metaphor of the map, interestingly enough, to explain the necessity for knowing what is to be written or communicated.

“One of the most difficult of the departments of composition consists in methodizing, or arranging, a subject; laying it out, as it were, and forming a sort of plan on which to treat it. The writer may be figuratively said to make a map of it in his own mind, ascertaining its boundaries, that is to say, the collateral subjects with which it is connected, its dependencies, influences, and prominent traits.” (p. 12)

Parker's first line addresses the problems writers face with respect to organization. I find it ironic, however, that he addresses organization *before* the exploration of the more intricate relationships and possibilities of its subject. Such a precise, definitive process

of the mind, what Peter Elbow refers to as a “transaction of meaning-into-language” (1973, 15), requires the writer to experience possibilities of connections among complicated, tangential ideas. Emig concedes that Parker’s use of the metaphor could be appropriate: “If the map is used as a rough guide, discovery is not precluded” (p. 12). The problem arises when, (as these textbook writers, precursors of the pedagogy to which Holden is subject, imply), the conceptual map is so exacting that it closes any possibilities of discovery, of extending the “boundaries,” of traversing “the many places a road can’t find” (as Stafford puts it) within the process of writing itself.

In her notes to Chapter 3 of *Opening Texts: Using Writing to Teach Literature*, Kathleen Andrasick observes that even as late as 1965, in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, Edward P. J. Corbett continued to espouse such beliefs:

Obviously, no decisions about expression can be made until one’s subject matter has been clearly defined. (Corbett, 1971,45).

The text continues:

Simple as the principle is, many students have difficulty in framing their thesis in a single declarative sentence. Part of their difficulty stems from the fact that they do not have a firm grasp on their ideas before they sit down to compose a thesis sentence. (49) (Andrasick, p. 190)

Emig rightly infers that such a theory does not take into account the possibilities and significance of revision (p. 11). The assumption of the writer’s knowledge and plan prior to writing implies that there is no place for the teacher in this process, either. It is assumed that the writer’s conceptualization of the subject is finished in thought, before writing begins. The writing merely records the predetermined conclusions the writer conceptualizes. There is certainly no ambiguity in their pedagogy about the place of the teacher: it is clearly to assign and grade.

Holden and Stradlater, his roommate, have an argument brought about by these defining views of writing. Stradlater, far more interested in social life than academics, asks Holden to do an assignment for him.

"How 'bout writing a composition for me, for English? I'll be up the creek if I don't get the goddam thing in by Monday, the reason I ask. How 'bout it?"

It was very ironical. It really was.

"I'm the one flunking out of the goddam place, and *you're* asking me to write you a goddam composition," I said.

"Yeah, I know. The thing is, though, I'll be up the creek if I don't get it in. Be a buddy. Be a buddyroo. Okay?"

I didn't answer him right away. Suspense is good for some bastards like Stradlater.

"What on?" I said.

"Anything. Anything descriptive. A room. Or a house. Or something you once lived in or something—*you* know. Just as long as it's descriptive as hell...Just don't do it too good, is all," he said. "That sonuvabitch Hartzell thinks you're a hot-shot in English and he knows you're my roommate. So I mean don't stick all the commas and stuff in the right place." (p. 28)

For Stradlater, writing well is merely about editing, about "how to say it," rather than "the struggle to discover what you have to say" (Murray). Holden transforms the assignment into an opportunity to reflect about his younger brother and to recall some of the memories of their childhood relationship. In the process, he grieves, as well, the loss of Allie. As Holden settles down to narrate his writing process, it soon becomes obvious to the reader that he no longer had either an assignment or an audience in mind as he wrote:

So what I did, I wrote about my brother Allie's baseball mitt. It was a very descriptive subject. It really was. My brother Allie had this left-handed fielder's mitt. He was left-handed. The thing that was descriptive about it, though, was that he had poems written all over the fingers and the pocket and everywhere. In green ink. He wrote them on it so that he'd have something to read when he was in the field and nobody was up at bat. (p. 38)

Like Richard Kinsella, in the telling, Holden moves away from description, the assigned topic, into another, more personal realm:

He's dead now. He got leukemia and died when we were up in Maine, on July 18, 1946. You'd have liked him. He was two years younger than I was, but he was about fifty times as intelligent. He was terrifically intelligent. His teachers were always writing letters to my mother, telling her what a pleasure it was having a boy like Allie in their class. And they weren't just shooting the crap. They really meant it. But it wasn't just that he was the most intelligent member in the family. He was also the nicest, in lots of ways. He never got mad at anybody. People with red hair are supposed to get mad very easily, but Allie never did, and he had very red hair. (p. 38)

This stream of consciousness narration trails his own memories and his emotional responses to them, as he moves from the description of the glove (the object assignment), to information for a semblance of an audience (“two years younger than I was”) to a rather general description of his brother. This part shifts into another domain, in which his explanation of “the kind of red hair he had” has no apparent logical association with the memory he recalls.

I'll tell you what kind of red hair he had. I started playing golf when I was only ten years old. I remember once, the summer I was around twelve, teeing off and all, and having a hunch that if I turned around all of a sudden, I'd see Allie. So I did, and sure enough, he was sitting on his bike outside the fence—there was this fence that went all around the course—and he was sitting there, about a hundred and fifty yards behind me, watching me tee off. That's the kind of red hair he had. (p. 38)

This digression is important and interesting to Holden. It captures the subtleties of his feelings for and relationship with Allie through personal, specific details. The image of Allie's red hair acts as catalyst for the memory of Allie's youthful image on his bike, watching his older brother. As Holden moves on to his memories of having broken the windows in the garage after Allie died, he relives the aftermath of the death of his brother and feels again the anger, resentment and pain of losing him. In this digression, Holden reveals as much about himself as he does about his brother, a phenomenon not unusual in writing.

Expressive Writing

James Britton has labeled this stream of consciousness narration “expressive” writing, that which records “thoughts written to oneself...the most personal, the closest to ‘inner speech’ and the thinking process itself” (Fulwiler, 1987b, p. 6). In “Writing to Learn and Learning to Write,” Britton defines expressive language “as language close to the self; language that is not called upon to go very far away from the speaker” (1982, p. 96). He distinguishes it from what he labels “transactional” writing, writing that is meant to communicate what one knows to the world. Instead, expressive writing remains important to the writer, rather than to a yet-to-be identified audience. Britton further

explains Edward Sapir's (1961) reference to the "unique, intimacy" of language because of the fact that it is learned in childhood and in "actual contexts":

That is to say that, because early language is tied to the here and now, it grows its roots in first-hand experience, and, secondly, that it is by virtue of this characteristic that it continues to represent experience intimately, recalling here-and-now aspects of remote experiences as we represent them verbally in our speaking and writing, or call upon them to *realize* what we are reading. (1970, p.136)

This is a profound insight into the workings of writing that is digressive and associative—quickly written and unfinished—and its power to create and recreate experience.

As I have observed in my students' work, the writer moves around within that mode, like Holden, writing primarily for himself, recalling, recording, venturing into thoughts that may have no meaning yet for a reader *or*, necessarily, for the writer. Voices within—voices internalized from the writer's life—initiate or continue fragments of dialogue, an internal dialogue in search of meaning. For both Holden and Richard Kinsella, "expressive" language becomes a means to think through what Harlene Anderson refers to as "the 'not-yet-spoken'—the newness to come in dialogue" (1997, p. 44), feelings that emerge into language as it is spoken or written. Britton emphasizes this emergent quality of expressive language: "Expressive language is giving signals about the speaker as well as signals about his topic ... It relies on an interest in the speaker as well as the topic. It's relaxed and loosely structured because it follows the contours of the speaker's preoccupations" (1982, p. 96).

Despite the fact that Holden appears to have an audience, "you," his true audience is himself, this inner dialogue within. He follows his own inner path, unstructured and exploratory. He enters into the memories of his life with Allie, creating his own psychological connections ("that's the type of red hair he had") which make little if any sense to an audience like Stradlater or someone even more distant. True to his character, Stradlater becomes enraged. He is oblivious to what writing means beyond the literal assignment, something in which he has no interest anyway. He has no

appreciation for the quality of writing Holden has done, or sensitivity to the nature of the true subject, Holden's own emotional life. But he does know how to follow an assignment to the letter, something most of my students have learned to do all too easily.

“God damn it.” He was sore as hell. He was really furious. “You always do everything backasswards.” He looked at me. “No wonder you're flunking the hell out of here,” he said. “You don't do *one damn thing* the way you're supposed to. I mean it. Not one damn thing.” (p. 41)

“*The way you're supposed to.*” Stradlater has at least learned the central tenet of schooling: to give the teachers what they want, “*Anything...Just as long as it's descriptive as hell.*” You're *supposed to* stick to the assignment and stay within the confines of the expected. Holden doesn't, as many of my own students are unable to do—stay within a path defined and known only by the teacher, unable to step off to discover other aspects of the landscape. Though confused, he later tries to respond to Antolini's rhetorical question. In his usual deferential habit, Holden tries to make sense of his feelings:

Yes—I don't know. I guess he should, I mean I guess he should've picked his uncle as a subject, instead of the farm, if that interested him most. But what I mean is, lots of time you don't know what interests you most till you start talking about something that doesn't interest you most. I mean you can't help it sometimes. What I think is, you're supposed to leave somebody alone if he's at least being interesting and he's getting all excited about something. I like it when somebody gets excited about something. It's nice. You just didn't know this teacher, Mr. Vinson. He could drive you crazy sometimes, him and the goddam class. I mean he'd keep telling you to unify and simplify all the time. Some things you just can't do that to. I mean just because somebody wants you to. (pp. 184-185)

Holden follows an internal motivation, his emotional paths, his own wilderness, and, of course, he's flunking out. Holden is comfortable and knowledgeable writing from the internal processes of thinking and feeling; he is at ease with surprise, with the unexpected, and he is open to the possibilities that happen when he allows the writing, and the telling, to guide him. The traditional notion of teaching writing overlooked these processes of coming to know, inherent in the act of writing itself, of finding and creating language. Emig eloquently articulates that omission on the parts of the early theorists:

There is no wisp or scent anywhere that composing is anything but a conscious and antiseptically efficient act. Nowhere in such an account is there acknowledgment that writing involves commerce with the unconscious self and that because it does, it is often a sloppy and inefficient procedure for even the most disciplined and long-writing of professional authors...of the untidy, of the convoluted, of the not-wholly-known, of a more intricate self and process. (1983, p. 48)

She emphasizes, "The process is what is basic in writing..." (p. 110). "The process" has become the heart of my teaching, both in writing and in reading. Students, particularly in high school, need to have the processes of their writing and reading encouraged, observed, valued and evaluated by readers interested in who they are as well as what they produce. I recently asked a class which had read *Night* by Elie Wiesel and watched the film, *Nuremberg*, to write about their perceptions of 'forgiveness' through several journal entries. Justin, a reticent writer, arrived at a clearer statement than he had previously written in this course. When I asked the class what it took for them to write an essay which satisfied them, he wrote, "It took me saying what I want to say and not what it takes to make the assignment I feel you want to read." How eloquent! In *Teaching With Writing*, Fulwiler addresses "the problem of students who are afraid to write":

Much of the frustration that develops into fear stems from the unrealistic, unsympathetic, and unconsidered demands often made by teachers... Writing approached in a process manner becomes a more friendly and familiar activity because writers are allowed to negotiate their way more reasonably as they move through it. Writing resumes its natural place at the center of the intellectual inquiry and exposition and becomes the clarifying companion to all the other learning activities— reading, speaking, computing, viewing, and listening. Writing is an essential activity to create order from chaos, sense from nonsense, meaning from confusion; as such it is the heart of creative learning in both the arts and sciences. (1987b, pp. 43-44)

The More Important World of Not Knowing (Murray, 1994)

In *Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life*, Natalie Goldberg tells about a writing assignment given to a class: "Where is your home?" They are to write for ten minutes. Stradlater would like the assignment. Just ten minutes of writing. It's clear, it's literal, it's

the assignment he expected of Holden. I imagine he would have walked out, however, swearing under his breath, when Goldberg shared her piece:

The night is my home and rain and the stars. The bell in the zendo singing me back from the wandering home of my mind and even Katagiri Roshi is my home—his voice and hands and feet and sitting there in his black robes like a crow ... I ran like an animal today in track, that's what Terry said and I knew I could all along. When I fell in love with great athletes, I knew it was in me to run like an animal. I don't want to be a great athlete, I want to be an animal. I don't care about writing of itself either. I do it for something else: To dig a deep hole so I can sit and not run when the wild animals I call up come to me. I know what to do with them. I note them on the page... (1990, pp. 88-89)

Goldberg gives herself permission to do what Holden has done—to allow the very act of writing itself to recreate the assignment, to follow shadows not yet distinct, to forget or ignore or dismiss what you are *supposed to do*—to resist compliance. Goldberg then shares what Eddie, a student-writer had read to the class:

I saw the old orange Datsun pickup on Agua Fria yesterday. When we bought it, they called them Datsuns, not Nissans. David Ortega was driving. He didn't recognize me in the Mazda 626 and I didn't honk. He is fat now. When I hired him, just graduated from Vo-Tech, he was thin and he ran everywhere. He was so excited about electricity, he ran to the truck for tools, ran to the shop for supplies, ran from the office when it was time to go. I don't know how he could have possibly gotten so fat... The back of the truck was a snake's nest of wire, galvanized outlet boxes, red Milwaukee tool boxes, an old wooden three-legged ladder, more wire--#6, #8, #14 romex—fluorescent light boxes, weatherworn and flaccid, more wire. Perched on top of the heap was the spare tire, ready to bounce off on the first bad bump. We had lost two spare tires off the orange truck that way.

Jim should keep the trucks neater, I thought... Then I remembered that the old orange Datsun looked like it always had, even when it was my business. Jim was my protégé, and he was doing everything like I had. The orange truck turned left on Silver and disappeared out of sight.

Goldberg notes, with perplexity, that Eddie was asked by someone in the class if he considered the truck 'home.' She writes, "It hit me as an odd question. Eddie said, 'Not particularly, but when Joan said "home," this flashed though my mind'" (1990, p. 91).

I love sharing this chapter with my writing students. It gives them the authority to drift away from my assignments and to find themselves elsewhere. When I ask them to share their writing, there is always someone who declines: "I did it wrong." They're usually the Eddie who has ignored or forgotten altogether the original assignment. They

have most likely explored the terrain of their own memories, thoughts—their own preoccupations. The boundaries have been pushed aside, and in five or ten or thirty minutes of quick writing, they have been “launched into the more important world of not knowing” (Murray, 1994, p. 60). I can’t know my students’ experiences or what they know, their versions of my “assignments” or the places in their worlds where their writing will take them. I don’t want to inhibit these unpredictable processes by judging far too soon, or correcting, or responding in ways which tell them it isn’t right or good or important enough. I want to encourage this process, their journeys into not knowing.

Murray articulately cautions us about the nature of assignments:

Most assignments I see guarantee bad writing. In many cases assignments direct students to write on subjects in which they have no interest and on which they have no information. They have to adopt a point of view implicit in the assignments or in the way teachers present them. They have to accept forms and perhaps languages which are not appropriate to their subjects—or their visions of the subjects.

Of course, students like assignments. Why not? They make things easy. The good students know instantly what the teacher wants; the poor students deliver as best they can. And neither group has to make a personal commitment to the writing. (1982, p. 27)

If I don’t trust my students to have something to say, they don’t believe they do, either. Part of this practice requires a constant modeling of this belief in the promise that writing offers. Freewriting, Elbow explains, is a means of focusing, “a way to produce bits of writing that are genuinely *better* than usual, less random, more coherent, more highly organized”; furthermore, he claims, “the integration of meanings is at a finer level than you can achieve by conscious planning or arranging” (1973, p. 8). In such moments of focused concentration the student writer can effortlessly, so to speak, capture language in ways that she might not consciously know she can write.

Dramatic Rhythms

Ann, a student of mine, had written a five-page piece about the birth of a lamb. She raised and showed sheep, and she had written a small piece earlier about it. I collected the writing from this ninth grade class, took them home and read them all quickly, in about twenty minutes, in preparation for conferences the next day. Reading

this way takes the onus off me to read as a judge, to grade, and I enjoy their writing so much more. I'm a far better reader in this mode, as I can focus on their language, the potential it offers and the implied, as well as explicit, meanings. I noticed in Ann's piece that she lead up to the birth, but there was no description or mention of the birth of a lamb. Next day I called her up to the writing table.

"Ann, what's this piece about?"

She looked a little surprised. "*You* know, the birth of a sheep!"

"Oh." I handed her the paper. "Would you read me that part?"

She knew what I was doing. "Well, I didn't want to gross people out!"

She'd envisioned a graphic description of the birth, the physical, messy details that she feared wouldn't work, for her or for an audience. I smiled and suggested she go back to her seat, write for ten minutes, and write the missing scene. She returned a short time later and handed me the writing:

When Nicky sent me up to the house on the hot water run, a twinge of worry settled in, as with the other pile of worries that had already attached themselves to my stomach wall. So many things could go wrong, during the gestation; like when our pen door wasn't wide enough and Sophie and Cinimin would both hit the door way at the same time, squeezing and grunting in an instant, and me yelling and pushing one back, knowing that if they kept trying to go through the door they could damage their lambs inside. Worry, exhaustion; staggering out to the barn to only be met with sleepy eyes. While you know the ewe is in labor, you know the pain she is in, you know, and you can't give her anything only wait and croon softly to her. Having to stand, because you would have to sit in piles of sheep manure if you did. Warming your hands under the heat lamp, because its cold and no matter how much you stuff hay into the door cracks on the floor, you can still feel the draft. When the water bag actually appears, it sweeps away a few worries that so far, everything is going well, a small sigh of relief and another gasp for expectant air. The water bag is in a tissue casing, reddish brown, and if it doesn't burst, a piece of straw or the ewe's weight will make it break. And you wait, hope fills in, because you know that the lamb is soon, because that's what it said in the worn book. And then you see the two hooves, encased in tissue, and hope comes, and then you wait, because if the lamb is in the wrong position the ewe will need help. After Cherrie was born it was like a high, and then you just fill up with such an extreme love for this little existence, and then you help it get warm, and help it stand, and help it get to its mother's now swollen pink udder...

Ann surprises both of us. She punctuates the initial writing with her term “worry” and gradually moves toward “hope” and, finally, to “love”—a structural movement that occurs as she writes. Her details mark her own physical place in the birth: having to push one back, away from the door; her crooning; standing in the manure; the cold draft. The physical details she’d feared had become subtle intimations to the moment of birth: the ewe’s water bag “sweeps away a few worries...The water bag is in a tissue of casing, reddish brown, and if it doesn’t burst, a piece of straw or the ewe’s weight will make it break.”—the only line necessary of the details she wanted to avoid and so hadn’t written. She brings the reader into the moments of waiting. The rhythm of the piece shifts gradually as she moves from worry and anticipation to relief, a gradually slower breathing rhythm, almost a sigh:

“After Cherrie was born it was like a high,
and then you just fill up with such an extreme love for this little existence,
and then you help it get warm,
and help it stand,
and help it get to its mother’s
now swollen pink udder...”

Ann’s quick-writing captures what she hadn’t anticipated, certainly what I couldn’t have known: a weaving of the experience of the birth both emotionally and physically. Ann becomes an integral part of the birth, as her emotional response moves from “worry” to “relief” to “hope” to “love.” It is anything but “gross.” Her language conveys the truth of her experience.

Ken Macrorie’s response to his own question, “What is good or powerful writing?” portrays the emotional/psychological and physical realities of this piece of writing:

[I]t has meaning for several audiences...it surprises, in what it says or how it says it, or perhaps in both. Its dramatic rhythms come from the events the writer has chosen to reveal, and from her relationship with those events...It’s not sentimental. It dramatizes its crucial moments. If it’s powerful writing, at the same time it rises above those moments and tells us what it’s like to be alive on this earth. (1994, p. 79)

In similar terms, in his article on jazz improvisation, Frank Barrett talks of the moments in which the rhythm in a jazz ensemble reaches a point of “dynamic interplay within an established beat,” called in jazz terms, the “groove.” That point defines the “magical moments, the best moments in jazz, (Franklin Gordon in Berliner 1994, p.388),” a space “where the rhythm keeps building instead of changing around (Donaldson in Berliner 1994, p.349)” (p. 614). Barrett describes the “paradoxical dimension” of the groove:

Good improvisers, we said, employ a combination of automatic and controlled cognition. However, this experience of groove that improvisers hope for seems to involve a surrender of familiar controlled processing modes; they speak of being so completely absorbed in playing that they are not consciously thinking, reflecting, or deciding on what notes to play, as if they are able to simultaneously be inside and outside of their bodies and minds. Controlled thinking is depicted sometimes as an obstacle, something to develop only to escape. (1998, p. 614)

His description echoes much of the language of Elbow, who writes of a similar paradox in the act of freewriting,

This paradox of increased overall control through letting go a bit seems paradoxical only because our normal way of thinking about control is mistakenly static: it is not developmental or process-oriented because it leaves out the dimension of time. Our static way of thinking makes us feel we must make a single choice as to whether to be a controlled person or an out-of-control person...but this static model isn't accurate. Most processes engaged in by live organisms are cyclic, developmental processes that run through time and end up different from how they began. (1973, p. 33)

This delicate balance between controlling and letting go describes the process of quick-writing experiences. My student writers learn to surrender the control (and, in the process, their fear) in favor of possibilities that may (or may not) come to them in the process of quickly capturing their thoughts and feelings. Again, as Barrett explains, jazz musicians talk about these moments as “flow,” “like being in a flow” (1998, p. 614), a term that my students often use when identifying qualities of good writing.

Britton's work points to the importance of “expressive” language and its potential for learning in children's lives: “How in telling about what's been happening to them, for instance, in sharing their experiences, children are also shaping those experiences and therefore make them more accessible for their own learning...by giving them shape in

language” (1982, p. 98). Ann’s writing shapes her perception of experience in ways that neither she nor I could have known. Murray again and again emphasizes this process of giving shape—writing that offers paths toward new meaning: “We might come to see the purpose of literacy is not at first to communicate with others, but with ourselves. We write and read to collect, order, and understand; to make use of experience—the experiences of action and reflection, of speaking and listening; to think, test, and share our thinking” (1989, p. 18).

Quick-Writing

I began using quick-writing exercises in the early 80’s and immediately saw the quality of writing develop. Students who saw themselves as non-writers, who had never liked their own writing, or who were afraid to try, dropped their fears in the momentary presence of writing fast and soon discovered that their writing offered—perhaps not the organized, compact essay teachers wanted—but far more varied and often better possibilities of meaning. As long as I valued those possibilities, the potential that even a line could offer, students became more and more comfortable and confident.

A class of junior and senior boys who took the vocational courses, most of them working as carpenters and mechanics after school, had signed up for a “Practical Writing” course. For the first few weeks, we did a lot of free writing. They were always ready to read them aloud, especially Pete. I cringed a little each time as I prepared for the party scenes he wrote with such detail. I listened, head down, (mine, not his—perhaps afraid to make eye contact with his real audience). I have a vague memory of commenting aloud to myself one time, as I heard a line that I liked, something he articulated well, something I hadn’t expected. He looked up, stopped reading, hesitated, and then continued. Two weeks later, Pete died in an accident. The guys were close, and the tenor of the class changed as these kids found subtle ways to support one another in their grief. I learned about the power of a line when Scott announced later in

the semester that they were *all* writers. He had learned it, he explained, when I'd found a line in Pete's writing. "It only takes one good line to make a writer."

Murray makes a significant distinction between "writing fast" and "free writing": "Writing fast is one important way to draft because it frees the writer from notes, research, outline, pre-thinking and encourages language to race ahead of the writer seeking a precise meaning. This is not free writing for there is a goal, the subject of the piece being written" (1989, p. 45). More often than not, it is writing fast, "quick-writing," that I ask my students to do. As Murray had once suggested in a writing course, I asked students to write different leads quickly. I offered them only minutes to try out three or four. They had no time to panic, and they knew it was just an exercise. In fact, I told them anything that came out was alright. Something might work. It might not. We'd see. They gradually began to trust the process. Keith had written about his grandfather, and his initial lead read:

I used to be a more jovial person but since June 3rd, 1984, I haven't been quite the same...

I asked the class to try other leads in short bursts of writing. Keith's leads each revealed possibilities of alternate styles, rhythms, diction, syntax:

My grandfather was an alcoholic, it's true. He was also, at times a very rude and obstinate man, but when he was on his boat, "Sea-Son," he changed it was the only time he was really happy or really alive.

My father was worried about him.
My mother despised him.
My sister didn't like him.
My brother loved him and so did I although at the time I didn't understand why.

T. C. Mitchell wasn't a very famous man, a particularly diplomatic man, or a very rich man but he was a practical, hard-working and witty man who exemplified the New England farmer, sort of reminiscent of the "Farmer's Almanac."

Keith recognized the opportunities for different pieces of writing in each of these leads, different tones, different themes, different stories. And I held my tongue in suggesting the one I liked best (the second, because of its rhythms) and respected his choice. I

would point out at times, with some students, what I observed about each. (And yes, sometimes I admitted my favorites!) I *required* them to try exercises, but the results were theirs from which to choose. The purpose was always to help them expand the choices.

A wonderful young writer-teacher in a writing group I was in at UNH, Sarah Blake, offered an exercise which I shared the following year with my writing class. It was in the early 80's and these students knew of the Mt. St. Helen's volcanic eruption. The story Sarah gave was only a partial story, one she had heard from friends about some people who had been hiking in the area and who had not known that the falling ash was from the nearby volcano. The assignment was to write as if they were those people. My high school students wanted facts, of course: How many people? Boys or girls? How long had they been there? I told them I knew nothing more, and they began to understand the nature of the exercise: to fictionalize and create the details. After they had started their writing (and I often interrupt them before they run out of steam), we began playing with leads: they were to write three quick leads in one minute. Tom wrote:

"The cry of the buried people called out to them as they walked through the rubble of once tall buildings."

"The beautiful colors of the spirits of the dead lit up the sky, then became black again."

"The nuclear winter which the two thought was not possible now began."

These lines may foreshadow three different stories. Some students resourcefully use all of them at various places in one piece of writing. The primary purpose is to get them writing fast, playing with language in order to drop their defenses about writing poorly and override the internalized voices from their writing histories. Tom Romano asserts the importance of such work in our writing classes:

Such free and non-stop writing should be a staple in every English class. Its objective, its goal, is the development of fluency and self-confidence—the parents of voice. Plenty of honest language production—fluency—is the sole criterion for successful freewriting. Quality of language production is not. But even so, frequent engagement in rapid writing will improve the quality of writing. (1987, p. 8)

Kim's four quickly written leads guide her from rather simplistic dialogue to a more sophisticated level of narration:

"Oh my God, Jeff it's a nuclear war!"

"Look Dave said. Black snow falling from hell."

"Hiking on Mt. St. Helen was different today, then from any other day."

"Mt. St. Helen was in a different frame of mind today.!"

The differences among the lines are fascinating. The subtle shift in Kim's leads from the hiking being "different today" to the mountain's being "in a different frame of mind" is something I can teach the writers about more effectively, after such metaphors emerge. The development of Kim's leads, from a simple statement to personification of the mountain, is something I might point out, even celebrate. Each line offers something to the writer. I might ask students to "vote" on which one *they* like best. There are always differences of opinion, so the writers can learn to trust their *own* choices. We might look at the different ways students had written, using dialogue or description or narration, and continue the exercise, trying more strategies for developing the craft of writing.

Much of the writing in class is timed, short bursts of writing. The development of detail becomes a critical study in my classes, so writing exercises often focus on ways to capture details—often those that come quickly. I write on the board, "She was afraid." and wait for their responses. Some say it's good writing; others point out the lack of details. "What kind of fear is it?" I ask. "Is she petrified? Nervous? How would Stephen King write this line?" So they jump in for a few minutes of writing (even those who avow no knowledge of Stephen King) and as we listen to the details of each writer's descriptions, we recognize the power of detail. They are impressed that their own writing can sound like writing they read. Then I ask them to return to their work to find a line in their own writing that needs more detail, a place where they might, for instance, add the kinds of description that would enhance a scene in a movie. If I am patient with

those who don't trust themselves to choose the lines, they'll eventually start writing. Don chose the line, "We clung."

"We clung like vines, afraid of dying, in need of hope. Ash swirled around us, bringing us its heat and overpowering dominance of the sky. Encircling; twisting; dancing it all became like a big whirlpool. We felt its pull and thought of being sucked in. We clung together like vines."

Jake's initial line read, "It's like being trapped in a battle of nature." He writes,

"The trees are shaking and falling before us. The wind is blowing like a late summer breeze only much harder and much hotter. This reminds me of a scene from some 'destruction of planet' scene from goo ol' B movies. There's no air to breathe, but we're managing to breathe by putting our mouths in our hands for any air that might be there. Our lungs must look like a 100 year old smokers' and we've only been going through this for an hour. Mother Nature is putting up a good fight but it seems to no avail."

Murray expresses what these pieces of quick writing offer the student writers:

Surprises are not always the clear statement of a meaning. Surprises may arrive as a subtle but significant change in the tone of the writer's voice, as a metaphor that isn't quite right, as a line that isn't very wrong but isn't very right. The text may produce clues and hints that, at first, may seem like verbal indigestion but which can, with a reader open to possibility, lead to important new meaning. (1989, p. 16)

Elbow points out that this process "is also the most mysterious and difficult kind of cognitive event to analyze. It is the moment when what was chaos is now seen as having a center of gravity. There is a shape where a moment ago there was none" (1973, p. 35). It is the world beneath the map.

Detail and the Possibilities of Memory

Detail, in its various forms, offers the greatest opportunities for improving writing. Ken Macrorie gives a wonderful example that often influences my students' abilities to develop detail. In *Telling Writing*, he explains:

A fundamental in writing is to reach for a fact instead of trying to be lucky with a Great Idea. When you have to mention anything in order to tell a story or make a point, force yourself to put down the name of that thing if it has a name, or to show it in its particular setting or doing its thing particularly. Don't say you pushed the throttle and the motorbike did its thing. Give the name of that thing and the sound and feel or smell, or whatever you can. Once a writer finds a telling fact and puts it down, it often pulls from the depths other telling facts. (1994, p. 45)

Macrorie offers an example of a university student who had difficulty writing about her father, so she skeptically wrote quickly at her instructor's request, to put "some facts down, so they would begin suggesting other facts":

Everytime I try to speak of my father I find words like *gentle*, *sweet*, *funny*, or *shy* popping up, and they are useless, meaningless. "Tell what your father *did*, what he *said*," you say, and I am stuck. How do I make a story from the things my father did?

I will tell you what he did.

My father walked to the far side of our pasture, found a cow with her newborn calf, and carried the calf home in his arms.

My father was rarely seen without at least two small children on or around him. He gave them horseback rides, told them funny stories, and lifted them atop a cow named Blackie, who didn't mind being used for a horse—his own children—until one by one all six of them grew too old for that sort of nonsense, then the young nieces and nephews, and next, last, the neighbor's children.

My dad followed me upstairs after he punished me once and said he was sorry and rubbed my back until I didn't cry anymore.

He raised and cared for twenty-five pure-bred Jersey cows, and he sang while he worked away his life and was poorer than any other farmer in the county.

My dad made a huge bowl of popcorn and spent countless hours reading Agatha Christie murder mysteries in bed as he munched.

Because he was an incurable dreamer, he straightened out the family's financial crises only on paper, by selling cows which in reality he could not bear to lose because he loved them.

When he was forty-seven years old my dad found out that he had a very serious heart condition, and he never went across the road to the barn again, but sat silent before the pot-bellied stove in our kitchen and puffed on a pipe. Every day he made tea and dry jokes for his wife and children and visitors.

When he felt stronger, he was sent to be rehabilitated in Waterloo, Iowa. On a bitter, cold day in January, 1959, he died in his sleep. He did not live to see his cows taken away that morning by the ma who had bought them. (1994, pp. 45-46)

This moving portrait demonstrates for my students the power of simple details and the possibilities of memory that can emerge in their own writing when they are encouraged—given permission—to write, not knowing what will happen when they enter the process.

In describing a similar process in the therapy conference, Carl Rogers writes, "Experiencing has lost almost completely its structure-bound aspects and becomes process experiences...the situation is experienced and interpreted in its newness, not as the past" (1961, p. 152). This "process experiencing" elicits details as the writer once

again recreates the lived experience. I find his client's intriguing description of this experience offers insight for us into what happens when writers engage in similar processes:

When I'm working on an idea, the whole idea develops like the latent image coming out when you develop a photograph. It doesn't start at one edge and fill in over to the other. It comes in all over. At first all you see is the hazy outline, and you wonder what it's going to be; and then gradually something fits here and something fits there, and pretty soon it all comes clear—all at once. (1961, p. 152)

Rogers claims, then, almost like a writing instructor, "internal communication is clear, with feelings and symbols well matched, and fresh terms for new feelings... There is the experiencing of effective choice of new ways of being" (p. 154).

Liz and Keety: The Emergence of Voice

After reading aloud the title chapter of *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, I asked students to write quickly about their own "house." After a few minutes of writing, Liz, a quiet ninth grade student, raised her hand and started reading, without introduction:

I have lived in a household that seldomly has good byes. My house a father that if your lucky calls once a month, but that doesn't fase me. He's like a perfect stranger when he calls. You know the kind that calls just as you sit down for dinner or right as you are slipping away to a good night's rest. When people like that call in our house the usual replay in our house is, "We are not interested." or "She's not home." My father has made alot of stupid mistakes in life of my mom, sister, brother and me. It's as almost as he expects us to forgive him for all the pain he has caused. My father is a blind man when it comes to see his many flaws in life. Who knows maybe someday I'll forgive him for all he has done, maybe someday he will relize his faults in his life and live up to them, and maybe someday when the phone rings I'll say "Hi, Dad."

She read with a determination and confidence I had not seen in her. The class listened to the voice that emerged, and in the silence that followed we all knew she had arrived at something significant about her life. And despite her insistence that it "doesn't fase" her, she looks to the possibility of forgiving him "someday." The rhythm of that last sentence, "maybe...maybe...and maybe..." reveals her hopes for the relationship she envisions with her father.

Keety, a senior in a writing class, had been working on her college essays. I shared with the class an essay that had been published in *The Boston Globe*, Maeve O'Connor's essay about her father and her celebration of their relationship on the date of his birthday several years after his death. I read aloud to the class the section of the article which explained Maeve's three week struggle with an essay. At a field hockey game one afternoon, she suddenly thought of her father and knew her topic. She went home after the game and wrote it in twenty minutes. Keety grasped the subtlety in the piece and, like Maeve, wrote quickly:

I hate painting houses, but it's ten bucks an hour and whatever hours I want, so I do it. My Dad's my boss. Ever since I dropped my expectations about getting out of the house on time, we've worked well together. We spend days in the hot sun putting colors on walls. It's satisfying as long as the paint's not gray. Gray is bland and makes us check our watches more often.

As we swing our brushes, we talk. He tells me what he learned about life from Mr. Brandis, his favorite music theory teacher in college. I tell him what God's been teaching me about patience lately. We understand each other. He and I are almost like the two violinists who sit next to each other in the B.S.O. and know exactly how the other is going to phrase the next passage.

The sun's hottest between eleven and one. As it inches its way across the sky, the air cools off; we don't. Our arms and legs caked with sweaty paint, we continue. Stroke by stroke, we paint all of our thoughts, emotions and ideas into hues of color on a big, monotonous wall. At the end of the day, we pack up our stuff and go home to one of Mom's delicious dinners, stronger, wiser, and closer than when we came.

As Murray writes, "Speed is vital, because it suppresses my critical sense... Speed causes the accidents of language and thought: the unexpected evidence, the surprising connection, the weaving of thought and language that may produce a workable, revisable text" (1989, p. 86). And in this case, Keety knew, as had Maeve, that it was complete for her. She sent it in as her college essay, pleased with the relationship it captured *for her*. It didn't need revising.

Kelly and Katie: New Ways of Thinking

Early one year I tried an exercise that Rob Schneider, a colleague, had given me from a book called *Your Mythic Journey*. It offered another level to an exercise I had used for years. I write on the board, "I am a _____" and ask students to fill in the

blank fifteen times. I write: I am a teacher, a mother, a wife, a green belt, a Democrat, a pianist, a reader... What Rob suggested was having the students gradually cross off, one at a time, what seems less important to them than the others. We go slowly. It is a painful process for some. They groan and refuse and sigh. (But they wait expectantly to see if I finally cross off mother or wife.) And we are left with words that may or may not define us in some way. The second exercise asks them to list, "I am not _____." The unanticipated challenge comes this time after they have eliminated the least important and are left with one. With great resistance they then write for 10 minutes about why they *are* that which they believe they are *not*. They refuse to accept they can write well about something they had just decided was *not* who they are. The surprises are striking, not only for the writing, but for the writer as well. Kelly, a ninth grader, wrote, "I am not...you."

I am you. But than again, aren't we all a part of each other? You have shaped me, your enthusiasm has inspired me, while your misfortune has warned me. I am you, the way we both breathe the same air and leave lasting impressions on everyone we meet. I am a woman, but that doesn't mean that I am not stubborn or determined, nor non athletic or non-aggressive. No matter what physical, cultural, or racial appearances we differ in, I can guarantee you that I am you in one way or another, we share an emotion, or a past hurt, or a future dream, you are me, and I am you. If you take away the differences, and think of the way humans rely on each other in every way, whether you want to admit it or not, we are the same, we both came from a woman, we both make the world function, we are each other, we are all the peoples of Earth.

When she finished this writing, she read it aloud to the class. She expressed her surprise at both the quality of writing and the fact that she had come to understand the ways in which she *is* an other. Kelly wrote in her end of the year portfolio nine months later, in June:

While doing the exercise I intently focused on the certain idea, of what trait I trully do, and do not possess. It was the last part of this writing though that I think, made it an analytical work. By forcing myself to write down "I am you." I opened myself up to a whole new way of thinking about myself, and others, I went on to continue with my reasons, for "Being you". By writing this piece I was forced to find similarities between me and you, I would have probably never had an oppurtunity to otherwise.

Through this quick writing, Kelly discovers "a whole new way of thinking about myself, and others." She considers the writing experience "an opportunity" to open herself up, expand her perceptions of who she is and what her world includes. Like others in the class, Katie, too, experienced the play of paradox by allowing herself to write unexpectedly into a new insight into who she *is*: "I am not ...perfect."

I am perfect because I am me and no one else. Other people's opinions matter to me but they shouldn't. Everyone is different, myself included, and everyone is perfect in their own way. No two people have the exact definition of a perfect person. Everyone makes mistakes, some more than others but that doesn't matter as long as you do the best you can possibly do, you're perfect. I may not be your idea of perfect but that's okay. There are hundreds of different things you could be perfect at such as laughing, making someone else laugh, being a friend, being a teacher, being responsible, smiling, even being a snob. It doesn't matter if what you're perfect at is good or bad as long as you try as hard as you can to be that way. If you exceeded your own standards on being as good as you can at something, you are perfect. I am the perfect daughter, sister, student, friend, Christian and teenager because everyday I make an effort to be the best I can be whether people notice or not.

Katie arrives at a new definition of 'perfection' for herself. The class was amazed that they could write so well, that the process of writing brought them to new understandings, definitions and relationships.

Murray's work, as prolific as it is, always assured me that he does not know all there is to be known about writing and that my own not knowing would be an essential aspect of developing my practice. My own comfort with surprise became vital to my students' abilities to do the same. Murray lists some of the possibilities of "surprise" that we might consider pursuing or identifying in our students' writing: surprise of perception, of recollection, of connection, of resolution, of celebration, of implication, of understanding, of caring, of pattern, of authority, of voice. (1989, p. 9) His notion is not simplistic. Learning how to recognize these modes of surprise became part of my practice as my experiences with students and their writing helped me to see the complexities of their processes.

Jon: Discovering Another Writer

Jon had struggled with apathy throughout most of a semester of writing. He could write for teachers; he had strong editing skills; but his writing lacked any authority or power. In one conference I learned that he was a swimmer, and I suggested that he write about a moment in his swimming career. In one quick burst of writing he freed his voice and discovered another writer in himself:

The first lap is a powerful one—my body is all fresh and ready to go. The water feels like I can glide through it at any speed I wish. It's refreshing, maybe made slightly more since it is only quarter of six in the morning. By the fifth lap my strength has begun to diminish. My arms and legs are tired. I still keep a steady pace, forcing myself to keep good form. One arm up, then the other. Legs keep moving constantly. Keep going. Don't stop. The water feels thicker and my arms heavier. Push it, move. If I don't move, I'll sink. My whole body; arms, legs, muscles, and lungs need to rest. But this is when I get better. I keep going and gradually I improve.

There are about 60 others in the remaining lanes, all creating waves and splashes. In the total view of the pool I am making my own waves, forcing myself to try to do better and improve. In my splashes I force myself to want to become better despite my need to just relax and sink. The coach watches over all and yet it seems easy to be lazy, to be overlooked. But I resist what I want at this moment so badly. And then I glimpse the flexing black line at the bottom of the pool; and I see the end of it. As I push on there's a glimpse of the side of the pool —of a rest and free flowing breath. My last strokes are victorious, I jump up and stand on the bottom stripping my goggles off. Now that I've finished, now that I've accomplished, I grab the side and pull myself up and out of the water. I'm done and I'm content.

The rhythms of this piece duplicate the rhythms of both his physical efforts (in the first paragraph) and his psychological attempts to defy his body's needs (in the second). He captures the tension between his penchant "to be lazy, to be overlooked" and his competitive edge. I read this piece as a subtle metaphor for the same kind of struggle I observed in his previous writing. I am interested, also, in the changing perspective as he moves further and further outside himself toward awareness of the other swimmers, the coach, the pool itself and "the flexing black line at the bottom." Jon was pleased with this writing but remained skeptical about the validity of its style. It was not what he was *supposed to* be writing to get those A's in other English classes. As Tom Romano explains, the emphasis in high school on transactional writing, writing to communicate,

must be balanced with writing “whose method is not calculated, but is, rather, spontaneous, intuitive, even mystical. Those who write, who listen intently to their inner voice and follow it faithfully, possess a power unsurpassed...for making the unknown, known” (1987, p. 157).

Voice

The ambiguous concept of voice in writing courses has intrigued many of us. Sometime in the mid-80's a colleague, Mary McIver, and I were invited to offer a workshop on “voice,” and we spent an hour or so with a small group of teachers looking closely at the texts of my high school students to explore language we might use in talking about voice in student writing. We were interested in uncovering ways in which we might, as teachers and readers of student writing, better understand what we mean when we talk about voice as an element in writing. I asked students in my writing classes to define voice and, at the beginning of the workshop, we asked teachers to share their notions of voice, as well. We found that both students and teachers associated the term with notions of authority, of self, of identity, of power, of meaning, of personality and of honesty. After reading texts of student writers and discussing in groups these notions of voice, one participant said, “I'm more confused now than before!” Well, we laughed. But what we lacked were theoretical lenses through which to move our discussions and our thinking further. We were attempting to initiate theory, as does Murray in his statement, “We all have many voices within our voice.” I'm not sure I could, or need to, answer the question, “So what is voice in writing?” but I would like to touch briefly upon a more theoretical perception of its implications in our teaching.

Elbow refers to voice once in his text *Writing Without Teachers*. His statement at once defines the significance of voice and the ambiguous nature of its elusive presence: “In your natural way of producing words there is a sound, a texture, a rhythm—a voice—which is the main source of power in your writing. I don't know how it works, but this voice is the force that will make a reader listen to you, the energy that drives the

meanings through his thick skull..." (1973, p. 6). Elbow associates voice with an essential source of power or authority of the individual writer, an entity that can be changed, but not abandoned. And yet he states, "But it's the only voice you've got."

Murray speaks of multiple voices within his own: "the voice of a man 62 years old, a Boston boy, of Scottish descent, who listened to sermons and who's been trained as a journalist" (). In the Bakhtinian view, as Wertsch points out, "voices always exist in a social milieu; there is no such thing as a voice that exists in total isolation from other voices" (1995, p. 51), the phenomenon of "multivoicedness" (p. 61). McNamee references the therapeutic work of Penn and Frankfurt: "Voice...is generative; it is unfinished and awaits a reply....It invites the other into what one might call a dialogic space" (Penn & Frankfurt, 1994, p. 222). (1999, p. 32)

What remains important to me is that I continue to expand and develop my sense of voice in student writing, not as a means to discover a definition, but rather to use it as a frame of reference with which to look closely at what my students' writing attempts and how it succeeds, or doesn't. Penn and Frankfurt's conception of voice as "generative" and "unfinished," waiting for another voice in answer, signals an interaction which I already consider essential to conferences. McNamee's suggestion that we take on other voices, essentially play with levels of authority and audience, brings an awareness to this process which I was not able to articulate. Talking about voice without talking about VOICE offers us a continuous sense of possibility in our practice. Like a Zen koan, its purpose is the journey, the quest for understanding, not the answer.

Holden could follow his inner voice faithfully. The piece that he wrote about his brother's baseball glove may not have served Stratlater as a formal essay, but it does offer compelling possibilities for various pieces of writing, through various voices—a far more important educative experience for students, I believe. When I am able to offer my students what Adam Phillips refers to as "licensed digression" (1994, p. 67), the potential for developing thinking, learning and writing is substantial. Phillips, a child

psychotherapist, offers intriguing rhetoric for this study. In his work *On Flirtation*, he employs the term “licensed digression” to specify a process which invites analysis of “memory in its most incoherent and therefore fluent form,” the “disarray in denarrativized fragments” that “reveals the patient’s unofficial repertoire of incoherence”(1994, p. 67).

Through this process of revealing, the analyst, and, I believe, the writing teacher, as well,

will punctuate the patient’s story with a comment (psychoanalysis is essentially a theory of interruption). In the double act of a psychoanalysis the analyst and the patient’s observing ego, in relationship to a third object called the patient’s speech, confer a different version of intelligibility on the patient’s story....The fragmentariness of his or her associations entails the making of links; a psychoanalysis is as much about the making of gaps as about the making of links. Each retelling excludes in a different way.(1994, p. 68)

This complex and dialectical process attributes to dialogue the means to “make sense” of the patient’s (the writer’s) experiences, and thus “it takes two to make a life-story” (p. 68)—certainly a Bakhtinian concept.

The quick writing that my students produce offers “memory in its most incoherent and therefore fluent form.” Incoherence lies in the gaps that implicitly link intermittent glimpses into memory or meaning. The fluent form, as Ann’s writing about the birth of the lamb portrays, emerges within the “disarray in de-narrativized fragments.” What isn’t (yet) told will eventually connect the gaps as awareness of audience eventually demands a more complete montage. The fragmentary nature of the text depicts signals of meaning that do not naturally demonstrate logic of order. Yet within the writer herself exists the possibility of an inherent control of such chaos, as “our unspoken lives press for recognition in fragments” (Phillips, 1994, p. 67). In similar terms, Berthoff suggests that the value of free-writing lies in its capacity for “generating chaos,” for encouraging “a dialectical sort of fluency,” and for “tolerating ambiguities” (1987, pp. 14-15). Phillips pursues this emergence of meaning out of our “unspoken lives” in his interpretation of Freud’s theory of free-association:

In psychoanalysis life-stories fragment in the telling; in order to be read, interpreted, they have to be unreadable. The patient has to refuse himself the conventional satisfactions of narrative. Abrogating his need for beginnings, middles and ends, he often has to become a very bad storyteller and make a nonsense of his life. (1994, p. 68)

Through a similar process, the writer, too, "has to become a very bad story-teller and make a nonsense of his life." Holden's montage, which holds the emotions of his brother's death, offers promise of a clearer vision of his life. In similar ways this is what writing students are doing. When they learn to "trust the process," so to speak, something I have found myself occasionally saying to students, they begin to accept the tentative, fragmentary nature of their free writing or quick writing or rough drafting, and the memories or associations or meanings which it evokes. What emerges are pieces of their life experiences on which they can reflect for greater purpose—to express what realities are becoming clearer to them. This process initiates revision, again and again. Phillips points out the essential criterion for both teachers *and* students: the ability "to tolerate anti-narrative—the kind of apparently random material that might make a written autobiography unreadable—or simply exchanges one story for another that is, at least provisionally, better" (1994, p. 68).

Linda Flower (1990) distinguishes what she labels "Writer-Based prose" from "Reader-Based prose." Her conception of "Writer-Based prose" depicts this "anti-narrative" structure:

In *function*, Writer-Based prose is a verbal expression written by a writer to himself and for himself. It is the record and the working of his own verbal thought. In its *structure*, Writer-Based prose reflects the associate, narrative path of the writer's own confrontation with her subject. In its *language*, it reveals her use of privately loaded terms and shifting but unexpressed contexts for her statements. (1990, p. 126)

Flower's research has pointed to an "underlying cognitive process" (p. 127) which Writer-Based prose reflects. Relying upon Vygotsky's notion of "inner speech," she proposes that, as in interior monologue, "the organization of sentences and paragraphs reflects the shifting focus of the writer's attention...[and] the writer may depend on code words to carry his or her meaning. That is, the language may be 'saturated with sense'

and able to evoke—for the writer—a complex but unexpressed context” (p. 139). Her conceptualization of Writer-Based prose helps me to read Holden’s narrative, and that of many of my students. It *is* disorganized, shifting from the description of the baseball glove to a description of the kind of person Allie was to “the kind of red hair he had” and finally to an account of Holden’s breaking windows. The primary feature of this writing is psychological in nature. The red hair, a “code word,” carries his meaning; for Holden, it is “saturated with sense and able to evoke [for him alone] a complex but unexpressed context”—as Vygotsky writes, “the sum of all the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word” (1962, p. 146). Although he can’t explain it, there is a logic in Holden’s language.

Reading Code Words and Anti-Narratives

Learning to “read” for code words which “carry meaning,” to read unfinished writing, to read the fragmentary nature of the writing in a different way assumes that we trust that “a world begins under the map” (Stafford). I often ask students to choose a passage from the text that seems to hold significance for them in some way and to explore its meaning, often in ten minutes of quick-writing in the classroom. Jill chose a passage from *To Kill a Mockingbird* on which to write:

“I say guilt, gentlemen, because it was guilt that motivated her. She has committed no crime, she has merely broken a rigid and time-honored code of our society, a code so severe that whoever breaks it is hounded from our midst as unfit to live with.”
--Atticus Finch, lawyer

This passage is just a small part of Atticus’s closing argument. It is significant to me for several reasons. The first is the great writing. This passage made me want to keep reading more of the book. I wanted to find out what else Atticus had to say. It made me feel like I was standing in the courtroom, which made it incredibly real and interesting. I actually had the drive to read, which I rarely feel. In the past, I just read because the book was in front of me. I *wanted* to read this time. The writing was so good that it made me think about what I was reading, instead of just reading the words on the page. I learned and began to understand some important aspects of life. Throughout the entire closing argument, I learned several vocabulary words associated with the courtroom, like defendant, plaintiff, indictment, and acquittal. I also learned about the various procedures that go on in the courtroom. I began to think about life and how we, as a society, judge people by looks before we even get to know them. It was a terrible reality

for me, but also an important one. I realized how cruel some people can be, when it comes to ridding themselves of their own guilt. I began to look at our society as big group which isn't perfect. I saw how we all have faults, but some of them like racism are so unfair. It is unfair to those doing the judging and those being judged. It doesn't give us a chance to be true. We put up barriers when we are ignorant and don't understand something. This was one of the passages that was really powerful and changed my way of seeing what is around me.

There is an internal structure to this piece of quick-writing. The passage was significant for her because it engaged her in the psychological actions of the courtroom dialogue, Atticus's reasoning, and the *feeling* of being there. Jill moves to her learning of more objective information: vocabulary, courtroom procedures, and then eventually to her own thinking—a leap she makes to the connections this text has to her life and our own society. She implicates herself in the issues of the text, (“how we, as a society, judge”) and she arrives at a new “feeling” reality, rather than merely intellectual: “It was a terrible reality for me.” She “realized,” “began to look,” “saw” the unfairness. The next three lines explicate that new, “terrible reality” and her developing ability to empathize: “It is unfair to those doing the judging and those being judged. It doesn't give us a chance to be true. We put up barriers when we are ignorant and don't understand something.” The process of writing has brought her in a few minutes to what is for her a profound realization, that this reading “changed my way of seeing what is around me.” After she has realized how guilt can move toward cruelty, she looks even further at society and sees even more deeply.

In *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context*, Barbara Rogoff broadly defines “cognition and thinking” as “problem solving” (1990, p. 8):

I assume that thinking is functional, active, and grounded in goal-directed action. Problem solving involves interpersonal and practical goals addressed deliberately (not necessarily consciously or rationally). It is purposeful, involving flexible improvisation toward goals as diverse as planning a meal, writing an essay, convincing or entertaining others, exploring the properties of an idea or unfamiliar terrain or objects, or remembering or inferring the location of one's keys.

Problem solving emphasizes the active nature of thinking, rather than focusing on cognition as the passive possession of mental objects such as cognitions and percepts. (1990, pp. 8-9)

And, she emphasizes, “the development of interpersonal roles and relationships is not separate. *Problem solving is not ‘cold’ cognition, but inherently involves emotion, social relations, and social structure* [emphasis added]” (p. 10). What a profound statement for education. I have returned again and again to Rogoff’s phrase, “‘cold’ cognition,” and its implications for my professional work—simply put, that cognition and thinking cannot be separated from the emotional and relational lives of our young learners. Their engagement in active processes such as writing produces thinking, learning, “problem solving.” It is improvisational and active by nature. Furthermore, Rogoff speaks of development as “transformations in thinking that occur with successive attempts to handle a problem, even in time spans of minutes...” (p. 11). We can perceive the act of free writing as essentially a cognitive act, in which, often, such “transformations in thinking” may occur moment by moment and can be located in the language produced in the process of problem solving.

Self-Actualization

Carl Rogers discusses and defines the “self-actualizing tendency,” what he views as “basic to motivation” (1977, p. 237). He describes it as “a tendency toward self-regulation and away from control by external forces, ...the directional tendency toward wholeness, toward actualization of potentialities” (pp. 239-240). If I may return once again to Holden’s experience with his teachers and with Stradlater, I would like to look at Holden from the view of this psychological positioning. Rogers’ work stresses the idea that “well-functioning persons come to trust their experiencing as an appropriate guide to their behavior” (p. 246). Thus, “when a person is functioning in an integrated, unified, effective manner, she has confidence in the directions she unconsciously chooses, and trusts her experiencing of which, even if she is fortunate, she has only partial glimpses in her awareness “ (p. 246). Rogers argues that “individuals are culturally conditioned, rewarded, reinforced, for behaviors that are in fact perversions of the natural direction of the unitary actualizing tendency” (p. 247). Stradlater accuses

Holden: “You don’t do *one damn thing* the way you’re supposed to.” It is Stradlater who has been so culturally conditioned by schooling that any meaning of an inner life or consciousness of potential remains insignificant or non-existent for him. Over the years I have been intrigued, as a teacher, by many of my students’ responses to Holden’s character. Most condemn him for his “bad attitude” and his negativity. Despite his despair at the death of Allie, his disappointment in his older brother’s “prostitution” of his own talent as a writer, and his parents’ and teachers’ inability to understand him, Holden can only live by, though not yet trust completely, his own intuitive sense, one which has an integrity and a morality by which he tries to make sense of others’ actions. Rogers concludes “that the most trustworthy entity in our uncertain world is an individual who is fully open to the two major sources: the data from internal experiencing, and the data from experiencing of the external world” (1977, p. 250).

If awareness and conscious thought are seen as a part of life—not its master nor its opponent but an illumination of the developing processes within the individual—then our total life can be the unified and unifying experience that seems characteristic in nature. If our magnificent symbolizing capacity can develop as a part of and be guided by the tendency toward fulfillment that exist in us both at the conscious and nonconscious levels, then the organic harmony is never lost and becomes a human harmony and human wholeness simply because our species is capable of greater richness of experience than any other. (1977, p. 249)

Holden is the only person in his world attending to this balance of the conscious and the non-conscious, existing between these worlds; ironically, only Phoebe, his child sister, can acknowledge the “organic harmony” in that state. To everyone else, Holden is crazy.

In *Freedom to Learn*, Rogers and Freiberg characterize a non-educative experience as “the futile attempt to learn material that has no personal meaning. Such learning involves the mind only: It is learning that takes place ‘from the neck up.’ It does not involve feelings or personal meanings; it has no relevance to the whole person” (1994, p. 35). Similarly, Dewey’s criteria for an educative experience require the engagement of both the intellectual *and* the emotional life of a person. An educator, therefore, must “have that sympathetic understanding of individuals as individuals which

gives him an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning” (1938, p. 39). Dewey refers to the “interplay” of “both factors in experience—objective and internal conditions” (p. 42).

Holden’s psychological state is induced by just such a dramatic clash between the external values and habits of his social environment and his own internal meanings. No one listens: Stradlater argues; Vinson has his students yell “Digression”; even Antolini asks rhetorical questions. In what ways do we, as teachers of writing, inhibit our own students’ self-actualization in these most critical years of adolescent growth? When specific assignments become our whole pedagogical practice, how can the healthy individual do anything other than defy those conditions for “success”?

Retrospective Structuring (Perl, 1990)

In the mid-80’s I worked for a few months as an informal writing instructor with a nuclear physicist. He suggested that as a professional I needed a “flow-chart” of what I believed about the processes of writing. I had no idea why, or what exactly it was, but I laid out some ideas about the implications of teaching writing from my own experiences in the classroom. I laughed as I created it, and even more as I figured out a way to show it to a group of teachers using three transparencies to demonstrate movement of process. But the process itself of trying to design it reinforced for me the recursive nature of these writing processes in which we attempt to engage our students.

We begin with a possibility, perhaps in the guise of a tentative thesis, perhaps a vague idea. As we begin writing, we either find ourselves clarifying a focus or having to return and rethink what we might want it to be. If we continue and move into the realm of explanations, developing various parts of the writing, we may again at any moment return or revert back to a previous part of the process, discovering a new topic through a digression, or having to rephrase the thesis to suit a different audience or purpose. As the writing (and thinking) develops, and we become more attuned to a specific audience, we write further to clarify to someone other than ourselves, moving outward from self

toward audience, though not usually in a linear fashion. Purpose and audience become entwined and shifting one may very well shift the other. Only after we have established meaning for ourselves and our audience do we concern ourselves with the final editing problems. Rarely does editing reflect us back into the processes of finding meaning and purpose.

Sondra Perl has named such a process “*retrospective structuring*” (1990, p. 49): “It is retrospective in that it begins with what is already there, inchoately, and brings whatever is there forward by using language in structured form...As we shape what we intend to say, we are further structuring our sense while correspondingly shaping our piece of writing” (p. 49). Perl qualifies the term “discovery.” It does not have the same implications as the more common use of discovery of objects.

In writing, meaning is crafted and constructed. It involves us in a process of coming-into-being...We see in our words a further structuring of the sense we began with and we recognize that in those words we have discovered something new about our selves and our topic. Thus when we are successful at this process, we end up with a product that teaches us something, that clarifies what we know (or what we knew at one point only implicitly), and that lifts out or explicates or enlarges our experience. In this way, writing leads to discovery. (1990, p. 49)

If we acknowledge this “retrospective structuring” as essential and beneficial to process, then as writing instructors, our responsibilities are to enter those processes with our students (“a theory of interruption,” as Phillips puts it), to encourage those perspectives and decisions, acknowledge their worth, and teach student-writers how to recognize and value them. “Licensed digression” becomes part of a practice when students learn what it can offer them. The more student-writers write for themselves, for their own learning, the more they will discover credible purposes for writing. As Dewey proposes, “There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process” (1938, p. 67).

Teaching students such a process requires, for me, interaction in the earliest stages of their writing—often, even before they begin. Donna Qualley, in *Turns of Thought*, states,

“We need an approach, a method for engaging the other that is receptive, deferent, exploratory, tentative” (p. 141). And in *The Writing Life*, Annie Dillard refers to this process as “an epistemological tool”:

When you write, you lay out a line of words. The line of words is a miner's pick, a woodcarver's gouge, a surgeon's probe. You wield it, and it digs a path you follow. Soon you find yourself deep in new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow, or this time next year. (1989, pp. 3-4)

I believe that an essential part of my practice relies upon these concepts of free-writing, quick-writing, and digression which touch upon a non-conscious movement of experience. It is upon this foundation that my conferences began, and it was a trust in this process that helped develop my practice. As Elbow writes, “Language is the principal medium that allows you to interact with yourself ... A principle value of language, therefore, is that it permits you to *distance* yourself from your own perceptions, feelings and thoughts” (1973, p. 55). The act of distancing becomes part of this process as one begins to consider what one has discovered or encountered in the language of “first thoughts,” a phrase Natalie Goldberg (1986) uses to describe “the way the mind first flashes on something.” As she explains, “The internal censor usually squelches them, so we live in the realm of second and third thoughts, thoughts on thought, twice and three times removed from the direct connection of the first fresh flash” (p. 9). Goldberg, like Murray, considers these flashes a place that has “tremendous energy” (p. 9), a place in which we might acknowledge possibility of discovery, meaning, insight, a space in which we might work with the student to create “re-vision” in a literal sense.

Felt Time and Space

This fall I told Liam, my thirteen-year old son, that for every hour of yard work he did, he could have equal time on his dirt bike. “That’s not right!” he responded, and I knew what he was about to say; he has said it since he was little. “The time doing the work seems like three hours, but the time I’m on my dirt bike seems like only fifteen minutes!”

My high school students respond in similar ways to time in the classroom. When they are engaged in work that they enjoy, that captures their interest, and that allows them a sense of individual expression or socialization—when they perceive it essentially as *their* time—time alters for them, as it does for most of us. Susan, a colleague of mine, joked in answer to a question broached by administrators, “How do we know when our curriculum has been successful?” Her answer: “When the students look up at the clock and say, ‘Is the class over *already?*’”

In his research in *Time to Write: The Influence of Time and Culture on Learning to Write*, John Lofty has written beautifully and extensively on the discrepancies between time as we know it in school and the concept of time as we, (and, more importantly, our students), live outside of the artificial structures of the institution. Quick-writing experiences immerse student writers in moments of time that alter in various ways their sense of reality. If they enter a memory of an experience, for instance, re-engaging in other moments of their lives, reliving or reflecting on the details of that place, that time, those particular feelings, then present time seems transformed—they don’t live in both simultaneously. The quick-writing practices which my students do early on in a course allow them the luxury of reentering their lives, their thoughts, emotions, experiences, and they learn in the process how to elicit the “telling details” (Macrorie) of those lived moments. Through these processes, they come to perceive experience in a different light—retrospectively, analytically, distanced, somewhat changed, even transforming.

Paula Salvio discusses a similar phenomenon of “felt time” experienced in the act of reading. Salvio articulates an intriguing assertion: “The linear structure of the traditional narrative is shaped by temporal features that capture only one dimension of experience” (1994 draft, p. 2). In her discussion of the “playing spaces” in which readers exist between our own emotional lives and the texts we read, Salvio suggests that the life of those “between” spaces offers possibilities into which we might look for a

means of understanding. The temporal modes of such spaces, she continues, should be distinguished from those of the traditional narrative, what Langer describes as a “simple one dimensional trickle of successive moments. . . (Langer, p. 37)” (Salvio, p. 3). She quotes Langer:

“The one-dimensional time of Newtonian physics, and its derivative, the time-dimension in modern physical theory, are abstractions from our experience of time. They have tremendous social and intellectual advantages, but they are very specialized abstractions, and leave many aspects of our direct knowledge outside the realm of discursive thought which they dominate. (Langer, p. 38)”

In contrast, Salvio explains, “The sense of ‘felt time’ that Langer then describes possesses a ‘sort of voluminousness and complexity and variability that make it utterly unlike metrical time’ (Langer, p. 37)” (Salvio, p. 3). These distinctions offer us insight into ways of looking at the subtle processes of quick-writing, in which the writer enters into different modes of space *and* time, living within other moments, feeling within altered properties of time. The rhythms of quick-writing—what my students often refer to as “flow”—parallel what Salvio reveals about reading.

To follow this a step further, Salvio also identifies an intriguing distinction between cycles and rhythms that I believe may give insight into what writers do. In reference to Connelly and Clandinin’s use of these terms, she explains that cycles, which “refer to depersonalized activities like schedules, calendars and routines...have temporal boundaries that are often rigid...[and] can be expressed in objective language” (p. 10). Rhythms are marked by an added distinction; they “are the cycles *transformed by an individual’s experience*, and are, therefore, intersubjective...[Such rhythms] require a *language of emotion* [emphasis added]” (p. 10). Salvio suggests that “emotional rhythms” (such as Ann’s writing about the lamb) can be used as “indices” to what readers (and, I would add, writers) value. The writing that happens when students explore subjects in their own individual, personal modes of time can be viewed as such indices. Ann’s ten minute writing about the birth of her lamb didn’t happen in her initial planning of what the

writing might do; in her thinking, she rejected it as too “gross,” inappropriate for her audience, so she dismissed the objective nature of its descriptions—what I would imagine is the messiness of the birth. She assumed only one dimension of this writing. What she couldn’t anticipate were the ways in which her own emotional and psychic involvement would create a different kind of telling—an intersubjective play of values and language, the rhythms of which Macrorie speaks: “Its dramatic rhythms come from the events the writer has chosen to reveal, and from her relationship with those events... It dramatizes its crucial moments... it rises above those moments and tells us what it’s like to be alive on this earth” (1994, p. 79). Such rhythms, I believe, create one aspect of what we call “voice” in writing. Donna Qualley writes about this process as a journey into the “beckoning spaces of ‘between,’” quoting her own earlier work:

“As teachers, the best thing we can do for our students is accustom them to this flux and flow, and encourage them into the uncertain and beckoning spaces of ‘between.’ Through dialogue with themselves and with others, our students can learn to negotiate their way onto firmer ground. And once there, we must ensure that the dialogue continues as all of us, teachers and students, reexamine our positions.”

The problem with such a theory is that many students try to arrive without having traveled through this dialectical process first. They attempt to bypass the messiness and uncertainty of between.... (1997, p.22)

My students often verify their place in these processes. Lauren writes a “progress report” of her experiences in the first quarter of one year:

I have been challenged to voice my opinion or write it down. To come up with thoughts and explanations. There have been group conversations that I have had trouble engaging in because I am between ideas.

And Julia writes,

I have been challenged often by the questions that arise in daily discussions but the challenges have come from me trying to figure out what I think. I appreciate the activities that allow me to do this...

And Kristen writes:

I can really look inside me and say what I’ve been dying to say. I can express myself and my ideas. By the open-mindedness in this classroom we are able to get off the subject and have extremely interesting conversations. I have noticed that my writing is really surprising me. Looking back and rereading some of my quick writes make me see and try to figure out (for example) what justice is.

The Epic Form

As Salvio continues to explore conceptualizations of time through her own knowledge of theatre, she presents a discussion between Schiller and Goethe about the epic form, “recognized for its reflexive qualities” (p. 13). I would like to use the subtle distinctions they establish in order to look once again at the characteristics of digression. A dramatic plot, they claim, moves before one’s view, and one is “bound strictly to what is present to the sense... imagination loses all freedom,” one has to “stick to the subject; any reflection or looking back is forbidden” (p. 13). In contrast, an epic form “seems to stand still while [one] moves round it” and the viewer is able to move in ways that dramatic plot does not allow. The advantages are significant:

But if I move round a circumstance which cannot get away from me, then my pace can be irregular; I can linger or hurry according to my own subjective needs, can take a step backwards or leap ahead, and so forth. (Schiller-Goethe Correspondence, 26 December, 1797; Quoted in Brecht)” (Salvio, p. 13)

This capacity for subjective movement is what Holden tries to express about Richard Kinsella’s speech. Having to “stick to the subject,” he is forbidden any moments of reflection by the shouts of “Digression!” from the class. Holden intuits the qualities of the “epic form,” i.e. the modes of space and time which exist “according to [the writer’s] own subjective needs.” Holden has accepted this way of being in the world as a natural mode, again, the primary reason he is flunking out of his fifth high school.

Salvio concludes, “The pedagogical challenge is not to replace emotion with a dispassionate critique, but rather to use our emotions as a path of inquiry toward understanding” (p.15). As a teacher I continue to struggle with ways to teach students how to ignore or defy or resist what seems implicit in schooling—“the demands of linear, discursive practices that diminish emotional life” (p. 21). I begin to perceive the teaching of writing as a pedagogy of resistance—what better means of teaching adolescents than encouraging their exploration of personal meaning, a process which requires them to delineate between what others expect of them and what they may accomplish in

following “errors that give a new start” or “the many places a road can’t find.” I would like to emphasize here that this is not about attending only to what teachers consider personal writing, the personal narrative, autobiographical writing. It is as much about formal essay, literary analysis, critical thinking. It is not about form, but about what happens prior to design, prior to our ability to articulate what we have never before as clearly perceived or witnessed—writing as testimony to our inner lives. Too many students have learned how to craft their writing to the narrow criteria of teachers, without learning the practice of seeing into their own inner lives—their felt responses to their ideas and those of others.

Process Experiencing (Rogers, 1961)

In his description of the process of personality change, Rogers describes the characteristics of the stages of this process. Among them he includes a critical one in the development of the individual: “There is a quality of living subjectively in the experience, not feeling about it... The self, at this moment, is the feeling. This is a being in the moment, with little self-conscious awareness...” (1961, p.147). This description has helped me begin to understand what the interior processes of free-writing and quick writing might look like. In the act of focused concentration in the writing, the writer is able to elude a self-conscious awareness of what he might intend or have intended, shifting into the “not knowing” that elicits a “process [which] involves a loosening of the cognitive maps of experience” (p. 157). I have heard writers, including Murray, describe it as following the writing, as if the writing itself, the process, guides the writer’s direction or as if the writer loses sight of her own intentions and acquiesces to the unexpected ways in which writing emerges. For the student-writer, this feeling can be exhilarating if reinforced by my responses and encouragement; but for students who have followed the confining expectations of “good writing,” this is a strange and precarious proposition. Most of my students would not give themselves permission to digress, follow their own words into unpredictable places; in fact, they have usually been warned *not* to digress.

The advice is meant to keep a final paper focused, but students have come to believe they must do this immediately. Veering from their perceived “stabilized framework” proves for many of my students to become a necessary process in the development of their writing. My practice emerged only as I came to believe, through the experience of my own writing students, that the loosening of *both* of our demands of what was to occur on the page freed them to explore and reveal the depth of their own thoughts, experiences, memories, opinions, etc. It is quite an experience to celebrate with each student as she tentatively tries on this “experiencing moment” because it is such an ambiguous, undefined space, which unfolds or reveals meaning, even in glimpses for the writer. My practice has been a training to recognize those glimpses and to teach students how to recognize such insights in their own thinking and writing. O’Reilly observes, “These essays, these tries our students make, are forays into secret, mysterious inner space, for them and for us” (1998, p. 3). Teaching not knowing sanctions such “secret, mysterious inner space” which neither we nor our students know before we enter.

An Aesthetic of Imperfection (Barrett, 1998, p. 611)

Because I do trust this process of exploration in language, students can dive in to writing without taking true risks—risks that make them vulnerable to loss of grade or confidence, to humiliation or discouragement. I am the one who guarantees that something will work, though not everything. Something. And I borrow again a concept from Barrett’s criteria of improvisation, what he calls an “aesthetic of imperfection”—a different standard of evaluating performance (1998, p. 611). He points out that the performances of a classical musician and of a jazz musician compel different means of evaluation. Because improvisation pushes the artist into the realm of uncertainty, jeopardizing the momentary quality of the performance-in-action for the sake of creativity and innovation, the work should be judged by other criteria than that of the classical performance, “evaluating the entire repertoire of actions that the musician attempted, the

beautiful phrases combined with the clunkers that were the result of risky efforts, the same expansive efforts that no doubt produce beautiful passages” (p. 611). As a classically trained pianist, I appreciate the profound implications of this suggestion for writing, as well. The effectiveness of quick writing and free-writing relies upon the willingness of the writer to enter a space of uncertainty, taking a chance in having it work, come alive, make sense in that moment. Adopting an “aesthetic of imperfection” as writing instructors as “acknowledgement that learning is something that often happens by trial and error, by brave efforts to experiment outside of the margin” (p. 611), affirms students’ efforts to enter the uncertainties of not knowing. “Evaluating the entire repertoire of actions” that the writer attempts, “the beautiful phrases combined with the clunkers” has made sense to me for years. I am not usually looking for the perfect essay. More often than not, the beauty of a line or insight or expression proves more valuable to my work with students. The criteria often shift—with individual pieces, over a period of time—and I tend to acknowledge specific qualities of a piece of writing and to urge the writer toward the more challenging aspects of the craft of writing.

In evaluating the quality of such performance, as Barrett writes, we need to value and consider the challenges and risks the artist/writer takes. The evaluation therefore should be “not just on conventional standards of success, but on strength of effort; level of purposeful, committed engagement in an activity; perseverance after an error has been made; passionate attempt to expand the horizon of what had been considered possible” (p. 611). These are wonderful criteria to incorporate into our practices.

In this chapter on “licensed digression,” I have attempted to portray the qualities and characteristics of writing in the space of not knowing in which “we begin with what is inchoate and end with something that is tangible” (Perl, 1990, p. 49). The heuristic power of writing can offer an invaluable resource in a practice of teaching writing. Our own professional ability to recognize, understand and teach the cognitive value of improvisation as Britton, Flower, Murray, Perl, Rogers and others define and describe

those processes is critical to teaching process as a valuable part of writing. Our responsibility also extends to our own developing capacities to read for possibilities of meaning and to teach our students how to recognize and value what emerges from expressive writing, writing to and for themselves.

In the next chapter I look at my students' journal writing to study the ways in which using expressive writing in literature studies can enhance their abilities to analyze and interpret meaning.

CHAPTER 2

JOURNAL WRITING: WRITING INTO LITERATURE

To suggest that people should keep journals is to suggest that even their quickest thoughts and feelings caught in mid-flight might be valuable to them and others. (Macrorie, 1987, iii)

Who will teach me to write? A reader wanted to know.
The page, the page, that eternal blankness, the blankness of eternity which you cover slowly, affirming time's scrawl as a right and your daring as necessity...the page in the purity of its possibilities...that page will teach you to write. (Annie Dillard, 1989, p. 59)

Learning to Value Unfinished Texts

In two chapters, both entitled "Writing Amid Literature" in his work *Clearing the Way*, a book I consider to be one of the best for secondary teachers on the teaching of writing, Tom Romano critiques the traditional assumption that the writing that literature classes produce is and should be primarily, if not solely, essay writing. In my first years of teaching, I fell quite easily into that narrow perspective of what teaching English means. My students read literature and analyzed what I considered to be significant themes. They did little else in terms of their literacy experiences. I assigned essays and then read and corrected them. It wasn't until I had become experienced at teaching writing, a pedagogy which I realized, with some discomfort, differed radically from the ways in which I had continued to teach literature, that I began to consider why the discrepancies existed. The implications disturbed me, and I began to question the validity of teaching literature solely through written analysis and a reliance on a single form.

Romano saw the dangers:

Such repeated, narrow engagement in composition, I believe, prevents students from developing open, flexible attitudes about writing. It inhibits their ability to use writing as a learning tool, and it promotes habits of mind and perceptions of how writing is done that may cripple their growth as writers. (1987, p. 131)

Even more significant a statement was that of Randall Freisinger (1982) whom Fulwiler quotes: “Excessive reliance on the transactional function of language may be substantially responsible for our students’ inability to think critically and independently....Product-oriented, transactional language promotes closure” (1987b, p. 8). The ironies of what our traditional training directed us to do with reading and writing stayed with me in the form of questions for many years. Romano advocated writing in literature classes as opportunities for “original thinking about literature” and argued for a necessary balance between transactional writing and an equally important power of writing that “is not calculated, but is, rather, spontaneous, intuitive, even mystical” (1987, p. 157-8). This perception of teaching literature offered a different pedagogy, one which also valued process as its focus.

In *Teaching With Writing* Toby Fulwiler describes reading and writing as “interdependent, mutually supportive skills, both of which are basic to an individual’s capacity to generate critical, independent thinking” (1987b, p. 2). The emphasis on reading as a means to learning has traditionally been the primary focus; writing has been neglected as a source of meaningful learning. Like Emig’s, Fulwiler’s work speaks to the significance of this oversight in traditional education, that of discounting the processes of composing; Fulwiler quotes Berthoff (1978):

The work of the active mind is seeing relationships, finding forms, making meanings; when we write, we are doing in a particular way what we are already doing when we make sense of the world. We are composers by virtue of being human. (Fulwiler, 1987b, p. 5)

Fulwiler affirms that “no other thinking process helps us develop a line of inquiry or a mode of thought as completely” (p. 5). He points to Britton’s 1975 study of functions of writing in British schools (ages 11-18) in which they found that 64 percent of the writing was for purposes of communicating information, what Britton labeled “transactional writing.” Only four percent of the writing students engaged in was what he called “expressive writing,” that which his co-researcher, Nancy Martin (1976), considered

“crucial for trying out and coming to terms with new ideas”(Fulwiler, 1987b, p. 6), what Fulwiler views as writing to learn.

Learning how to make this shift in my own teaching was a slow process for me. The most difficult aspect of re-creating my practice was learning how to evaluate and value what Murray calls “unfinished writing,” how to sustain writing without closure, and how to do more than merely grade the quality of what students considered a finished product. I came to value Murray’s concept: “Decoding a messy, evolving student text,” he teaches us, “is a frightening challenge for most teachers, because they are untrained for this task. But writing teachers and their students have to learn to read unfinished writing” (1989, p. 26). Learning how to value anything but finished, refined products required of me a personal paradigmatic shift in thinking in order to learn how to do what Murray proposed: “To work with our students, in conference and in workshop, to develop the skills of reading fragments that may inspire a text and to read an unfinished text so that it evolves into increased purpose and meaning” (1989, pp. 74-75). In my literature classes, journals became an essential part of that process.

In my early years of teaching, I had tried using journals, but I remained ambivalent about their effectiveness for a long time. I wasn’t sure how to use them. It seemed natural for students to be writing, often and much, but I felt a resistance (my own) to grading or even evaluating them. To read, respond to and “correct” everything they wrote, what I had been trained to do with assigned writing, seemed to go against the purposes of the educative experiences the journal writing offered them. John Ferguson, a colleague, had said for years, “They should be writing far more than we can read.” It made sense, but I didn’t know how to translate that premise into a practice. Why would they bother to write if it weren’t being graded? Didn’t everything require a response from me? Wasn’t that my professional responsibility? What would they learn? And what about the constant demands of the system in which I worked for grades, at least once every four weeks?

It gradually became clear to me that I was still treating the journal as a product, “possessing itself as a conclusion” (Fellman & Laub, 1992, p. 5). I hadn’t consciously accepted the power (or validity) of “unfinished writing” or the value of “an aesthetic of imperfection” (Barrett) in a system in which product meant everything. Learning how to teach student-writers to learn to write for themselves would become more critical to their development as writers than writing for my expectations and standards. Learning to write for *themselves first* was essential to writing for other audiences. It became even more clear over the years that my evaluations, grades, criticisms, even responses and suggestions might inhibit their most significant thinking and writing, and that my assignments were far less important than the writing students might engender (though not necessarily “finished” products) out of their own discovered purposes and insights.

For purposes of this dissertation, the term “journals” suggests quick, timed writing (usually five to fifteen minutes) that I use often in my classroom to encourage students’ thinking about the literary texts we are reading. I may ask them to respond to something specific in the text: “Talk about the codes of slavery that Dana has to learn when she is caught in the ante bellum South in *Kindred*.” I may ask students to respond to something, anything, in the reading that struck them as significant in some way, perhaps the narration or a character or something that confused them. I may ask them to list questions that reveal how they read or to find a passage and write about why they remembered or chose it. These journal writings almost inevitably lead to the beginnings of analytical writing, often without the young writer’s knowledge of the levels of thinking that we call analysis and interpretation. Single lines, words or phrases punctuating their writing offer glimpses into still-obscure concepts that can be sophisticated and somewhat profound for these student-writers. As Elbow asserts, such writing can “find relationships and conclusions in the words that are far richer and more interesting” than the writer can anticipate. “An assertion (or a mood, an image, a central detail or event or object) should tell you more than you already know, what your meaning is” (1973, p. 21).

Such writing can also easily overwhelm, even intimidate students. Teaching them how to recognize these insights and value them as steps into further thinking has become crucial to this work and to my practice as both writing *and* reading instructor.

Many students too quickly judge their writing as disorganized, poorly written, meaningless, or boring to others. It takes encouragement, careful response and engaging conversation to help them celebrate the disorganization and chaos that almost always exists in the course of exploring ideas they've never ventured into or that become more complex than they have before managed. "Teaching not knowing" has become a practice in which both my students and I share responsibility, develop mutual trust, value response, and acknowledge the unique authority of one another.

Witnessing and Testimony in Student Writing

We think by processing ... we often inform ourselves by speaking aloud to others. Drawing on the work of Gusdorf, Langer, and Vygotsky, James Britton (1970a) argues that the "primary task for speech is to symbolize reality: we symbolize reality in order to handle it." (Fulwiler, 1987, pp. 4-5)

In *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* by Shashona Felman and Dori Laub, M.D., witnessing implies a means of "accessing reality" (p. xx). In her discussion of the witnessing of traumas, Felman explains what it means to bear witness to another's story: "By virtue of the fact that the testimony is addressed to others, the witness, from within the solitude of his own stance, is the vehicle of an occurrence, a reality, a stance or dimension beyond himself" (Felman, 1992, p. 3). As teachers of writing, we perform, in some respects, the act of witnessing our students' stories, their claims, their testimony, as they attempt to make sense of, to bear witness to, their realities. These moments of testimony, Felman explains, remain necessarily fragmented,

not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition....In the testimony, language is a process and in trial, it does not possess itself as a conclusion....Testimony is, in other words, a discursive practice...(1992, p. 5)

I would like to address two (of many possible) implications this idea has for the teaching of writing: the first, that it is critical that we learn how to acknowledge and understand and utilize such “discursive practice,” how to value the integrity of language that is “a process and in trial, [that] does not possess itself as a conclusion,” a concept that I explore in this chapter; and the second, which I address in the next chapter, that we need to create practices in which we competently act in response to such processes, particularly through the ways in which we listen and acknowledge students in their subtle and delicate acts of giving testimony. As adults, teachers, writing-coaches, facilitators, we “bear witness” to the language of our students’ “testimony” within their writing and in our dialogue. Our witnessing of their testimony is a means of “accessing reality” (p. xx). Felman and Laub assert that in the act of giving testimony, one must confront its “unpredictability,” our being caught by surprise—signals of “not knowing” that inherently accompany the nature of testimony. This process of bearing witness to their testimony remains a delicate one, for uncertainty and unpredictability are necessary qualities of the acts both of giving testimony and of witnessing. The ways in which we listen, the stance we choose to assume, directly impact our students’ creation of testimony, as well. I believe that we need to explore further our “relational responsibility” (McNamee and Gergen) implicit in this role. Our own conscious presence, our expectations and our responses to our students’ witnessing, become critical to the processes of assisting our students in accessing their realities—the very purpose of writing.

Journal writing is a means to such processes, the immediate accessing of language that is “a process and in trial, [that] does not possess itself as a conclusion.” I learned to become comfortable with the writing that happened in that process, with its “unfinishedness,” learning to identify places in the process that became indices of learning, “moments of movement” (Rogers, 1961, p. 129) in my students’ thought and articulation. My ability to identify and to value such writing directly influenced my

students' abilities to accept the quality of unfinished writing and to continue to access possibilities of meaning.

Nicki: Witness to Esperanza's Testimony

Nicki wrote for fifteen minutes in response to the prompt I gave the class: If *The House on Mango Street* is a journey through her childhood (suggested in a class discussion by a student), what does this portray about Esperanza? As I read Nicki's writing, I underlined that language which seemed to hold meaning:

If *The House on Mango Street* is a journey through her childhood, what this portrays is that she did not have an easy childhood. It was rough. It might have been like she was there because she didn't know where she was. She was lost. She didn't have a house, school was rough, and nothing is the way she wanted it to be. She must have thought that the only things that really mattered in life was the corn field, and the 4 trees. Nothing else was really there, and nothing else was a place destined to go. The stairway was in the hall. Her sister was too young to really play with, and her brother's only said intelligent things once in a life time about clouds. Nothing is what she expected it to be like. Lunch at school was a mess, wearing cool adult shoes could get you in trouble with strangers, and neighbors, came and neighbors went because of people like her family. It seems like she would have been okay, except she had a really guilty conscious. Even she couldn't see her house from the window, she would say the house was hers. She thought everything in life was somebody's fault, and why shouldn't it be her fault. The only pleasures in life were things that weren't hers. The car-rides, and televisions were all somebody else's, or stolen. That was her whole life, somebody else's. Simple as that. She was just taking the place of somebody else. It's like that McDonald's commercial when the girl didn't like what her family was like eating at McDonalds. She was a really big dreamer. She had such high hopes and wishes. She wanted so much more than she could ever have. It was never going to be her reality. It's like a story you read about the really poor people who are homeless and don't have money food or anything. It's like that, only so much closer to home. I may not be part of the wealthiest families, and I have really high hopes and dreams that I know could never happen. I empathize with her. Our dreams over take us. We are our own dreams.

The details of Nicki's exploration of Esperanza's experience bring her to powerful insights voiced through her strong statements. We can almost track her arrival at this witnessing of her reading of the character: "That was her whole life, somebody else's ... It was never going to be her reality." The quick writing engages her in an internal "dialogue" of sorts between her own experiences and feelings and those of Esperanza as Cisneros's text reveals itself to her. In fact, it is Nicki's own experience that gives her the capacity

to “empathize with her” and to go beyond the text with her own, personal inference, an intriguing conclusion: “We are our own dreams.” She has moved from observation and analysis into interpretation, one to which she connects personally. In this writing, Nicki has become witness to Esperanza’s testimony and in the process has been able to “access” something of her own “reality,” perhaps a new perception of a reality of life, for her as well as for others like Esperanza.

Kate and Meg: An Inner Dialogic Journey

I noticed a passage in *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton which makes reference to the mines of South Africa, and the wealth of the country built on the backs of the black South Africans. In class one day I turned to that passage and then handed out copies of Ursula LeGuin’s short work, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas.”² What appears to be a simple story of a town eventually sets up a moral dilemma for the reader. LeGuin’s piece offers a utopian society in which anything the reader wishes can be possible; the “catch,” however, is that in order for such a place to exist, misery and suffering must be embodied in a child kept in the basement of a building. No one can offer solace or the utopian society ceases to exist. There are those who walk away, having seen that the foundation of their happiness depends upon the suffering of another, an innocent child. I ask students to write about the reading. Kate writes,

If I was at Omelas, and I had seen the child, I would most likely have left. After being so happy for so long, and then discovering the town had such a terrible secret; I don’t think it would have been very easy for me to go back to the way things were and pretend nothing was wrong. But then again this is a difficult question because I truthfully don’t know if I could have given up my perfect world. But in the end it’s just not right for one to suffer so terribly for so many. Why should one have to suffer, when we could all just suffer a little together? But that is not the way Omelas works. Maybe an appropriate thing to do would be to imagine that I was the child. Would I want someone to help me? To leave a perfect life, just for me? Yes, I do believe I would have left Omelas, for even though we talked about not feeling guilty it is not fair to the child to suffer and for all of us to profit from the child’s sacrifice.

This journal write portrays a difficult inner dialogue for Kate. Her continual use of “But..” brings her back again and again to the dilemma. She can’t resolve it easily, and she

attempts to be honest with herself about what she would do. The conflict she encounters in this writing lies in the possibility of her acting against her own moral belief. The writing eventually moves her closer to her initial response and the criterion for her decision: "Maybe an appropriate thing to do would be to imagine that I was the child." She has confirmed her own response, at least for the present, through this inner dialogic journey.

Meg writes:

Almost all of us in the class said that we would either help the child or walk away from Omelas, myself included. But it's so easy for us, in our warm school where our lives are very easy, to say something rather than actually do it. I hope that if I was given the choice I would walk away, but the pit of my stomach is asking if I could do it. It would take a lot of courage to leave the happiness + my friends + family. I hope that I would not disappear into the rest of those who ignored the misery. Part of me thinks that I would push it to the back of my mind where I would try to forget about it. But every time I laughed, or smiled or enjoyed myself, it would remind me of why I could be happy. Eventually I wouldn't be able to take it anymore. I would have to leave or I would set the child free. The one thing that I most believe in is that everyone deserves to be happy + everyone deserves to be loved.

Meg, too, allows herself to confront her own ambivalence, realistically considering her ability to leave behind all that she has in her life, including people. She puts herself through a time frame and makes her decision based upon her (future) inability to live a life in denial. ("Eventually I wouldn't be able to take it anymore.") These writing experiences allow each student "freedom in which he can move in his thinking and feeling and being, in any directions he desires" (Rogers, 1989, p. 109). The opportunity to do such writing again and again I believe offers students far more than merely assigning final products. Obviously these writings prepare students to do finished writing, and yet the unfinishedness of these quick writes renders as powerful an indicator of cognitive development as do their final products.

Paul: Expressing Silence

I have been reticent over the years about "teaching" Elie Wiesel's autobiography *Night*. I feel that its profound subject matter demands a very personal reading, and I

leave the book largely to their reading, asking them to write about their experience reading this work in journal entries. While students are reading *Night*, we study several films, including *Life is Beautiful* (and the criticisms of its portrayal of the Holocaust experiences), *Nuremberg*, an excerpt from *Band of Brothers* recommended by a student, and *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, including the essays of response which Wiesenberg solicited from various public figures.

Paul's family took a vacation to Europe during our study. When he returned he told me they had gone to Dachau and for his work, he had taken a video camera as he walked through the silence of the memorial, which he allowed us to view. We were all struck by the silence of the place, and I asked him to write a journal entry about that experience:

I took a moving trip to Dachau two weeks ago. The main country rode went by 400 feet from the East wall. From our first step in, everything was silent and subdued. The only noise was the sound of the gravel being crushed as you walked along. No one felt the urge to speak to their neighbor.

Silence is the voice of the Holocaust. It is what the Jews were forced to do as they stood for hours in roll call square. It is how the spirits communicate to the visitors now.

My sense of German ignorance of the Holocaust was cemented when I saw the houses beyond the South wall. I know housing in Europe is at a premium, but how can they disrespect something that is such a horrible event in the history of civilization?

The first sign I saw really shocked me. Hitler had established Dachau only weeks after his inauguration for his political opponents. It was a "protection" camp.

As I walked down the tree-lined center avenue, I felt as if I was back there in 1945. There were dying Jews everywhere, ones that would not live to see the chains of slavery broken.

Dachau was a moving moment for me. I was reliving history. If more people made the pilgrimage to see Dachau and other Concentration Camps, we might have everyone helping each other. There might not be a Taliban or a KKK. We might have world peace.

Paul captures the silence of his own awe as he enters the living space of those who died, and the contrasting emotional disturbance of that silence by those living adjacent, what he considers something of a moral travesty to the memorial of the victims. I am intrigued by his ability to locate the past and the present in a timeless frame. This short piece of writing holds possibilities for other kinds of writing, including essay. Paul

expresses the power of the experience in that place and, although I might encourage him to develop it, its simplicity also possesses insights into this deeply personal and public experience: "Silence is the voice of the Holocaust ... It is how the spirits communicate to the visitors now."

Bryn: Movement Toward Analysis

Bryn read part of Steinbeck's novel, *Of Mice and Men*, and wrote a response to her initial reading in her journal, an assignment I often use in lieu of quizzes that purport to test whether or not the student has read. Those quizzes often reveal more about the teacher's reading than the students', delineating the ways in which the teacher, usually having read the work a number of times, has come to interpret, and perhaps reinterpret, aspects of the reading. Each re-reading of a text takes me further from the initial reading which my students are attempting to do. I ask them to portray the quality of *their* reading, noting the details that seem significant to them and exploring their reasons. It is not a simple task to ask; for some, it seems (and perhaps is) more difficult, more risky. They have learned to read for teachers' quizzes and tests, for idiosyncratic preferences of individual teachers. It takes practice and encouragement and, finally, faith in themselves, in the process, and in my ability to read that process. Bryn writes,

This book is about two guys who go traveling in search of who they are and some kind of home. There are 2 main characters: Lennie and George. Lennie is mentally challenged. George looks after him. They travel in search of work and food. From the book, it seems that the 2 have a history of getting "fired" from their jobs. George says it's because of what Lennie does and says. George tries to control Lennie so they won't get fired again.

This first part sets up the story and identifies, superficially, the two characters. Her insight into their "search for who they are," and not just a home, poses a significant insight into the theme and conflict of the novel. Bryn moves, then, toward a supposition. Her next line is the beginning of a strong interpretive statement that gives insight into George's erratic behavior, sometimes angry, often gentle toward Lennie:

I think that George doesn't know what life is about and who he is. I think he yells and swears at Lennie to make himself feel tough. Who he is, is something he doesn't understand. The best way to hide that, is to blame someone else. Lennie isn't bright enough to understand that, so it's perfect for George. I haven't really figured out their relationship. At times George is very harsh and other times he lets himself go, relaxed. He's nice then and hopeful and understanding. I think George talks for Lennie because he thinks that Lennie is too dumb to respond. George doesn't want to get fired so he speaks for him.

In her next line Bryn touches upon what she sees as ironic in their characters and makes predictions about her previous statement, "I haven't really figured out their relationship.":

I think Lennie understands more about life than George. He may be much slower in responding and remembering things, but I think he sees the world in a very different way than George. He's more carefree than George. I think he just doesn't know any better. It will be interesting to see how they grow individually and what each will teach the other about life. They are very different people who have to learn to survive, with and off of each other. I still don't understand the mice thing.

Her first line indicates a fragile understanding of both characters. It is a place where I might encourage her to return and write further, the beginnings of an insight into the symbiotic nature of their relationship. Bryn acts as witness to the characters' stories and to the realities they create but often can't themselves perceive. She is able to see each character in ways the other isn't.

Reading the Line

Murray taught me to be a reader of writing, particularly with my students' "unfinished writing": to acknowledge that "language and rhetoric are not dry matters of precise rules but are living processes, lenses that can illuminate the world, catching quick glimpses of potential meaning, of understanding, of clarification" (1989, p. 110). Through this process of inquiry, I do not expect the writing itself to meet the expectations of finished writing. As Murray observes, "Syntax often breaks down when we approach a new and interesting meaning, something we have thought before or are afraid of thinking or sabotages what we had thought before..." (p. 39). Recognizing the cognitive value of such "breakdown" of syntax becomes critical to my reading of their developing texts. I am not discouraged, as I once would have been, by what more traditional teachers might

consider a lack of editing skills; rather, I have learned to pursue meaning within the developing structures of their language. It requires of me an even closer reading of their texts.

Murray often refers to the "line of tension," a place in the writing to which we should attend: it is "the catalyst...rarely a sentence; it is sometimes a word, often a code word or words loaded with personal meaning" (1989, p. 85). Although it usually has meaning only for the writer (as Holden's line, "That was the kind of red hair he had."), I have learned to search for those fragments of language in students' writing that hold a tension, imply a contradiction, create dissonance with the other language of the text. It is a point of mystery. Learning to read the line does not mean I must interpret it or presume its meaning. It is a signpost for "the world...under the map" (Stafford), the place into which the writer may write to create meaning. I present it to the writer as an interested and willing reader, asking for the possibilities of meaning she may not yet have discovered. Paul's line, "Silence is the voice of the Holocaust," captures an entire world of experience from his felt knowledge of Dachau. Nicki's conclusion, "We are our own dreams," may offer another text altogether. I trust my own practiced intuition to lead me to such lines. Whether or not they hold meaning for the writer, I am giving to her language which captures me in some way. In my experience, my students are equally intrigued by seeing their own language affect a reader in any way, and "revision" has often begun there.

Discussing her students' autobiographical writings, Salvio describes a similar process of reading, and teaching our students how to read, their texts:

[C]ontradictions [within student texts] are indices to the dramatic tension in their narratives...important guides away from readings that are normalizing or simply cathartic. To locate a contradiction requires an intense level of concentration on the part of the reading community, it requires re-reading and often unraveling threads in our autobiographies, that while alluring, are often road signs to gaps in our conscious memories, silences, places where we are yet to be more fully implicated. (1995, p. 18)

The line guides our reading to “places where we [the writer and eventually I, the reader] are yet to be more fully implicated.” This language articulates both the possibilities of meaning and the possibilities of relation in that process.

Reading as Writers

Aaron’s class was asked to read the first half of a two page short story, “Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin and to think like the author, sketching out some plausible choices for completing the story. This was a technique suggested by Tom Carnicelli as a way to get students to make conscious predictions as they read. I have found that using such techniques to get students to “read as writers” effectively teaches them how to read more closely. The story focuses on a young married woman in a Victorian marriage, who is mistakenly told her husband has died, and, in the subsequent hour, isolates herself to reflect on what her life has meant and to consider the possibilities of her future. She expects to grieve only, but she becomes dimly aware of the realities of her marriage with a man she probably didn’t love and experiences a gradual sense of freedom in the possibilities opening to her. Aaron offers two endings, two tentative interpretations:

If I were the author I would definitely complete the story and explain to the reader how the woman feels. I would explain that now the woman is sad, but still loves life, and wants to stay and look upon the patches of blue sky, hear the peddler cry his wares, and smell the delicious breath of rain in the air. So she fights her pain and anguish to stay alive because she is patient and knows she will be with her husband again, somewhere. Or I would go in the entirely opposite direction and tell how she wants to be with her husband now. I would explain that she desires to go up into the patches of blue sky, through the wispy clouds, and arrive on a golden landscape, at the golden landscape she would finally be “free” with her husband. Now she would be happy to be with her husband in eternity, but she would also be sad that she left her other loved ones.

This technique of having students “become” the author shifts them into a more creative than analytical space, a space of possibilities rather than of definitive meaning. I have found that it often does, however, *initiate* the process of analysis. Once they enter the story through the potential it offers—indefinite options—they enter a space in which

analysis may begin more easily. I then hand out the second page of the story, the ending. Aaron reads and continues writing:

I was totally wrong, in what I thought would happen. When she said, "free, free, free!" I thought she meant that she was going to be free from life. Now I understand how the paragraph about forcing will upon a creature ties in. What had her husband done to her?, besides controlling her like a remote control toy car? Oh well, that is cruel enough. It was quite an ironic story, but had somehow Richards really known that Mrs. Mallard's husband was alive? I liked the ending and how it fits what I thought would happen, in a way. Now she is truly free, but she desires to be away from her husband.

But still I wonder why she had hated her husband so much? Did he beat? Or not love her? That must have been it. He probably never loved her but desired a slave instead, which she served as. Thus when she thought he was dead her "body and soul" were free.

The author's ending prompts Aaron to reconsider what was "wrong" in his choices, to return to the story in order to adapt the ending to what has lead up to it. This reflexive movement initiates a cognitive process in which the student modifies his previous expectations and the indefinite space of possibilities, having now to make sense of the story as played out by the author. As Aaron shifts his thinking, ("I thought she meant...Now I understand..."), his questions lead to more speculative inquiry, ("What had her husband done to her?...But still I wonder why...Did he beat? Or not love her?"), and inferences begin to emerge from that writing: "He probably never loved her but desired a slave instead...Thus when she thought he was dead her 'body and soul' were free."

After this second writing I ask the class to *reread* the entire story and write again, making meaning of the story, exploring the ideas and themes Chopin seems to offer in this work. Again, Aaron writes quickly:

The story is about a strong, but repressed woman. She had suffered years of forced will and no love, so she coped by not loving. The meaning is one of how love isn't always love. How her husband use love to capture her and make her his slave. The author deals with ideas of desperation and life. At first the author has the woman desperate and not knowing what to do, but then like life the answer comes to her painfully. She smells the air, sees the sky, and hears the sounds, and knows that she is now free. Another idea that the author deals with is repression and freedom. During the end looking back Mrs. Mallard sees how she was repressed, but is now free, and it makes me see images of birds flying about free.

In this writing, Aaron becomes conscious of the author's choices, aware of the movement the writer has intended. It is another reading of this text, unlike his initial intent to understand the characters and plot. Aaron makes strong declarative statements, conclusions at which he has arrived through the tentative processes of predicting, speculating, questioning, exploring possibilities, naming, and finally inferring (though not in linear order). He shifts from questioning what her husband had blatantly done, to understanding that it was she who had unconsciously felt "repressed" and "suffered years of forced will." Such lines reveal "moments of movement," what Carl Rogers identifies as a place in which "something of importance" happens—"not something named or labeled but an experiencing of an unknown something which has to be cautiously explored before it can be named at all" (1961, p. 129). This process of exploration offers a critical space in which we can encourage students to exist for a time in the realm of the tentative—a space of not knowing—to emerge perhaps with glimpses of meaning, perhaps with more questions, perhaps with answers which can serve as base for more writing.

Aaron's third writing synthesizes his assumptions from the second: that it was "forced" with no "love." This is a strong interpretive leap, far from the simplistic initial predictions. The most interesting line to me appears in this third text. Aaron's expression demonstrates a sophisticated insight and analogy: "like life the answer comes to her painfully." It offers meaning beyond the obvious, insight into something he probably can't yet explain, a place where I might enter to encourage more precise interpretation. I ask students to take such lines that seem to offer something significant, (my directives are often purposely ambiguous), to write that line on another page, and to begin writing. The technique nudges the writers further and further into meaning-making, teaching them how to read for "the line," to explore their own language, moving slowly from what could not yet be "named" toward perceptions and ideas that become more explicit and precise—urging them through "moments of movement." Each of Aaron's three quick

writings moves his understanding, his analysis and interpretation, further. The uncertainty underlying his early statements advances toward meaning, syntax and diction that demonstrate greater authority in its ability to articulate meaning. As a reader of this writing, I am as much a witness to the process through which the writer moves as to the meanings he develops within this writing. As a teacher, I try to set up such writing experiences to make these processes happen, to have students experience their value, and to teach them to recognize the potential knowledge in these acts of reading and writing.

Personal, Idiosyncratic Connections with Texts (Andrasick , 1990)

The following five student pieces are quick-writing responses to a the reading of a poem at first sight. I have used this poem along with several others to help students explore ideas about identity. For purposes of this work, I would like to study several aspects of these writings, among them the ways in which these written responses differ, as well as the commonalities among them; the kinds of movements each demonstrates; and the personal connections and their relation to their developing understanding.

The poem “Eleven” by Archibald MacLeish focuses on an eleven-year old boy who quietly slips out of the adult world of school and its expectations into a more familiar place—the shed. He sits, waiting, silently observing, and the gardener enters, an integral part of the silence of that world.

“Eleven”

And summer mornings the mute child, rebellious,
 Stupid, hating the words, the meanings, hating
 The Think now, Think, the Oh but Think! would leave
 On tiptoe the three chairs on the verandah
 And crossing tree by tree the empty lawn
 Push back the shed door and upon the sill
 Stand pressing out the sunlight from his eyes
 And enter and with outstretched fingers feel
 The grindstone and behind it the bare wall
 And turn and in the corner on the cool
 Hard earth sit listening. And one by one,
 Out of the dazzled shadow in the room,

The shapes would gather, the brown plowshare, spades,
 Mattocks, the polished helms of picks, a scythe
 Hung from the rafters, shovels, slender tines
 Glinting across the curve of sickles—shapes
 Older than men were, the wise tools, the iron
 Friendly with earth. And sit there, quiet, breathing
 The harsh dry smell of withered bulbs, the faint
 Odor of dung, the silence. And outside
 Beyond the half-shut door the blind leaves
 And the corn moving. And at noon would come,
 Up from the garden, his hard crooked hands
 Gentle with earth, his knees still earth-stained, smelling
 Of sun, of summer, the old gardener, like
 A priest, like an interpreter, and bend
 Over his baskets.

And they would not speak:
 They would say nothing. And the child would sit there
 Happy as though he had no name, as though
 He had been no one: like a leaf, a stem,
 Like a root growing—

Archibald MacLeish

(1) Sam begins by tentatively exploring associations among words and ideas, inching his way toward meaning. His jumbled syntax juxtaposes words and phrases, probing the possibilities of ideas without commitment. He appears to be comfortable with this speculative, initial stance with language as a promise of meaning:

The first 3 lines have an interesting form, I think that the child is mute by choice, "child, rebellious," a child who not only does not want to speak, but doesn't want to have anything with words maybe he has been hurt by words, for someone telling something bad might happen in words. The Think now, Think, line hits a chord in me because it reminds me of my parents trying to get my brother to read words he didn't know, very often he would flee to into a world of silence where there wasn't a need for words, or grammar...

A personal experience "hits a chord" with his memory of his brother's retreat into silence when his parents pursued too rigorous an expectation of him. This memory-recalled is key to the movement of this writing; it leads him to new perceptions in this poem prompted by personal experience.

The description of the shed is in my view very accurate, it gives you a feel of the silent just the solitude, maybe the child uses it as something to listen to him maybe the reason he left is because people weren't listening to him. He calls the tools wise and older than men, does that mean that men, or adults are not wise, for they are not silent? "the blind leaves" I think that the leaves are described as blind because they are not looking at the child who wants

to in a way be absorbed by the shed. The old gardner is described as a man of the earth, the "Hard earth sit listening." I think I understand the symbolism of the priest, a priest, like in confession, won't tell anyone what the child says or does unless it is wrong.

His writing continues to be provisional, stepping in and out of possibilities, of underlying meanings ("maybe") and questions, ("does that mean...?"). He offers two clear assertions: that the child "wants to in a way be absorbed by the shed," and that the gardener, like a priest, is a silent confidant. I find it fascinating to watch such a process of thinking. Sam is unraveling meaning for himself in a way no one else can for him. His analysis relies upon his own connotations of language and personal experience and knowledge (the memory of his brother's reading, his knowledge of a priest's role, his own relationship with adults, his learned expectation of symbolism in literature). The last part of his writing attempts to integrate these ideas and to identify a theme:

The interpreter part however doesn't make a whole lot of sense, is he taking what the tools and earth want to say and changing it to gardening. At the end of the poem the author first compares the boy to a leaf, maybe a blind leaf. Then at the end to a root, a root which I guess must be buried deep in the earth with no noise to bother it. In this poem the author uses many images to convey the basic sense or emotion on what this poem is about. The basic theme that seems to be repeated through this poem is silence.

In this last paragraph, Sam's attempt at synthesis falls apart as he struggles to do what he seems to consider more rigorous or formal interpretation before he is ready for closure. He raises the issues of symbolism, and his final line tends to resort to an uninspired statement (for his English teacher, most likely) that does not prove successful in synthesizing the insights he has made earlier, having waived the traditional standards of form, precision, clarity, organization in favor of speculative inquiry. I think his attempt in the last two lines to meet (too soon) the standards of a final, structured composition collapses any further opportunity for exploring the relationships he has initiated. It is as if a self-imposed form ends thought.

(2) Matt's immediate response to the poem recalls a personal (literary) experience with the concept of silence. The students had been given some choices of reading (a

study of the concept of identity) in the previous months, and, although there was no intent on my part to propose a connection, Matt begins by relating the notion of silence to these other works.

I have been thinking and exposed to a lot of silence lately in the books *SIDDHARTHA* especially and *THE CHOSEN*. One seems to be more at peace when one is silent. You listen like a river, soak up like a sponge. Words do not explain it. That is just the English language (or whatever language you might speak.) No, silence brings out inner feelings which go through a filter when one speaks. I find that forms of art, listening, watching, writing, forms of art are what one really feels if one can express things well or just let them flow. This boy is special and knows all. His comprehension cannot be expressed through words. One has to let it radiate to oneself through silence like the boy. He is at peace and words would shatter the peace like thunder. He looks at the sickles, curves, shapes. He notices everything for he is silent observing soaking. He notices things about the tools that one does not notice unless like the boy "Older than men were, the wise tools, the iron Friendly with the earth" "The harsh dry smell of withered bulbs...."

He is always like a leaf or a stem or a root. He is old and knows that words are useless. He is stemming into knowing feeling know feelings. His root is silence and without that root he is nothing.

Although his syntax remains unrefined, Matt's writing addresses sophisticated parallels between Siddhartha's experiences with silence and this young boy's: "You listen like a river, soak up like sponge. Words do not explain it." Danny's silence is different in *The Chosen*. His father is a Rabbi whose beliefs in Hasidic mysticism intentionally leave the boy in a world of silence, denying him contact even with knowledge from books to which he is drawn. In the end, however, Danny accepts the suffering of silence because he recognizes that his father has taught him what he'd hoped, as Matt phrases it, "His comprehension cannot be expressed through words. One has to let it radiate to oneself through silence." Danny, unlike Siddhartha, is not at peace, but he comes to understand, like his father, and like the gardener in the poem, that "words are useless. He is stemming into knowing feeling...His root is silence and without that root he is nothing." The wisdom of "knowing feeling" becomes true for all three characters' experiences. I am intrigued with Matt's idea of "knowing feeling" and his insightful discovery of significant connections among these works of literature. He doesn't separate them, and by exploring the more familiar texts, he is able to make a leap into this new literary work.

(3) In contrast to Matt's work, Chris' writing remains primarily in the literal reading.

He attends to the images in the poem which he renames:

This poem has very vivid descriptions especially the sickles and other tools mentioned the descriptions almost put you into the story because you could smell the air and other odors you could vividly see the tools and the old man, the habitat, the half shut door baskets etc. I liked the sentence the iron friendly with earth.

I don't really understand why its called eleven is it a time of day? or a number of some items? This story is filled with words having to do with nature such as corn, earth-stained lawn, trees and leaves and bulbs.

I just realized where the title comes from the boy who is Eleven watches the gardener

This is all Chris writes. Although he "liked the sentence the iron friendly with earth," he doesn't attempt to explain its meaning to him. Yet this literal study of the poem moves from his listing of objects toward a more significant observation, that it is "filled with words having to do with nature." As he begins again listing the words associated with nature, out of apparently nowhere he answers his only question, the reference to "eleven." Having moved past this obstacle, Chris seems to hover on the edge of movement in the last line in which, for the first time, he acknowledges the presence of the boy and names a connection between the boy and the gardener. With a class discussion or conference or even the technique of taking that line to another page and writing further, he is ready to move toward something he hasn't yet done by himself. The potential for further exploration and understanding is promising.

(4) Jennifer quickly draws a conclusion about the boy's conscious choice "to be mute" and his "wishes" in the poem, and she works confidently from that premise:

"Eleven" is (in my opinion) about a young boy who has chosen to be mute. He wishes that he were a root growing, a leaf, or a stem. I think he doesn't want to be a little boy, he doesn't want to have to think. Therefore he is described as rebellious. He sneaks around the house to the shed out back to see the gardener. Almost as if to worship him because he is a leaf, a stem, a growing root. He doesn't talk to the gardener because plants can't talk. I think the little boy is convinced he is none-other than a plant, or maybe he knows deep down, but he wishes so that he were. Plants don't talk, they don't do anything but sit in the cold earth, soak up the water & the sun, and be themselves. Little boys have to learn, and talk, and think. They have to be like everybody else. Or a young age, that's what seems to be the situation. Although we know when we get older, that everybody is

somebody, although we're all different. He hides to wait for the gardener, and looks at the familiar tools in the shed. "Wiser than old men" for in his head, tools are teachers, molders. The gardener, the god Himself; a little root growing, a stem, or a leaf.

Jennifer quickly concludes that "he wishes that he were a root growing...he doesn't want to be a little boy" with the responsibilities and expectations put upon him by an adult world lacking in empathy, unlike the natural world, and she uses that connection throughout: plants don't talk...they simply "be themselves" as opposed to "Little boys [who] have to learn, and talk, and think. They have to be like everybody else." She has insight into the nature of childhood, that at such a young age he doesn't yet realize what she has, "that everybody is somebody." In this quick writing the sentences from the beginning explicitly set up her idea of the conflicting expectations of the adult world and the natural world. The syntax of the last line enhances the analogy; she implies that he will learn all that from the adult gardener within the innuendos of their silent relationship (rather than in the noise and confusion of the world he left). Despite its syntactical and organizational lack of sophistication, this analysis is compact and clear. Were Jennifer to revise this piece of writing, I believe that she could move far more easily into the form of essay and continue to develop the language to write analytically.

(5) Because Lisa is comfortable with poetry, she finds her way quickly into the writing. Unlike Jennifer's, Lisa's analysis relies initially upon what she "feels" and remains tentative, although she states meaning clearly in her first sentence: "it is about maybe a child confused and needing help":

I feel that this poem is close to me because it is about maybe a child confused and needing help. I love to read poem with such feeling. I feel that by reading poems like these, you can help herself and others. I feel that there is a boy that is only thought of as dumb & people probably try to help and care for him, but only to find him not listening & caring for them. I get the impression that the kid, when is outside has a feeling of love, and usefulness. He is able to talk to them, he shows them love by smelling the flowers. The flowers respond by giving him a beautiful sense to his nose. The birds chip and sing to him as he dances and responds with him. He tries skip to the sound and dance with the boy.

As Lisa pursues the obscure concept of feelings, she differentiates the boy's relationships with adults and with the natural world. She creates her own vision of a bucolic scene to represent his union with nature—a possibility she finds interesting. Eventually she is able to make more committed statements that imply an understanding of the boy's silent relationship with nature:

The ground touches him but only to let him live the way he wants and lets him be free. I feel that the difference between the humans & nature is that humans expect you to talk a if you don't something is wrong w/ you. Nature lets you live free, lets you explore the thing you want to. Humans don't understand that you don't have to speak to be talking. I think that maybe the child doesn't speak because he feel that what comes out of his mouth isn't him, but only a someone else, He only speaks to please others.

Though she is clearly analyzing, differentiating the two worlds, Lisa does not abandon her emotional reading of the text. It remains an essential means for her empathic understanding and explication of the boy's conflict in the poem.

These students move in their writing through quick, tentative ideas and observations into analytical and interpretative language. Berthoff claims that “Anything we can do to foster a student's capacity to pose questions in substantial terms will be helping to develop the inquiry procedures which are essential to all academic writing” (1987a, p. 16). Berthoff describes for me what these students are doing as “moving sideways”:

The logic most appropriate to inquiry is what C.S. Peirce called *abduction*. It is a matter of moving sideways, as it were—developing analogies, drawing inferences, hypothesizing, putting claims to the test, thereby making clear the conditions under which a statement might be said to be true, of laying bare assumptions and defining presuppositions. (1987a, p. 16)

In high school, a place in which almost everything students write is graded, when the act of “laying bare assumptions and defining presuppositions” becomes a valued process of practice and reflection, dramatic change occurs. Student-writers' abilities to think through complex ideas and to express them more fluently enhance the possibilities of choice and ultimately the quality of their writing. In a system in which such acts are

considered valueless (i.e. not part of the evaluation of a student's work), to engage in such a process would prove worthless, if not perilous, for many students.

Too often we want to control the writing of our students, reminding them of the checklists of expectations, but doing so does little to help them arrive at it. In fact, I find the results to be superficial attempts at sounding good, but saying little in depth. Andrasick addresses the problem of reading and writing assignments that require too much, too soon, of student writers. When we expect precise, finished products each time we demand that they write, the idea of "assignments" becomes paradoxical. When we expect that our students will do exactly what we want them to do, write exactly what we want them to write and how we want them to write, we are not teaching them to think beyond *our* own experience. Andrasick affirms what my students demonstrate:

All readers—sophisticates and neophytes—make personal, idiosyncratic connections with texts before they do much else...[A] personal connection may contain the initial germ of a useful critical insight...Coupled with personal connection is the composition of an initial understanding of a text. A reader begins to use personal language to make a coherent—although not necessarily complete—statement about the text. Again, such statements vary widely in sophistication. (1990, p. 5)

These five examples of journal writing on the poem illustrate the ways in which personal connections "may contain the initial germ of useful critical insight." I see it as my responsibility as a teacher of literacy to help students learn, in various ways, that their subjective understandings can be crucial to the kinds of inquiry we want them to learn and value. Such a practice, for me, begins with "teaching not knowing," instructing my students in the possibilities of open-ended strategies, patterns of thinking, ways of remaining tentative, that *elicit* language, and eventually meaning, for *them*.

Andrasick refers to Newkirk's argument for the necessity of uncertainty in our practices—*our own* as well as our students'. As Newkirk argues, "Our prepared certainty belies the uncertainty of the earlier part of our reading, and by withholding our fumbling from students we can misrepresent the process we claim to teach...the muddling that occurs when readers confront difficult texts for the first time" (1990,

p. 210). Newkirk asserts that the purposes of the essay/literary analysis and of writing to explore meaning differ greatly: one is “to demonstrate a coherent reading,” the other “to explore the possibilities of the incoherencies in a reading” (1990, p. 210). Andrasick states,

These gaps in understanding—what Tom Newkirk calls the “incoherencies in a reading” (1990, 210)—are central to the process of critical inquiry, but too often students (and teachers?) see them as failures rather than as opportunities. Without coherencies, the generation for critical questions is unlikely. (1990, pp. 75-76)

As these student texts demonstrate, the acts of probing “the possibilities of the incoherencies” and of their own uncertainties impel their writing toward imminent meaning. Through the processes of questioning and speculation, of observation and investigation—preludes to creative and analytical conceptualization—students make sense of what was inchoate. Through “the logic of moving sideways,” they find their way into meaning, comprehension, understanding, and knowledge: “I think I understand the symbolism of the priest”; “His comprehension cannot be expressed through words...He is at peace and words would shatter the peace like thunder.”; “I just realized where the title comes from the boy who is Eleven watches the gardener”; “Wiser then old men’ for in his head, tools are teachers, molders. The gardner, the god Himself; a little root growing, a stem, or a leaf.”; “The ground touches him but only to let him live the way he wants and lets him be free....Nature lets you live free, lets you explore the thing you want to. Humans don’t understand that you don’t have to speak to be talking.”

Newkirk suggests that many of the traditional assignments meant to “teach” the skill of critical analysis may, in fact, have the opposite effect, that it may “discourage students from dealing with reactions that are not easily resolved into a thesis, that it may discourage the student from dealing with the more puzzling (and very likely more complex) issues of meaning and language, that, in sum, they encourage the student to play it safe” (1990, p. 211). I have found that such inhibitions are particularly true of young high school students who are first entering the realm of analytical thinking. Sam’s

second paragraph falls in that category. He begins to address a confusing issue but closes out the possibilities of further interpretation by returning to the more familiar routine of form, in lieu of thought. In our secondary English classrooms, the distinctions between these two purposes of writing need to be clearly taught and equally valued. If the value of writing to learn remains ambiguous, or if I give signs of my own ambivalence about its worth, it inevitably discounts in the minds of most students what these student writers demonstrate: the powerful analytical possibilities that lie in their quick-writing, in the writing they do for themselves to explore, often through feelings and intuitions, the meanings of literature and language.

Not only do students acquire a useful and accessible means of practicing composing as readers, but they learn critical thinking through writing. No longer simply utilitarian, writing, as part of the process of genuine inquiry and the exercise of reasonable judgment, becomes an epistemological occasion, in the fullest sense. (Andrasick, 1990, p. 43)

In *Freedom to Learn*, Rogers and Freiberg divide classrooms (as Freire [1970] divides pedagogies) into two categories: those in which teachers are facilitators and students are “sources of knowledge” and “producers of ideas,” treated as “citizens” of a community; and those, more traditional classrooms, in which teachers are “givers of information” and students “consumers” of that information (1994, p. 8). The distinctions, however, are not always clear to teachers or administrators. In this latter mode, particularly in secondary schools, many students learn to become what Rogers and Freiberg refer to as “visitors or tourists in the classroom,” assuming the passive cloak of invisibility in order to avoid confrontation or embarrassment or commitment (p. 9). I’ve learned to look for and identify those students, and they grin when I ask if they know they’re invisible.

Rogers and Freiberg’s survey of students indicated that a community of learners promotes both an acceptance of process and the time it requires to engage in learning. Such a community may provide a sense of “controlled freedom” that offers safety; a sense of the “unknown boundaries that you’re supposed to discover for yourself”; and a

realization of "what potential we have" (pp. 14-15). Such a community, they note, cannot be prescribed; rather, "it must grow from the lives of those who will live it" (pp. 18). In these terms, "Progress is on an individual basis" and the voices of everyone are important.

These are the criteria that create a writing community, as well. Unfortunately, anathema to such a learning community is the reality of our schools and the uses of "punishment and bribes" to motivate learning (p. 31). Many students have been conditioned to work for grades, points, passes, (even treats) or to work to avoid detentions, poor grades, reprimands or "groundation" (as my students put it). Teaching students to work for the sake of learning has been an on-going endeavor in my classroom. It requires a whole re-teaching of what drives them, a shifting of the motivational factors from externally provided to internally driven. Some of my students understand the distinction but decide that the external pressures of school, parents, and colleges are ultimately established, and there is nothing they can do about it. They believe that working to get the grades is the only goal, even though they admit they often do well while learning nothing.

Rogers and Freiberg ask, "What does it mean to teach?" For an answer they turn to Martin Heidegger:

Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn... The teacher is far less assured of his ground than those who learn are of theirs. If the relation between the teacher and the taught is genuine, therefore, there is never a place in it for the authority of the know-it-all or the authoritative sway of the official... (12, p.75) (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994, p. 34)

As such, the task of the teacher is necessarily "delicate and demanding" (p. 34). Rogers and Freiberg then ask, "What is learning?" And they answer: "the insatiable curiosity that drives the adolescent mind to absorb everything he can see or hear or read about a topic that has inner meaning" (p. 35). Learning that does not involve feeling or personal meaning, something of the inner life of the learner, but merely the mind "has no relevance of the whole person" (p. 35).

The whole person, both in feeling and in cognitive aspects, is part of the learning....Even when the impetus or stimulus comes from the outside, the sense of discovery, of reaching out, of grasping and comprehending comes from within...The locus of evaluation, we might say, resides definitely in the learner. Its essence is meaning. (Rogers and Freiberg, 1994, p. 36)

My exercises and techniques are created with specific goals in mind; one of the most significant is shifting that “locus of evaluation” to within the student. I want students to internalize these processes, not remain in an external “assignment” mode that produces artificial, and as a result, poorly written, work.

Courtney:: Shifting the “Locus of Evaluation”

A freshman class had been working on a short essay attempting to synthesize what they had come to understand about the notion of *identity* through a number of readings, a film, personal writing, and various activities. The day before the essays were to be handed in, I asked the class to write on their drafts: (1) what questions remained for them about identity, having thought about and written for a few days, and (2) the biggest shift in their understanding of identity over the course of the study.

Courtney was a writer who, having little confidence, had difficulty with criticism. She was often anxious about the exactness of an assignment or due date or expectations. It was evident that she wanted to know precisely what she needed to do to get an A. She is a talented artist and she considered her writing part of that talent. (Ironically she did not consider her art the possession of the teacher. In her art work she was comfortable in the realm of not knowing.) She wanted parameters, however, for her writing. She was struggling that first year of high school to overcome her anxiety and become more confident. But she was skeptical of the way I had been working with them, allowing them choices—about what and how they would learn. The middle school taught her to figure out what a teacher wants. She knew that I want them to go beyond the obvious, to take risks by attempting to learn what they hadn't yet, rather than to demonstrate merely what they had already accomplished before. She wrote in ten minutes or so the following answer:

I still want to know my identity. I know that I like certain things but things I really like I refrain from saying. Things I really want to be I can't be because of my parents. People think I'm conservative but that is only because I can't wear black eye shadow or buy the jewelry I want. I cover up my identity.

—Biggest Shift—

Actually thinking about it. I never did before and now I am aware of it.

Having written that, she went home and rewrote her essay on her own. It was perhaps the first time she had written for herself. The new questions opened her writing to something she had yet to discover: the significance of her own sense of identity. The next day she came up to me before class and asked me to read what she called her "Forward":

I know it is very uncommon to have a forward on an essay but I believe that this needed to be said. I wrote an entire essay on identity and it was full of examples and perfect grammar and even a few good ideas. It was also longer than this essay that you are about to read. A teacher who told me to follow guidelines would have loved it. I however have been searching the depths of my mind over the past few days and I am realizing that I don't believe very much of what I was saying. So since people are now telling me to take risks this one is mine. If it does not go well maybe I'll go back to being afraid to take risks but at least this time I will have a reason to be afraid instead of just presuming that I am doomed to get an F on a paper. So here is my essay I believe that is one of the best pieces of literature that I have ever written and quite frankly if this comes back with a D I will still say that I value this essay higher than my perfect A's in the past. Now without further adue here is my essay.

This preface certainly identifies a profound "moment of movement" for Courtney. She had not before been able to trust my assurances that risks would bring learning. I must admit, I was a little unsettled about reading the two essays. If the writing didn't work, and the grade was low, had I betrayed her? All the teacherly concerns about grading still arise, but they are far less important than such a powerful response from a student like Courtney.

Courtney's first essay pieces together some strong generalizations about identity, largely culled from the class exercises, readings, activities and discussions:

... I didn't realize how complicated identity really is. There are so many aspects to everyone. Every struggle, every experience, every possession is a part of your identity.

Identity is the process that defines a person. It keeps us from staying the same. Every minute is spent gathering another aspect to a person's identity. A trait innate from birth, or an opinion that changes perspectives. Every day we add to our complex web of identity threads. We will keep changing our identity in many ways no matter how small until the day we die.

Identity is being unique... If we were all the same life would be boring. In the book *Anthem* by Ayn Rand Equality 7-2521 finds out that he doesn't want to be a clone of everyone else around him. He wants to break free and be himself not we just I. His quest to become an individual shows an elaborate version of what everyone goes through in their lives.

Looks can create an important part of identity, acceptance... People don't invest very much time to judge someone fairly... Everyone is constantly searching for identity. ...When you suppress your identity it always comes out sideways... Objects influence us too. We attach memories to them.

In her final paragraph, Courtney knew enough to attempt to summarize and conclude, a rather artificial way to end a piece of writing, but learned early in her writing experience. She had not really created the categories she began to list, and the essay was obviously weakened by this half-hearted attempt.

I believe now that identity can be measure into a few categories, one: the search for new things 2: objects with memories 3: Looks and 4: Passions. I never knew that I could define identity now I know what it is to me. Identity is the search for who you really are by attaching memories to objects, finding your passion and dealing with whatever abnormality that is laid before you.

In her written response to what questions she still held about identity after writing the essay, Courtney wrote, "I realize that I don't believe very much of what I was saying." She points out that "a teacher who told me to follow guidelines would have loved it." Judging from the text of the essay, those "guidelines" would probably include use of definition: "*Identity is a process that defines a person.*" "*Identify is being unique.*"; references to the text, movies and activities to support her claims, although fairly superficial: "*Amanda [a student] says that in the book *Out of the Dust* the main character burns her hands and isn't sure that she can ever play piano again.*"; and probably a breakdown of the concept into "a few categories," though in her last paragraph they are not parallel or logical. Her generalizations seem fairly well written, at times, although diction is not consistent: "*if you have an abnormality you are immediately*

a dork.” Courtney ‘covers,’ (though not adequately) the language of the teacher, the class’s activities, the readings (although one is not even her own reading), the class discussions, and the essential questions initially raised about identity. She plays it safe, as she admitted. She doesn’t venture beyond what has already been said. References are vague and unsubstantial. She knows the formula: how to say little if anything, fairly well. Even syntax, however, deteriorates in the concluding paragraph, in which she attempts to sum up and conclude by tying everything up neatly, packaging an idea.

Murray claims that “school doesn’t know the territory of writing. The good students flowered in a world of command and expected response that is counter to the essential conditions for good writing” (1989). It was only when Courtney begins to write for herself, to take up her own questions, that the process of writing begins for her. It becomes immediately personal, emotional, and significant to her. She begins the new piece:

Identity is masked. No one really knows what someone’s identity really is. Me for example, I am not myself. If I had my way I would dye the tips of my hair pink and wear black eye shadow with punked out clothes. People think that I am conservative but this shroud I wear is not me. Expression is limited to me and many others. My parents have rules and even if they did let me others would call me a poser for finally breaking out of the boring shell that I have lived in for my whole life.

She develops the topic about which she had previously written: “Looks can create an important part of identity....” The generalized “you” translates into “me,” and the details of her writing focus on her own experience with appearance as her personal sense of identity. She explores and reveals a deeper sense of who she is and what others don’t see. The original paragraph had been written in the form of generalizations and platitudes (“People don’t invest very much time to judge someone fairly.”) These new statements underlie her own experiences of living behind the “mask” and not being seen for who she feels she might really be or become. In her second paragraph she finds a connection between the “mask” and Lucy Grealy’s experience:

Identity is never truly shown to anyone. In the book *Autobiography of a Face* by Lucy Grealy the main character lost half of her face due to cancer. Supposedly she lost her prior identity but I think she just lost her costume. She was still herself and kept parts of her hidden away like the fear of death. Identity does not change; appearance does.

What had been merely a vague reference in the earlier paper she is now able to take further and conclude that Lucy Grealey “was still herself and kept parts of her hidden away like the fear of death.” In her third paragraph, Courtney returns to ideas from the first writing, and, although they seem disjoint, she is beginning to make sense of both the literature and her own experience in new ways:

Shades of true identity are let slip sometimes. Patches of imperfections that endear people to others. In the book *Anthem* by Ayn Rand Equality 7-2521 let go of being a conformist and showed his differences. He ran away to be in love and like sciences and knowledge. It was amazing what he had covered up for so many years and thought was a curse.

Whereas in her original piece, Courtney focused on *Anthem* as an example of someone being individual, an obvious rendition of the novel, in this writing she pursues again the “mask” that inhibits and damages the self. In the next paragraph she reveals her own situation as an only child and her wishes about what might have been:

Identity hides itself in the folds of age. ...[She talks about being the only child] We are influenced into these categories of age by our situations. Given the chance we would probably be quite different from what we have become. We have managed to pull that oh too familiar blanket of invisibility over our true identities due to necessity and influence.

I see the personal meaning with which Courtney is struggling in this paragraph, a place where she might return to explore those possibilities of differences, the notion of age, and the “necessity and influence” to which she alludes. Her signs of struggle indicate attempts to deal with more complex ideas. In this last paragraph she acknowledges her own doubt and ambivalence, the place to which she has arrived in this writing, and these statements offer far more thought and reflection than the earlier writing. For Courtney to admit to not knowing is a great step for her.

I have learned that I will never truly know anyone's full identity. I do not even expect to know the true potential of my own. Identity is shrouded in mystery and I do not think we are supposed to know all its answers. Identity is always hidden to some degree. It will be this way forever, I am content knowing inside that even if I change my appearance no one will ever know what is inside me, not even myself.

Her previous ending had offered what appeared to be distinctive categories; its facile platitude, "Identity is the search for who you really are by attaching memories to objects, finding your passion and dealing with whatever abnormality that is laid before you," is replaced by the more thoughtful conceptual writing of the second draft. This draft possesses an integrity which Courtney herself recognizes and of which she is proud.

Because of her "Preface," I did not ask Courtney to take this writing further. I felt that it wasn't the time. I acknowledged the differences and the quality of this piece. As a writer, this leap of faith was important to her, and she herself noted the differences between the two: the first "was full of examples and perfect grammar and even a few good ideas"; the second writing integrates her experiences in greater depth and expresses what she has come to understand, acknowledging as well what she has *not yet* come to understand. I wrote a response to this work:

Courtney,
I am impressed that you were able to take the risk in this paper. It is a real leap in faith—in yourself as a writer. You're right. "A teacher who told me to follow guidelines would have loved it." The fact that you would go beyond the writing to "search" your mind and realize that you don't believe what you wrote indicates to me that you have become a true writer. You have written for your own standards, not artificial ones that others impose.

Each piece of writing has its own voice and its own meaning. Yours is strong in your rewritten identity piece. There you discover powerful insights:

"Identity is masked."

"People think I am conservative but this shroud I wear is not me."

"Supposedly she lost her prior identity but I think she just lost her costume."

"Identity does not change; appearance does."

"Identity hides itself in the folds of age."

"We have managed to pull that oh too familiar blanket of invisibility over our true identities due to necessity and influence."

"He pulled out his mask of his father's shadowy thoughts..."

"I do not even expect to know the true potential of my own. Identity is shrouded in mystery..."

These lines reveal new insights into your understanding about the complexities of identity.

Perhaps you'd like to look at it one more time with me to address any aspects of writing you'd like. I'm pleased for you, Courtney.

Knowing Courtney as I did at that point in the year, and that it had taken half a year for her to attempt to write beyond grades and competing with other students, I responded with affirmation, assuring her that her understanding of her own writing was valid.

Teaching not knowing is teaching a way of being, a process, a potential, an act of becoming. Murray's phrasing suits the nature of a writing pedagogy in which I learned to escort young writing students into the realm of not knowing. Of course it makes sense: We learn only by entering such a space, one in which we are not yet comfortable, most likely not yet competent. Why would students want to approach their levels of incompetence if they are going to be graded on everything they do? They would have no reason to, unless the risk were accepted as a natural and necessary part of the curriculum and of their learning.

Sara and Ryan: Revision Through Discussion

I introduced a study of literature centered around South Africa and Apartheid. While a freshman class read *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton, we also watched *Cry, Freedom* and read excerpts from *Kaffir Boy* by Mark Mathabane. Later, I asked them to read "Crackling Day" by Peter Abrahamson and "Life for a Life" by Alan Paton and to write a journal entry exploring those works. They brought in their journal entries and discussed for the class period the kinds of questions and responses they had to the readings. At the end of class some students asked if they might rewrite the journals in order to take in the conversation and the views of others. Everyone seemed to like the idea, so they assigned themselves a second writing. Sara, usually a strong writer, but silent in the classroom, wrote for her first entry:

I really felt a Life for a Life a lot more than Crackling day. I don't really know why because Crackling day was a lot more interesting but the writing just captivated me. I really like how Alan Paton writes. I love Cry the Beloved Country, and I enjoyed the writing of this story too. The detective Robbertse really disturbed me. How he would be so angry, just to intimidate Maarman to tell the story. I think that he knew that if he pretended to be angry, he could have power over the blacks.

"...He would hold a man by the throat till one of his colleagues would shout at him to let the man go. Sara's father, who was one of the wisest men in all the district of Poort, said that he could never be sure whether Robbertse was mad or only pretending to be, but that it really didn't matter, because whenever it was, it was dangerous." (pg.165)

I think that especially with the blacks, he used this power that he had against them; because we all know that they had no choice but to give in. That's the same as in Crackling Day. Uncle Sam (even if he was a big coward) had absolutely no choice but to whip the boy, because he knew that it was not his place to speak against the white man. I know, that even I would give in, and if I couldn't whip him, because I was too much of a person to whip my nephew I would have let the white man whip him.

This first writing primarily expresses her immediate responses to the readings. Sara touches upon issues of power without much depth, reiterating what has been common knowledge to the class in the weeks of reading and discussing, "we all know that they had no choice but to give in." After the class discussion, however, she writes in a different way, in terms of both subject and style. She has a much stronger voice with far more authority in her reading of the characters' motivations. It offers a much stronger analysis:

Because we are talking about all of the different voices of the stories and films, and books that we are reading, I decided to list and describe the voices that I have seen in "A Life for a Life" and "Crackling Day":

1. Mr. and Mrs. Maarman: I think that the Maarman's are very strong people, and have a very strong voice. They do not want to hurt anyone else to help a white man, especially one such as Robbertse, who is so cruel to every black. I feel also though, that they know their place in society, and would not step out of line from where they are supposed to be.
2. Robbertse: I think that Robbertse represents many white's feelings towards blacks at the time in South Africa. He knows that he can have complete power over the blacks as so many Europeans could at the time, and probably still can today. But the blacks could not step out of line, which made it really easy for there to be control.

3. Solomon Koopman: I think that Solomon (even though he had a small part) showed the tenderness of the people of South Africa. They may have been thought of as power hungry ignorant fools, but they had hearts just as big as anyone else's, probably even bigger. In the movie "Cry Freedom" the people who the reporter was staying with in Shanty Town told him about how they call their uncles: mother's brother, or their nieces: brother's daughter. They are all one large family, who in a time of struggle and conflict ban together for the better of their people.
4. Aunt Liza: Aunt Liza was a very strong person, and showed the resistance to the apartheid in South Africa. She saw the equality among blacks and whites, and would probably be one of Stephen Biko's supporters. She stood her ground, and showed her pride when the white man came to their house to make sure the boy got a proper beating, because she would never beat her nephew to make a white man happy, and she clearly stated that, " 'You should be happy. The whites are happy. We can go on now.'" (p. 21)
5. Uncle Sam: Uncle Sam, unlike aunt Liza showed the other side of the blacks. One side had their pride, and the other side was greatly intimidated by the power that the whites had over them, and let their dignity be stomped out of their soul. I feel bad for all of the blacks who lived their lives in misery, because they were always nervous about how they could find a way to get out of their next situation with the whites, and were to cowardly to stand their ground.

In this journal write, Sara studies more closely the motivations of the individuals whose voices she hears in these works. She makes connections between the movie *Cry, Freedom*, about Steven Biko, and the characters in this short story as a way of understanding better their positions in South Africa. Her writing is clearer and portrays an understanding of the dilemmas the black South Africans faced. I asked the class to write about the differences they noticed between the two journal writes. Sara noted:

Before, I couldn't focus on the big picture of the stories. I could really only see what was going on in the plot, and not see what it meant to me or anything like that. When I went back to write another entry I could see what everyone else was thinking and saying as I read over the stories a second time. And I saw all the different voices (although I did not list all of them) and understood them better because of the discussions. I liked the fact that we wrote down our opinions on the first one, and then expanded on our ideas with our new insights that we got in class. I think we should do this again.

It is common for readers to focus primarily on plot in a first reading, looking to see what will happen. The class discussions had helped Sara, as she said, "focus on the big picture." I have students reread many passages and parts of texts, especially short stories, to teach them how to read as writers, thinking beyond the plot to ways in which

the writer consciously makes choices to pull the reader along. Sara had returned to her writing as a space in which she could process the class discussion.

In the same class, Ryan, still reading *Cry, the Beloved Country*, wrote in his first entry:

“Life for a Life” may hint at one of the possible outcomes of the trial of Absalom Kumalo in *Cry the Beloved Country*. The black man in the short story, Enoch Maarman, was punished very severely for a crime he did not commit, only because it gave the white people the illusion of “justice.” He only did not regret the death of the baas, Flip, and since he was the head shepard the anger and sadness of the white people was taken out on him. With stories like this, it seems that Absalom has no chance of surviving the South African law, or ever getting out of jail, having admitted to killing Jarvis. While *Cry the Beloved Country* stresses the fidelity of the judge and how he tenaciously adheres to the law, it also states that the law is made by the white people, so I think it may be possible that even if a black person confesses, he may be executed (just a guess). Having stated this, I find the optomism of Kumalo (and Misumangu, who does not tell him otherwise) confusing, since he seems so sure that his son will soon be let out of jail that he arranges plans for him to marry the girl he deserted.

“Crackling Day” further demonstrates injustice to blacks in South Africa. The white man that the boy gets his crackling from is really a jerk in the way he dishes out the pork rinds and makes the boy address him [as “Baas”]. And the white boys he and his friend encounter on the way home that verbally assolt them for no real reason is very troubling. Also, the way in which the boy is punished for defending his pride only makes Absalom’s fate more gloomy.

Ryan usually offers astute insights into the literature, and I was interested in how this writing would change in his rewriting. He gave the class the notion of the “illusion of justice” in the discussion and several students borrowed the idea to help rewrite their own, giving credit to Ryan, as I suggested. Interestingly, he assumes a direct correlation between what happened to both of the innocent boys in the two stories to what he sees as the probable outcome to Absalom’s trial (another naïve, though not entirely innocent, black African boy). Ryan explains the differences between this first writing and the next:

My writing prior to the discussion mainly focused on one point. (the fate of Absolom) Although I explained it in detail I overlooked some parts to it that I added in the second writing. Also I was more brief on this point the second time. I also wrote about some new ideas that were brought up in the discussion, and my thoughts on them, including reason for the death of Enoch in "Life for a Life" and the response of Uncle Sam and Aunt Liza to the white man in "Crackling Day."

In his second writing he begins by defining his term "illusion of justice" and explaining its purpose. I am impressed with the clarity of his thinking and writing:

Having read "Life for a Life," I think that the reason that Enoch Maarman was, in effect, executed for a crime he did not commit, a crime that both the blacks and whites knew he most likely had nothing to do with, was to provide an illusion of justice. This was both to give the white people the feeling that the death of a loved one had been avenged, and to instill fear into the blacks and make them think that anyone who did anything similar would be treated likewise. The reason that Enoch was chosen to be killed is stated when the author writes, "Someone must pay for so terrible a crime, and if not the one who did it, then who better than the one who could not grieve." Since the detectives knew that Enoch had been abused by his *baas*, Flip, a bit more than the others that worked for him (he had a son who had left for an education that Flip would not allow to return) it probably seemed to them that he had a "motive" for killing him. Although the police state that Enoch's death is an accident, and cover it up, I am pretty confident that this is purely for legal reasons, and everyone is supposed to know what really happened to him.

Ryan moves on to a new topic, a moral dilemma the uncle is confronted with in the disapproving voice of the aunt, when ordered by a white man to whip his nephew for having defended himself against three white boys:

In "Crackling Day," the scene in which Uncle Sam is forced to beat the boy is very important. While Uncle Sam realizes what must happen if he is to stay at his home or avoid severe punishment, Aunt Liza seems to silently protest his submission to the white man that forces him to beat the boy. She seems to wish that he put up some sort of resistance, even though it would be futile, it would show the boy that what he did was not really wrong in the way that the whites would have him believe it was. Also, afterwards it was very important that they explain this to him, and though they both exchange some bitter words over who should do it, they neglect to do so. As Liza says, "You should be happy. The whites are satisfied. We can go on now." Uncle Sam can not bring himself to explain to the boy because it would entirely contradict what he had just done and ruin the boy's respect of him.

Ryan's writing leads him back to the issue of justice once again in the novel:

In both stories, the severe punishment of the black people for violence against whites (even things that they did not even do) seems to contrast with the feelings of Kumalo in Cry the Beloved Country. He seems very optimistic of what will happen to his son, and while this may be due to the fact that he is not familiar with the system of the very urban Johannesburg, no one really tells him that it will be otherwise, or even hints at it. Also, although the book stresses the fidelity of the judge and his adherence to the law, it also states that the law is made by the white people, so who knows what the punishment could be for Absalom for killing a white man, even if he admits to it and says that it was an accident.

The class discussion allowed the students' writing to expand into areas of thought beyond that which they had initially considered, individually. A second writing encouraged them to re-enter the dialogue they had begun in class and to continue in that space to think about and develop congruent ideas. Several students picked up Jeff's idea of the "illusion of justice" and they carried it into their own inner dialogues, to explore its meaning further.

Emily: Authority of Voice

In another class, I handed out copies of "The Stone Boy" by Gina Berriault to a class, began reading the story aloud and asked students to finish it for homework and to write a journal entry. It is a difficult story to understand because of the subtleties of psychological reaction a young boy experiences after accidentally shooting his older brother. In shock he leaves his brother lying in the field and goes on to pick the peas, an automatic motion, the chore for which they were responsible on the farm. The story focuses on the responses of everyone around Arnold, from his family to neighbors to the sheriff. Emily wrote,

This story seems so full of silence, from Arnold, from Eugie, and from all those other people in the story. Arnold made a mistake, but he didn't go and tell anyone, he just kept on doing what he was supposed to be doing, silently. It seems as though everyone in this story is speaking through their silence. At the beginning Eugene's silence yelled to Arnold that he was superior. The way he moved, and the way he looked all made him great, because he was the oldest, and Arnold was the baby of the family. But Arnold didn't seem to mind being the youngest. He looked up to his brother and admired him, and they shared a close relationship that only came from being brothers. Like Arnold had thought when the sheriff had questioned him, his brother wasn't really his friend, he was so much more. They shared a love for each other, but it was a brotherly love, and it came from Arnold's silent adoration of his brother. When Arnold accidentally shot his brother though, that relationship died and Arnold was left alone and uneasy.

He didn't like being without his brother, because he had lost a part of him when he had lost his brother, but was he really to blame for it? I don't think that it was his fault that he did not tell; he was so confused and upset, it was like he could not think properly because he was in such a state of shock. But the others did not understand him and instead of trying to help him, they silently accused him of murdering his brother and being incompassionate. They were the ones who made him cold-hearted in the end because they accused him of that. He accepted their accusations and conformed to them to prove them right because they would not accept that he was just Arnold, a good boy, not a murderer.

Emily uses her observation that "This story seems so full of silence" to help her write about the relationships among the characters. She works through an understanding of the most essential one, that between the young boy and the older brother he accidentally kills, and she comes to understand what the characters in the story do not—that Arnold's silence is the result of his grieving, not an absence of love. She eventually grasps the effects of their silent stance: "They were the ones who made him cold-hearted in the end because they accused him of that. He accepted their accusations and conformed to them...."

I then asked students in class to "write an interpretive statement about the meaning of this story: Without reference to characters or plot, what is this story really about?" I find this technique often helps students to articulate themes and to begin analysis. Emily wrote again:

This story is really about how silence and hatred can turn the heart cold. Silence can be a good thing at times, but it can also be used to destroy a person. The silence of a person is more destructive than any amount of words when it is because of hate. What someone says you are does not make you that thing, but that accusation can get to a person's mind and twist their thoughts to make them conform to the accusation. That is what happened to Arnold. The hateful, silent accusations of all the people against Arnold got to his mind and took over. He could not escape from their glaring, silent, accusing eyes and he could not speak to them and explain the silent love & adoration that he had for his brother. They could not understand what was in his heart. They could not understand how the loss of his brother had thrown him into such shock and disbelief that all he could do was move. He could not think or else he would be confronted with the guilt of his dear brother. That was why he was silent, and he could not explain something for which there were no words in the first place. So they took his silence and used it to weaken him, along with their accusations.

This writing does not move far from the first in terms of ideas, but she uses those ideas well to offer definitive statements, insights into the conflict in which the boy is entangled because of the inability of those around him to understand his silence. In this writing Emily's own voice is stronger: she has moved from the tentative questioning, "But was he really to blame for it?" in the first writing to clear conclusions that condemn "the hateful silence" of those who destroy his innocence. The rhythm of her syntax sets up the parallels of these distinct forms of silence, his and theirs:

He could not escape from their glaring, silent, accusing eyes
and he could not speak to them and explain the silent love & adoration that
he had for his brother.

They could not understand what was in his heart.
They could not understand how the loss of his brother had thrown him into
such shock and disbelief that all he could do was move.

He could not think...he could not explain...
So they took his silence and used it to weaken him...

The analysis is strong; she apprehends the concept of silence and uses it to explore what is not necessarily said but implied throughout the story. From the silence of his brotherly relationship, to the silence of the "accusing eyes," to the silence of his grief, she explores how Arnold is victimized by the innocent event of the killing and the adults who misconstrue silence and allow their own anger and grief to turn on a nine year old. This is quite a sophisticated reading and analysis for a freshman.

Portfolios: Student Evaluations of Learning

At the end of the year, I have asked students to create a portfolio of their work, reflecting about what they have learned about reading and writing throughout the year. One of the questions asks them to show what they have learned about analysis, among other things. Lynn included a quick-write on *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse as an example of analytical writing from early in the year:

Out Of The Dust

“I don't look back over my shoulder,
at the single grave
holding Ma and my little brother
I am trying not to look back
at anything”
page 73, paragraph 1

I thought that, in a way, this quote very much described Billie Jo. Billie Jo is very unhappy, events of her life have crippled her, but yet she is struggling throughout this book not to let these tragic events shape her. Her mother's death affected her greatly, but she is trying to look past all her hard times and start fresh, and new, and free of that stifling dust of Oklahoma. She is trying to not let her past become her identity. I believe that our identity is heavily based on past experiences. If Billie Jo's mother hadn't died, if her father's farm wasn't barren, if she could still play the piano, I truly believe she would be an entirely different person. There is no escaping ones past, your past will only haunt you until you accept. To try to place her mothers death in the past and not realize the significance of that event on who she is will only form a bitter, confused identity, that feels loneliness and emptiness...

This characterization is quite sophisticated in its associations of identity and conflict.

Lynn explains why this piece represents some of her strongest analytical writing throughout the year.

I feel that this piece is an example of analytic writing because I really tried to investigate how BillieJo is feeling, rather than skim the surfaces of the book's words.

I tried to look at the dust as more than just dust, but a symbol of all the destruction and death and dieing, in one little girls life. Through reading Out of the Dust, I learned that so much can be said in so few words, if you look for it. Out of the Dust, had a way of expressing emotion and feeling in small poems and very few words, but because of that we were forced to go deeper than the few words on the page.

For her portfolio, Mia's choices of analytical writing also included journal writing she had done earlier in the year. I had introduced Faulkner's "Barn Burning" by reading aloud the opening scene of the story, showing them the movie version, and then asking them to read the entire story and to write about it. Mia had written:

“Barn Burning”

I don't really have any idea about what this short story is about. I think it might be something about decisions. Throughout the story different people made decisions. That dad always made the decisions about burning down the barns and putting him and his family in danger. Also he made the decision to wreck those peoples rugs. The boy made the decision to run and tell the rich guy that his father was burning the barn. If

I were the boy I would have done the same thing. I would have been so sick of what my father was doing I would have wanted for him to be in trouble sooner. Also at the beginning of the video in the court room I would have blurted out that he did it. Now after reading the story I think that it might be about bad decisions but also the battle between the boys emotions. (just a guess)

Mia begins writing with little understanding, suggests “something about decisions,” explores her own imagined place in the story, and within a few sentences is able to name the conflict. Once it has emerged into words, she can begin to analyze it:

It seems as though throughout the whole story the boy is battling inside whether to love his father and “stick with his own blood” or to turn against him and hope that he can do something about it. Sardi always thinks that something will stop his fathers craziness. He thinks that the burning of the 1st barn will stop him, then the rug, and then the second barn burning. The boy is hoping that his father will stop because he doesn’t want to turn against him. His love for his father stops that. Then finally at the end the power of his emotions says to try and do the right thing. This is when he goes and tells the rich people what his father was going to do I am not exactly sure how to interpret this story but I took it as a story of a young boy whose emotions are taking control of him.

Mia tentatively poses “decisions” as the theme of the story and then seems to struggle with her own empathic feelings for the boy’s plight (“I would have...”) toward a second possibility: “the battle between the boy’s emotions (just a guess).” She uses the story itself to test out her thesis and finds that she can take it even further: “I took it as a story of a young boy whose emotions are taking control of him.” Mia included this work in her portfolio, commenting on her choice:

This journal entry shows that you can take a short story that you don’t understand and break it up into smaller pieces so that you understand it better. In this journal entry I started out with writing about things that make no sense but then it led me to the good part. Just by talking or writing my ideas down it helped me get a better understanding. I made references to the text and came to a conclusion that “Barn Burning” was about the battle between the boys emotions.

Lilly wrote two journal entries she considers good analytical writing and explains why:

From *Cry, the Beloved Country*: (having read *Taste of Salt*)

In chapter 12, Mr. McLaren reads aloud, I'm guessing, to a council his resolution to end "native crime," in other words, black crime. He says something so simple, and so pure, it's a wonder why it is so difficult to carry out. He says "We shall always have native crime to fear until the native people of this country have worthy purposes to inspire them and worthy goals to work for." he goes on to state... "For it is only because they see neither purpose, nor goal that they turn to drink and crime and prostitution."

Through this short passage I seem to further understand, what before seemed so clear to me. Why should the Black African's try so hard to go to school, be a good citizen, live a good life, when in the long run all it will earn them is nothing. You need rights to truly experience and cherish everything you earn from being law abiding. Rights which Black South African's do not have. If you are black in South Africa, you will be born poor, you will live poor, and you will die poor, much like the poor in Haiti. Even if you do earn a decent salary, and are semi-successful, if you are black your stature will never be that of a white person. Why? Simply because you are black. Sure some might say that if you do carry out a good law abiding life, no matter the outcome, you will reap the rewards of your "good behavior" in one way or another. But truthfully, here, on Earth, the likelihood of that happening to a Black South African during Apartheid is highly unlikely. So if you are not being treated fairly, you do not earn anything from being good, why be good? Most blacks aren't, aren't what a white person would consider "good." You rebel, anything to get attention, to pass the time, to get your point across. It makes perfect sense to me.

In her exploration of a passage she had chosen from *Cry, the Beloved Country*, Lilly comes to understand even more clearly the effects of Apartheid on the lives of Black South Africans. She reasons the logic or justification of their unproductive lives and sees in a new way the inherent injustices in the system and its effects on their individual and collective lives. The language she quotes from the novel seems to propel her into an inner dialogue in which she "seems to further understand" what she has already known. She writes in her portfolio about analysis,

I chose the journal entry about what Mr. McLaren said in Chapt. 12 in *Cry, the Beloved Country* because I am taking meaningful quotes directly from the text and breaking them down. I start out with a quote and go from there with my own thoughts and opinions. Also I am making literary connections between this book and everything I learned about Haiti [from a previous unit] in this entry.

Her second journal entry was a response to the film about Steven Biko, *Cry, Freedom*. Again, Lilly struggles to understand the nature of victimization in that society. She raises questions that lead her to a deeper sense of the complexity of the pervading injustice:

South Africa, as a whole, as a country, is a prison. With its white enforcers, guards, killers, and then the Blacks, the innocent prisoners. In a situation such as Apartheid, it makes you wonder, who really is a victim, and who really is the culprit... Could the victims be the Africans, the black Africans that are being so harshly prejudiced against. OR, could the victims be the white public? They, the Caucasians are being brainwashed, taught, brought up to live, act, behave and treat others by a certain race a specific way. The blacks are aware of the cultural divide and of what is being done unto them. They are resisting the thumb that is pressing them farther and farther into the townships. ... Are they, the whites being the victims, since they are being sheltered, protected from the horrible truth, the gruesome reality of what's taking place in their hidden war-torn country? Are they simply the victims of their own ignorance? Not knowing, and not trying to change the unjust country.

These entries illustrate perceptive ideas. She looks closely at ways in which Apartheid has imprisoned and victimized *all* South Africans, a significant insight into the conflicts of that country. This writing emerges over time as students learn to write to develop their own questions and to ascertain their own meaning. Andrasick writes of our responsibilities in this process:

Teachers must be more knowledgeable than before. We must be able to do more than explicate texts. We must recognize how we compose meanings and make our strategies available to students. We must know how our readings emerge and teach students how such information can be accessible to them as well. (1990, p. 34)

Teaching my students how to operate in the epistemological mode of not knowing is the most significant, and most difficult, aspect of my professional work. Parker Palmer speaks of the practice of teaching and of learning, in terms similar to Andrasick's:

[A]s important as methods may be, the more practical thing we can achieve in any kind of work is insight into what is happening inside us as we do it ... To educate is to guide students on an inner journey toward more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world (1998, pp. 5-6).

Twenty years ago I taught literature by explicating passages that I had read as significant to the text, asking questions to which I led the witnesses, and assigning and grading literary essays. Later, journals became a place in which I learned how to encourage writing with heuristic powers, writing that involved the inner life of my student writers, writing that went beyond my expectations, beyond my own knowledge, and I began what I would come to know as "teaching not knowing." Todd, a junior, wrote of a semester's literature course,

I think that [this course] has taught me a lot about my reading. I learned that there are always ideas in a novel, but they have to be found and developed in my mind. I think that I changed from reading just for leisure to reading to learn about something that I can relate to my life.

The writing that I did while reading the novels became a way to explore what I learned from reading. It was not the kind of writing I was used to. I was used to answering questions and writing about them. The writing I did in [this course] was more writing about what I felt personally. I think the course has helped me to try and get something out of my reading.

The Intimate Nature of Making Meaning (Palmer, 1998)

In *The Courage to Teach*, Palmer discusses the philosophy underlying the traditional teaching in which I was trained, that which kept me from valuing what has become for me the focal point of literacy: "the intimate nature of making meaning":

This 'self-protective' split of personhood from practice is encouraged by an academic culture that distrusts personal truth. Though the academy claims to value multiple modes of knowing, it honors only one—an 'objective' way of knowing that takes us into the 'real' world by taking us 'out of ourselves.'

In this culture, objective facts are regarded as pure, while subjective feelings are suspect and sullied. In this culture, the self is not a source to be tapped but a danger to be suppressed, not a potential to be fulfilled but an obstacle to be overcome. In this culture the pathology of speech disconnected from self is regarded, and rewarded, as a virtue. (1998, pp. 17-18)

For a number of years I have enjoyed using *The House on Mango Street* as an exemplar text to encourage students to make the kinds of personal connections that create their own literary artifacts. Sandra Cisneros' vignettes portray a mosaic of young Esperanza's inner life as she struggles in the poverty of her urban neighborhood. The opportunity for students to create personal vignettes of their own has created some of the most exciting writing I've seen in my high school classroom. For a number of years I have asked students to choose several chapters from Cisneros' work and employ her style to write their own autobiographical vignettes. Nel, a ninth grade student, focused her vignettes on her struggle to reconcile her ambivalent feelings about living in the margins of a middle class community: "Living in a mobile home, I was once ashamed of where I came from... Yet eventually I realized that if I am ashamed of where I come from, then I am also ashamed of my family because that is the best we can do." Nel's vignettes

expose the vulnerable side of an adolescent who is self-conscious about her circumstances yet whose sensibilities capture the details of her reality.

“Cathy Queen of Cats”

John and Sandy are the couple that lives on the top of the hill. They mind their own business and everyone respects them for that. Sandy works at the school and is nice enough to call all the children at six in the morning to inform them that school had been canceled.

Jack and Josh are the brothers that live in the brand new, sky colored house. They do not talk much and if you wave to them, they most likely will not wave back. I do not think that I have heard either of them talk, not even to each other. They don't shovel their driveway in the winter until the snow is almost half melted, and their lawn seems to be cut only when it is long enough to reach the trim of your shorts.

My next door neighbors are a family of five with four different last names. They just recently moved into the neighborhood, and are constantly complaining that people are not friendly enough here, yet they have not so much as invited someone over.

The Smith boys range in age from 13 to 20. They spent their summer days playing in the woods, building forts out of old Christmas trees that they collected from people's yards. I don't think that I have ever seen them with clean fingernails.

The people at the bottom of the hill are the ones that everyone wishes would move out. No one knows for sure how many people live in the house, and all the residents think that the street is their personal parking lot. The daughter is a pregnant high school dropout who has been smoking since junior high. The grandmother hates kids and rarely steps outside, except to water her dying porch flowers.

Betty is an elderly woman whose hacking cough can be heard from a mile away. Until last month when she was diagnosed with lung cancer, it seems that she was never without a cigarette in her mouth. Luckily she was able to put a stop to the habit.

Mary and my mother are the neighborhood watchdogs. They are the first to hear of anything occurring in the neighborhood, and the ones that you can always spot peeking out the window when something is going on.

“The Earl of Tennessee”

Every neighborhood has that one neighbor. The neighbor whom you never catch sight of; the neighbor whose presence you are never aware of. In Howe Drive, that neighbor is Gert. By now, I am guessing that she has hit at least eighty years old. She spends her days inside her house, smoking up a storm.

All of the neighborhood kids were afraid to go too close to her house because she had a gigantic dog that was left outside all day and night. The only thing that prevented the beast from ripping our heads off was the rotting wooden fence that became weaker every day.

I can remember about ten years ago, before the foldable scooters and the moon shoes, there were pow-pow power wheels. They were loud, three-wheel bikes that were made out of hard plastic. Every kid in the neighborhood had one. We would ride up and down a hill for hours. The only problem was that the hill ended in Gert's yard. No matter how much force we put into it, we could never get the brakes to kick in before we plowed into her grassless "garden." One time she got so fed up with the noise that she threatened to call the police and get all of us kicked out of the neighborhood. After that threat, we found another hill to ride on.

"Those Who Don't"

Those who don't know better come into the trailer park scared. They don't think of it as a place where human beings live, they think of it as a crime scene. Television portrays the area as a place where drive-by shootings occur, gangs lurk around, and drunks prowl the streets. Many are close-minded, and would not even consider rethinking the impressions they have made. It is a shame that opinionated people are not able to look past the typical image of the area and realize that as long as there are decent people living there, it can be a wonderful place.

Nel's writing brings to life the people whose lives touch upon her daily existence, lives she presents as more real and colorful than the stereotypes of "those people" who live in trailer parks. In *Freedom to Learn*, Rogers and Freiberg write, "Significant learning combines the logical and the intuitive, the intellect and the feelings, the concept and the experience, the idea and the meaning" (1994, p. 37). Nel's writing beautifully transcends the traditional form of literary analysis; her living portraits, drawn from both intimate and distant perspectives, echo the themes of the novel and translate her own personal experiences into literary artifacts. She adapts the stylistic writing of Cisneros's vignettes to create her own world, to "access reality" for herself and those whose lives are dismissed as insignificant by others. This is a creative writing experience I offer students later, rather than earlier, in the year. I don't expect that writing this vulnerable and revealing will happen in the first weeks or even months of school. I celebrate this writing with Nel, and for the remaining years of her high school, she greets me warmly in

the corridors and in my classroom doorway, and we smile, remembering such intimate moments in her work, her discoveries of who she is and who she can be.

Lisa's vignette, a tribute to her admiration for her older sister, initiates a quest for her own identity, mirroring her perception of Esperanza's quest:

"Me and Jenny"

Me and my sister, Jenny, look alike. But we're different. Our likes and dislikes, our personalities, our goals and dreams. We're different. Jenny's fingers are long and slender. Mine are not as thin as hers at the bottom. But if I pull my skin tight at the bottom of my fingers, they look kind of like Jenny's fingers.

Jenny has freckles. She has freckles everywhere. On her face, her arms, her legs. She even has one on her eyelid. She showed me once. If I took an eyebrow makeup pencil and put little dots all over my face, maybe then I'd have Jenny's freckles.

Jenny has things I do not. Jenny is things I am not. Maybe if I am more quiet, I will be Jenny Polite. Maybe if I am less temperamental, I will be Jenny Calm. Maybe if I am more accepting, I will be Jenny Open-Minded.

Maybe if I am more of this and less of that, I will be more Jenny-like. Maybe if I am a little more of this and a lot less of that, I will be more Jenny-like. Maybe if I am more of this and a little less of that, lots more of this and more of that, lots less of this and less of that, more of this and more of that, lots, and I mean lots, of this and well, get rid of that all together. Maybe, maybe, maybe. If, if, if. More, more, more. Less, less, less. This, this, this. That, that, that.

But I have a question. What's wrong with Lisa?

Lisa places this vignette in her portfolio later in the year and writes,

My vignettes, from the Identity unit, are also good examples of analytical writing I have. These didn't analyze anything I'd read but they were like a small analysis of myself. My favorite, "Me and Jenny," for example, analyzed, in a way, how I view myself compared to my older sister sometimes. I learned things about myself through writing the vignettes, especially the "Me and Jenny" one.

Another important part of analytical writing is thinking about what is not necessarily written in the piece. Analytical writing involves thinking deeply, and I think the depth of my thinking has improved this year. Also, part of good analytical writing is clearly describing your thoughts and expanding on what you have written. This can help improve your understanding of the piece. When doing analytical writing, you can also learn new things and come up with new ideas to write about.

Lisa recognizes the power of analytical writing to find her way into understanding, feeling, and "new ideas." She has learned, both through the readings and her own writing, to think about "what is not necessarily written." This insight marks what Rogers calls a "moment of movement" in her development as a thinker.

And Roshni's vignettes reveal her disdain for an ignorant society that allows some to treat people on the margins with contempt, and her empathy for those who share "the feeling of not belonging." Hers is an analysis of that feeling as she interprets Esperanza's voice.

"No Speak English"

Sam's poor old mom. No one knows what she goes through. Sam, my old neighbor, gets so confused. He never knows what to do with his old mother: He worked day and night, night and day. Finally, he got enough money saved up to call his dear mother to America. We don't know much about Sam or his mother. He always has that mysterious look. It's creepy at times.

But I always think of that poor old lady. She tells my grandmother of her misfortune. She talks about how much she left behind in her country, back in India. I silently sit in front of the TV, listening to all they have to say. Both old women weep silently to each other. Never once uttering a complaint to their sons.

I laugh when I hear them screaming on the phone to the English speaking callers. Over and over they yell, almost frustrated with tears, NO SPEAK ENGLISH, no speak english, no speak english. After much effort and frustration they slam the phone down.

Only I know the sadness in their hearts. Their feeling of not belonging. How they desperately long to go back to their homes. I know how sick they are of screaming no speak english over and over.

"Those Who Don't"

Those who don't know will never know. They will forever be ignorant. They don't realize that those who are different from them aren't always the bad ones. Just because they, themselves, grew up in rich towns with big houses, they look down on those who didn't have it so good.

People look at me and assume I'm dumb and poor. They hear I'm from Lowell and assume I'm a thug. They give me looks I can't explain. It's a look of disgust and shame. I get looked down upon because of that. They don't notice that I am still the same. I am still the girl they met a few weeks ago. The girl who they thought was from the same place as themselves. Now they feel like they are better than me, superior to me. I even feel scared at times to talk to them.

The day they come to Lowell, they will feel like the inferior ones. They will feel out of place and scared. Everyone around them will look at them in disgust. They will be judged as the rich snobby kids from out of town. They know that, and so do I.

That's how it's been for as long as I've known. That's how it is now. That's how it will continue to be. Yup, forever.

"Manny Writes Poems"

Manny is only nineteen, and has a baby boy. The baby's mother disowned the child a year ago. Manny's parents hate the child more than they hate him. That's a lot of hate towards a baby. It's sad really. Even at age nineteen Manny is obligated to let his parents run his life. They always use the baby to bring him down. I talk to Manny a lot. I love him like a

brother. His life reminds me of a movie, the kind in which people use boxes of tissues to wipe tears, and blow their noses. Many times he says he just wants to break down and cry.

Manny writes to get the load off his back. He writes of his misfortune, his lost love, his cruel parents, and his messed up life. It's also comforting to see his poems published on websites and all over the internet. I share my poems with him also. He tells me that things could always be a lot worse when I tell him my issues. He gives me lots of advice. He helped me realize my life isn't as bad as it seems, and that things could always be worse. He comforts me. I just wish I could do the same for him. Manny, I want to help you. I really do. I just don't know how.

He is so weak, but his poetry makes him strong. He tries to stay strong for his son. I feel helpless when I am with him or his baby. I don't know whether his life will get better or worse. I pray that it does get better, just as he prays for me. I tell him to keep writing because it seems as if that's the only way I can help him. I just have to keep the poet inside him alive.

Roshni writes in her final portfolio,

Analytical writing basically shows our understanding on a matter. Through my many works I learned that analytical writing can come in all different forms. It is my understanding that analytical writing is just what it seems but more in depth. You analyze but with reason and importance. It isn't so complicated once you grasp its real meaning.

These vignettes portray a young woman struggling with who she is, how she is perceived, her relationships with others, and her understanding of what life brings. I love these writings. If anything has ever made me feel like an outstanding teacher, it is these vignettes, written without conferences, without revision work, without my interruption. But I know my students can write these because I am able to guide them toward an "inner journey," step out of their way, and allow them to be independent of my teaching—"to let learn," as Heidegger puts it. Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater identifies this kind of work with literature as

what Donald Murray has described as the "ghost text" or the "intertext" created by what the writer reads, and what the writer then writes. Murray urges composition teachers to invite students "not only to understand the text they are reading, but to allow that text to spark other texts, ghost texts...that are born because of the communication between the written text and the experience of the reader" (1984, 244). (Chiseri-Strater, 1991, p. 23)

Andrasick affirms that teaching students to write creatively is not separate from literary study. On the contrary, when used together the result is both improvement of expository writing and of reading. "Operating creatively as writers and readers, they begin to

transfer the structure and technique for one process to the other, often unconsciously” (1990, p. 133). Our ability to “knit those writing activities into the patterns of critical inquiry” results in “a wealth of critical thought” (p. 133), as these young writers demonstrate. “We cannot afford to ignore creative thinking during analytical tasks, just as we cannot ignore analytical thinking while creatively composing” (p. 133). Palmer writes that “the teacher invites the students to step inside the space created by the text, asking them what is going on in it, how it can be understood, how they understand themselves within it” (1993, p. 76). He describes this process as “creating cognitive space, space that allows evidence and insight to emerge. But,” he adds, “teachers must also create emotional space in the classroom, space that allows feelings to arise and be dealt with” (p. 83).

My students’ writing demonstrates Palmer’s claim: “Indeed, our feelings may be more vital to truth than our minds, since our minds strive to analyze and divide things while our feelings reach for relatedness” (p. 85). Through journal writing, my students turn inward to “discover” as Perl defines it: writing that involves us “in a process of coming-into-being ... that lifts out or explicates or enlarges our experience” (1990, p. 49). The journal writing that they do often initiates the point at which I can begin to teach; it serves as catalyst for connecting their own experiences with those of others. Their writing demonstrates their developing capacities to witness others’ life stories, to learn to read empathically, and to reenter their own lives with new insight into who they are and their potential for becoming.

In the next chapter I explore ways in which writing conferences may engage us in dialogic relations which are by nature tensional, momentary, and unfinished. We become witness to our students’ testimony of their experiences and stories and their emerging sense of reality. Our capacities for empathic understanding in dialogic interaction within a space that provides “conditions for psychological safety” (Rogers, 1961) generate cognitive processes that integrate feeling and knowing.

CHAPTER 3

CONFERENCES: SUSTAINING DIALOGIC TENSION

I was taught to occupy space, not open it... opening a learning space requires more skill and more authority than filling it up. (Palmer, 1998, pp. 132-133)

Facilitating a Dialogic Process (H. Anderson, 1997, p. 53)

In one of my favorite short stories, "The Stone Boy" by Gina Berriault, a nine year old boy accidentally shoots his sixteen-year old brother, his idol and hero, while going to pick peas before sunrise. Eugie, the older brother, had agreed to take Arnold duck hunting on the way. When the gun gets caught on the wire fence and goes off, the gunshot kills his brother and, in an act of shock and disbelief, Arnold goes off to pick peas, mechanically following the familiar habit of farm chores, before he returns home. The story is about the community's responses to the apparent cold-heartedness of the young boy. In one scene, the sheriff interrogates the nine year old and asks, "Were you and your brother good friends?" In the text that follows, Arnold's silent dialogue with himself reveals to the reader how much he loved his brother, and how good their relationship was, but because he associates the word 'friend' only to others his age, he does not understand the question. The sheriff infers guilt from the silence and pronounces the boy incorrigible. Had he been privy to the inner thoughts and feelings of the boy, he might have considered asking the question in other ways, or asking other questions, and gained a different interpretation altogether.

In another scene I find fascinating, from a Japanese film, *Rhapsody in August*, two aging women who suffered losses of family and friends in the bombing of Nagasaki visit one another in absolute silence, sitting together, facing one another as if in conversation, grieving, paying homage to the unspoken horror of their youth. A young

grandson observes their ritual and intuitively recognizes the spiritual affinity of these women without attempting to put into language its meaning. His parents, however, intolerant of what they believe to be his grandmother's irrational ways, are not able to apprehend the women's silence; neither do they bother to ask her about it. Both the parents and the sheriff interpret silence as self-incriminating—signs of insanity or guilt. What both judgments impede are the possibilities of empathic response to the poignant silence of an other.

As a parent, I, too, have interjected my own meanings onto my sons' silences, having asked the wrong questions or worse, none at all. The assumptions we make about our students' inner lives, whether known or not known, affect our work with them. I have come to regard conferences as the antithesis of interrogation. Sheila McNamee's language of "relational responsibility" (1999) implies, instead, a "dialogic process" which transforms each individual's understandings of the subject of their dialogue, as well as (and perhaps as importantly), "the relations among the interlocutors themselves" (p. 5).

Our understanding of the 'others within' invite us to break the taken for granted flow of interchange, and to explore the myriad identities at play and rest. We may variously inquire, Who is speaking and acting here, Who is listening, What voices are not being heard, What selves within are suffering, Why is this voice dominant and not some others, and How can we help these suppressed potentials into being? (1999, pp. 12-13)

Such a complex and difficult relational process may seem impossible, unnecessary even, in the setting of a classroom. Yet I believe our work with adolescents, particularly as writing teachers, is as important in their lives as the relationships of therapists and clients. I do not mean to imply that we *are* therapists, but in the lives of our students, our relationships, our ways of being with and responding to them as persons, are critical to their development as educated individuals.

Perhaps one experience that helped me to realize the power of this relational integrity has come from working with teachers for fifteen summers in the New Hampshire Writing Program as a writing instructor. Again and again in writing conferences, I have

been amazed by the vulnerability of each individual, the intense personal nature of their writing, the overwhelming appreciation for my listening and responding, and the sense of achievement and satisfaction that each has experienced. How little I taught, really. I believe that my ability to find ways to open spaces for writers—emotional space, intellectual space, psychological space—allowed them to pursue subjects for which many didn't believe they could find language, even as adults. This process is difficult for me to name, even to describe, certainly to demonstrate. Harlene Anderson states, "If you follow a client's lead, you will be led where you need to go" (1997, p. 53). As a therapist, she defines the philosophical stance implied in the phrase "therapist as a not-knower": a therapist "who is uncertain and regards knowledge as evolving"; who engages in "a collaborative partnership between people with different perspectives and expertises"; and whose role is "facilitating a dialogical process" and "generating possibilities" (p. 4). Writing and the teaching of writing involve these same processes, "helping people to access the courage and ability to 'move about around things,' to 'have a clear view,' to 'achieve self-agency'" (p. xvii).

Such spaces possess the characteristics and qualities of improvisation, as Barrett and Starratt suggest. Starratt calls for a need for a process in which knowledge "comes to be seen not as a prepackaged byte of information, but as the improvisation of the human mind in its effort to engage in the drama of the world" (1990, p. 94).

To be drama, it has to engage humans at some minimum level in a human exchange. To be a human exchange, there has to be some minimal presence of human persons to one another, by which the dignity and sacredness of each person is acknowledged, however indirectly and subtly. To participate in the social drama each person "has to be me," and has to respond to the "me" of the other person. Hence humanly significant social situations cannot be totally scripted; there has to be room for improvisation. (1990, p. 9)

In light of the focus of this chapter, I would like to add Starratt's criterion of improvisation as a lens with which to begin to understand conferences, and the classroom, as "tensional practices" (Stewart & Zediker, 1999). This study of conferences attempts "to look and look again" at ways in which the relational nature of conferences, in a dialogic

space, opens possibilities for the writer and her writing, for our understandings of the ways in which our relationships change meaning for both of us.

Conversation and Dialogue

Conferences have often been referred to as conversations, and I have used the terms interchangeably at times. I turn to John Stewart and Karen Zediker's conceptualization of dialogue in their article "Dialogue as Tensional, Ethical Practice," to enhance our understanding of writing conferences. Starratt names the improvisational nature of conferences as "social drama." Stewart and Zediker articulate the characteristics of dialogue as a process of human exchange.

They begin with reference to Martin Buber's use of the term dialogue: "His goal was to understand dialogue as a special and particular quality of relation, an identifiable option, a concrete and life-enhancing possibility, a potential that exists in tension with the potential for monologue" (1999, p. 227). Stewart and Zediker take up his perception of dialogue, asserting that a "dimension of dialogue...is tensional" and describing its characteristics as "oscillating, relational, fluid, and emergent" (p. 231). Dialogue begins as a relational process:

As the other(s) involved participate in parallel and overlapping contributions we meet, and our meeting moves, moment-by-moment, along a multi-dimensional monologic—dialogic continuum. Our experiences of dialogue are always momentary and unfinished or incomplete; they never precisely repeat one another; they are always marked by idiosyncrasies of the individuals, the context(s), and the topic(s). But we are most able to do our parts to incline the meeting toward dialogue when we experience ourselves in this tensional space and understand our attitudes and actions in relation to these tensions. (1999, p. 232)

The "tensional space," they assert, is created relationally and is not sustained for lengths of time but proceeds only through brief, lived moments. I envision a quality of elasticity in this dialogic tension, stretched thin, perhaps at times, looser at others, the tension itself created "*between* persons," as their "meeting moves, moment-by-moment, along a multi-dimensional monologic—dialogic continuum."

Stewart and Zediker continue to layer this “dimension of dialogue,” emphasizing the conditional nature of the “tensional and momentary” qualities as contingent upon the ethical quality of the content: “communication” becomes “dialogic primarily because of the ethically laden content of the tensions that the participants are negotiating moment-to-moment” (p. 231). This negotiation involves choices which, as McNamee has stated, exist within “a reality of interdependence” (1999, p. 36) and which has “transformative potential for the participants” (p. 45). Stewart and Zediker name the tensional relationship a process of “Letting the other happen to me while holding my own ground” (p. 232):

[O]ne outcome of letting the other happen to me is that my understanding and knowledge of the other is enhanced, and thus my potential power in relation to him or her may be increased. So the “passive” or receptive moment of the tension changes my potential for active choices vis-à-vis the other. Similarly, the more I articulate the position that I hold, the more it becomes vulnerable to the other’s criticism, which means that the “active” moment renders me more subject-to the other’s choices vis-à-vis me. And importantly, insofar as the purpose of time, as the saying goes, is to keep everything happening at once, a person can only talk or write about these moments sequentially. But our experience is that they are lived *together*. (1999, p. 234)

I would like to point out two other significant characteristics of dialogue which they consider essential to its process. First, Stewart and Zediker state that the very nature of this process precludes an element of control on either part. In fact, these “relational, emergent and momentary features of dialogue make it impossible to offer a technology of specified ‘moves’ that will guarantee[sic] that an encounter will be dialogic” (p. 231). There can be no authoritative, controlling voice. The dialogic tension requires a mutual commitment to the attempt to sustain that tension. Therefore, and secondly, “when one chooses to engage dialogically, he or she not only becomes an *active agent* shaping the quality of the relationship, but also assumes responsibility for the ways in which communicative practice facilitates relating” (p. 240).

So, for our educational purposes, the dimensions of dialogue as they define them offer an ideal for which we may strive in our conferences and classrooms. Both its means and ends are significant to our educational practices. We needn’t consider the

length of time to be a criterion in the quality of any particular dialogue. In fact, we cannot expect these moments of tension to be sustained for long periods. Neither should we anticipate a resolution or “finished” quality within our dialogue. The effort on our parts and our students’ to enter and remain within such tensions, even for moments, assures a process of negotiation that enhances educative purposes. These definitional qualities offer significant, precise criteria for helping us to evaluate our own work in writing conferences.

In *How's It Going: A Practical Guide to Conferring*, Carl Anderson proposes that the conference has two parts: “Conversation about the work the child is doing as a writer; conversation about how the child can become a better writer” (2000, p. 17). Such a definitive structure does not offer the potential of dialogic tension. This structured “conversation” diminishes the possibilities inherent in a relational, tensional process of negotiation “*between* persons.” C. Anderson’s “conversation,” linear, prescribed, controlled, (“First the student is in the lead role... Then the teacher is in the lead role...” (p. 21), structures a relation that is non-interactive, that diminishes the possibility of meaning to emerge *between* the student and the teacher. One might interpret this scenario as an example of Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, which denotes a space in which the learner and a *knowing* other engage. As Vygotsky writes, “It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (1978, p. 86). It is a space in which the knowing teacher assists the student toward skills that she is not yet capable of doing by herself. However, I would like to propose that the Zone of Proximal Development may be better viewed through the lens of this tensional quality of dialogue which Stewart and Zediker offer, a scenario influenced by Bakhtin’s notion of “tension between two languages and two belief systems” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 314), a process of

relational negotiation between persons, each sharing a responsibility for epistemological possibilities.

The conference offers a space in which the learner moves with assistance toward that which “she will be able to do by herself tomorrow” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87). The Bakhtinian model of this process, furthermore, gives more emphasis to its occurrence through a dialogic means rather than what may be perceived as a unilateral process from *knowing person* to learner, and his work implies McNamee’s concept of the “relational processes” as offering “the possibility of intelligibility itself” (1999, pp. 18-19). These are far more difficult and complex processes than I envisioned early on in my teaching. As Murray observed of his students, “They wanted instruction: rules and patterns with blanks hungry for their filling. They wanted right and wrong, correct and incorrect, go and no go, and I offered them constructive confusion, productive doubt, possible possibility” (1989, p.129). It has taken me years to learn how to do just that, and it was through teaching writing that I learned

Teaching writing, i.e., teaching not knowing, does not require our controlling efforts. It requires much more complex and interrelated possibilities for choice and change. Although I agree that there are techniques we can develop to help us and our students in conferences and that there may be many structures with which we can describe the processes of conferences, there is also a danger in trying to codify such constructs. As teachers we will benefit most from learning how to function in practices which allow more space for not knowing, for the unpredictable and, as Murray suggests, for welcoming the unexpected.

In her Foreword to Carl Anderson’s book, Lucy Calkins writes,

In *How’s It Going?*, Carl names the components of conferences, giving teachers a way to plot their course through these often fleeting conversations. How reassuring it is to see that the hundreds of conferences we hold each year are all variations of a few themes. How helpful it is to enter conferences knowing we’ll face several key decision points, junctions that offer us a predictable set of options. (2000, xiii)

How reassuring it *would* be to assume such a knowing position and to be able to reduce dialogue to a manageable set of techniques. Calkins names the conference “the central act of teaching writing” (p. xiii). To disregard its complexities, therefore, is to diminish the possibilities of response that Murray implies in his concept “teaching not knowing.” The comfort and reassurance of predictability undermine the nature of listening and of response from which we might continue to learn. In my own experiences in conferences, I have found patterns and techniques, but I consider them to be inhibiting factors in my own growth as a listener with any particular student—I wonder if I am relying on a response or perception that comes too easily or that comes out of a repertoire of techniques rather than out of the individual relation to which I am attending. The moment-to-moment tensional quality of the relation in dialogue demands of me (and my students) much more than technique. The writing that I find most interesting and from which I learn about teaching comes from unexpected places and requires responses that are not necessarily within a “predictable set of options.”

In her work, Harlene Anderson explores ways to elicit the client’s voice, ways of encouraging the client to become “an active agent”:

The more we suspended our own knowing the more room there was for a client’s voice to be heard and a client’s expertise to come to the forefront... We found that the more we became immersed in our clients’ language and meanings and positioned ourselves as inquiring learners, the more we acknowledged, encouraged, and heard their voices. (1997, p. 63)

She argues that modern therapy’s “*therapist-led endeavor*” and “*therapist-determined possibilities*” can limit the “potential for unknown newness”; “reify a therapist’s preknowledge while missing and dismissing the uniqueness, richness, and complexity of an individual or group of individuals”; and “risk dominating and silencing the client’s voice” (p. 32). This language resonates with our concerns in teaching writing. Similarly, we found that our own repositioning in writing conferences and in writing workshops in the 80’s “suspended our own knowing,” and encouraged the voices of our students as we, too, “became immersed in our [students’] language and meanings and positioned

ourselves as inquiring learners.” Harlene Anderson, as therapist, affirms the dialogic process that Stewart and Zediker have defined:

Not-knowing freed us from needing to be experts on how clients ought to live their lives, the right question to ask, and the best narrative. We did not have to be content-knowing experts. This freedom to not know, in turn, led to an expanded capacity for imagination and creativity. (1997, p. 64)

The freedom in which I invite my students to move around, to explore and test out their own thinking and learning is a “freedom to not know,” and its effects in their writing have certainly produced greater capacities “for imagination and creativity” in their literacy experiences.

Shane: “Essaying” into Meaning

I’ve found that my own humility has been the greatest lesson in these relations with students. I’d like to begin almost twenty years ago with an example of a conference that never took place. For several reasons Shane and I never met to discuss his essay and how he might develop it. I collected the set of essays on a Friday, the day grades were due to close for the quarter—poor planning on my part. The class had read and discussed *The Grapes of Wrath*, and I was tentatively exploring ways to use conferences in my literature classes. Shane handed in his paper.

American Literature: *The Grapes of Wrath*
“TITLE: ENDING A BOOK, THAT SHOULDN'T OF ENDED”

1 When I read the last page of the book, I turned to the next page believing that the book had not ended yet. When I realized this I all of a sudden said “I don’t like this book”. The way he ended really caught me off guard. Then I thought was there a reason to the way he ended the book this way, was there a significance why he ended this book this way If there was I sure couldn’t come up with explanation.

2 “Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. “You got to,” she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close. “There!” she said. “There.” Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously.”

3 After reading that paragraph I had a bunch of questions in my head. Tom was a major question. What ever happened to him when Ma had the last talk with him, about him having to leave because it jeperdized the whole family. What ever happened to the Joad family after the heavy flooding, I always wanted to know if the Joad family would get their white house and farm land. It was like leaving out the plot of a story. Also what ever

happened to Al, did he continue to live with his family or did he take off with his new wife and her family, did he get work in a garage? Things like this I will never know. Unless I think up an ending by my self, that's not as fun as reading an ending in the book that the author thought of himself. Because deep inside you know that's not the true ending of the book, only the author knows what the future holds for the Joads because he thought it up and wrote it.

4 Maybe there was some significance to the ending that had to do with the book as a whole. The only thing that I could think of is that it showed the Joad family all broken up, depressed because Rose of Sharon's baby was dead when she gave birth, the flood destroyed most of all their things, one of which was their truck, and basically they were at a loss. They were at a loss all through the whole book, and maybe the ending verified that they would always be at a loss no matter how much they tried.

5 So that's how I feel about the ending. I wish he could of gone on and not end where he ended. I thought the rest of the book was great, there were some slow chapters but once I got into it, it got interesting. I also think Steinbeck is a good writer but needs to work on his endings. Maybe he got tired of writing the book, and ended right there. But I don't think so, he had some good reason why he ended it there.

6 At first I was going to write about the depression of the farmers, and why they came to Cal. But after finishing the book I just had to write a short paper on how I felt. I still wouldn't mind giving a paper on the first topic I had on the Grapes of Wrath...

Like Holden, Shane was following the path of his own internal motivation, a decision to forego what he was *supposed to do*, stay with his first topic. In a preliminary conference in which each writer had checked in with me to talk about possible topics, I had felt unsuccessful in trying to sway Shane from such a general subject as "the depression of the farmers, and why they came to Cal." I had suggested that if he chose to write on that topic, he would need to do some research and write a more historical essay, something I felt he had neither the time nor ability to pursue.

Shane was absent at one point and missed the conferences on their drafts. Due to my own indiscretion, the papers were due the Friday before grades. Shane's paper came in and I was "at a loss" (as Shane puts it) as to how to grade it. I needed to talk with him, but I had let time run out. I realized as I struggled for a grade for my original assignment, an essay on the novel, that this was instead a wonderful piece of journal writing, exploratory writing to discover what he thought about the novel.

His first paragraph is a valid response to the reading. Shane's prior knowledge of novels leads him to "believe" that the resolution would be worked out for him. And his experience in English classes has taught him that there are reasons authors make such decisions, and that it is his work as a student to devise an adequate explanation to demonstrate his knowledge of the text. He knows what he is *supposed to do*, but acknowledges that he can't do it.

His second paragraph offers a key scene for him. He follows it with "a bunch of questions" that indicate the nature of his reading: questions about the main characters and the family, questions about how their conflicts were, or weren't, resolved ("What ever happened...")—in deference to the "true ending of the book." Steinbeck doesn't offer him what he expects of the plot's resolution. His answers are implied in the text, not explicitly developed, as Shane expects. But then, in the fourth paragraph, there is a transition in his thinking about what the text offers him and the rhythm of his writing signifies that shift:

Maybe there was some significance to the ending that had to do with the book as a whole. The only thing that I could think of is that it showed the Joad family all broken up, depressed because Rose of sharans baby was dead when she gave birth, the flood destroyed most of all their things, one of which was their truck, and basically they were at a loss. They were at a loss all through the whole book, and maybe the ending verified that they would always be at a loss no matter how much they tried.

Here Shane captures the implicit progression of what he considers the "plot," the outcome of the conflicts of the family and its individual members throughout the story. *"They were at a loss through the whole book, and maybe the ending verified that they would always be at a loss no matter how much they tried."* The circumstances overwhelm this family and each individual member in it, and their struggles are about remaining whole as a family. Here is a potential beginning of Shane's essay. This brief paragraph captures a glimpse into an (as yet incomplete) understanding, the possibility of an interpretation, of the whole work. Shane has seen his way past his doubt that "I sure couldn't come up with [an] explanation."

Pat D'Arcy, in "Writing to Learn" in *The Journal Book*, addresses the problematic approach to traditional methods of teaching writing which view the papers which are to be graded as "a collection of finished pieces or products" the teacher evaluates as successful or unsuccessful based on how well the writers have "included the information that the teacher is looking for," how well it "matches up to pre-determined expectations" (1987, pp. 41-42).

Shane's piece did not "match up to" the form of the essay I had assigned. Truthfully, I failed to teach him how to arrive at such a product and began to wonder if that particular product, the essay, were even important in Shane's writing life, at least at that point. He had, instead, made some significant discoveries about reading and, particularly, the use of writing to learn. It was my responsibility to have shown him what he had accomplished. I was too concerned about his not having reached the goal I had set out for them. In actuality, he had successfully arrived at such a place without my assistance, despite his belief that what he was attempting to do was "wrong"—a remarkable feat in the writing life of an adolescent. Furthermore, his writing reveals an effective inner dialogue, an internal dialogic process that integrates his questions, his confusion, the text, his "feeling," his learned expectations, and his attempts at rationalization and interpretation. This "unfinished" writing holds promise of meaning for Shane. Murray taught me about the importance of "unfinished writing", and of my own ability "to develop the skills of reading fragments that may inspire a text and to read an unfinished text so that it evolves into increased purpose and meaning" (1989, pp. 74-75). Shane had negotiated meaning as far as his present ability could take him, and it became my place to help him realize the conscious choices he had made and might have continued to make. As D'Arcy states, our role is not to stand at the "finishing post," but to offer "constructive suggestions as to how they might develop the meanings they were seeking to evolve so that they learned more *through* the writing as they went along"

(1987, p. 42). Shane had begun that process alone. This is a milestone in a student-writer's learning: to learn how to learn *through* writing.

D'arcy also points to a significant paradox in that "the formlessness of journals enable[s] the students' own voices to be heard in their writing—perhaps by them for the first time as well as by their teacher" (p. 42). This responsibility on my part became clear to me too late. Shane was a reticent reader and writer, and I missed the opportunity, since it was the end of a course, to show him what he had learned and how to move from there to begin to produce the standard of writing *he knew* was expected of him in such assignments. Catherine Twomey Fosnot describes the learning process Shane had successfully negotiated, though admittedly on a rather unsophisticated level: "Learning is not the result of development; learning *is* development. It requires invention and self-organization on the part of the learner. Thus teachers need to allow learners to raise their own questions, generate their own hypotheses and models as possibilities, and test them for viability" (1996, p. 29).

Face-to-Face Embodied Dialogue

I return for the first time in almost two decades to Tom Carnicelli's article on conferences. My rereading of it intrigues me. I read now with knowledge of over twenty years' experience with high school students, their writing, our conferences, their revisions and evaluations. Carnicelli makes an incisive analogy to the traditional mode of assigning-grading, in which, if conferring does take place, it is about the *already completed* writing; it is, he says, like an "autopsy; it dwells on past failures, not future possibilities, and it provides advice to be used in some nebulous 'next time'" (1980, p. 103).

Over the years I have heard teachers debate which is the more effective response to student writing: the written or the oral. Some have even suggested that a tape recorded response to the reading of the student piece proves most effective. I appreciate Carnicelli's insight into the power of the verbal conference, face to face

embodied dialogue, as critical to both the teacher's and the student's understandings of the other. It is a process in itself crucial to my own perception of writing as an educative experience.

The presence of the student allows the teacher to tailor a response to the student's needs. A point that might take five minutes of painstaking writing to explain can be dismissed in ten seconds if it's apparent that the student fully understands it. A comment that might seem obvious to the teacher may require a more detailed explanation than could have been anticipated. Finally, the presence of the student enables the teacher to be more tactful or more forceful, as the student's attitude warrants. The conference teacher can better judge how much to say, and how to say it. (1980, p.107)

It is that presence that positioned my role as teacher in profoundly different ways of being with students and with subject matter, a presence that is not just physical, that has required of me radical changes in my understanding of teaching and of learning. As Carnicelli points out, the teacher's independent, solitary reading of a piece of writing precludes "an enormous amount of information about their papers" which only the students themselves have: their initial and/or intended purposes, specific problems or obstacles with which they are struggling, their intended meaning, "other ideas and facts about the subject they couldn't manage to fit in" (p. 107) or, as I've often experienced, newly discovered meanings or creative digressions that might prove significant, though irrelevant to the original idea or topic. A solitary reading also precludes a relation within which I may come to know my student and her writing more fully, more intimately, developing our capacities to explore understanding and meaning together.

Often, to my chagrin, I have found that my written comments, usually labored over, have been completely misconstrued by students (or worse, not even read). Sometimes I've read them again when a student asked what I meant (or because it was illegible!) and I've found myself perplexed by its meaning—what was clear to me at the time of the reading has turned ambiguous at best. In the face to face conference, our presence and the possibilities of dialogue (i.e., moving back to earlier ideas, the not-yet-written, our conversational digressions) offer a living dynamics which differs radical

from the isolated reading of a finished piece, both in its purposes and in its efficacy for learning. The dialogic space allows me to monitor and mediate, on a conscious level, the student's responses to my questions, suggestions, observations, or directives, as well as to their own writing. If I notice confusion, I can stop and ask what is confusing her; if there is discomfort, I can gently ease back or directly address the reasons for that discomfort. A hesitation in answer to a question might suggest a place where we consider what is happening. And the unspoken is always something I must consider; H. Anderson refers to "the resource of the unsaid and the yet-to-be said" (1997, p. 118). My purpose is "to create a space and to facilitate a process" (p. 77) which will continue in the writer's internal dialogue and in the writing that ensues. Carnicelli observes that in such a setting, students can receive criticism in the "spirit in which it is offered," and appreciate "the teacher's support and concern." He emphasizes, "Even the most tactfully phrased written comment may seem destructive to a beginning writer" (1980, p. 108). In my own experience as a writer, even the face to face verbal comment can feel devastating. As writers, we all exist vulnerably.

Romano emphasizes, as well, the possibilities of relations that assist both parties in "the give-and-take of dialog":

I tout conferencing because it is so immediately human. A written response does not feature an open, helpful facial expression, eyes that show interest, a human voice repeating a writer's words and asking genuine questions based upon them. Further, the give-and-take of dialog allows us to avoid misunderstanding by clarifying our questions and listening to students' responses. We learn what they know and what they need to learn. (1987, p. 103)

I learned early about the value of spending time with the student writer before a final evaluation of the writing. The "process pieces" I asked them to write and hand in with their final papers would sometimes reveal more about their writing than I could ever discern in a reading. Students often recognized that problems existed in their writing but were unable to do more than generalize (often through hyperbole) about their feelings: it was their "worst piece of writing" or a piece that "bored them to death" or they had "lost

interest in” or “hated.” My time spent privately evaluating (i.e., commenting, correcting, grading) the writing without having known such responses was usually unproductive for the writer. I was attending to places in the writing that I didn’t yet know were not even valid for the writer herself. I needed to attend to the writer, as well.

Traditionally we tend to consider a teacher-student conference as a unilateral process in which we feel compelled to solve the problems of the writing, and I continue to struggle with that learned tendency. Murray reminds us that “The teacher should not look at the text for the student, not even with the student. The teacher looks at—and listens to—the student watching the text evolve” (1982, p. 29). This simple statement offers profound implications for transformation in our teaching. Qualley discusses composing as “a way of making sense of connecting, and responding to situations, texts, and ideas that is open, provisional, and dialogic” (1997, p. 5). These insights into the nature of writing portray a pedagogy of not knowing. As I work with my students in conferences, my purpose is not to establish “a finite dialogue designed to produce consensus and agreement, but rather...an ongoing, reflexive, and ethical dialogue of inquiry that serves to continually illuminate and enlarge [the writer’s] understandings of others and herself” (p. 5). Such purpose does not presume knowing.

Eli: Experiencing of Feeling

For Carl Rogers, as a psychotherapist, “moments of movement” (1961, p.129) offer a healthy space in which the client can begin to “cope” with reality. As a writing instructor of vulnerable adolescents, I consider this process just as healthy a space and an essential aspect of the processes of writing and learning. Writing instructors at every level have acknowledged the vulnerability in which writers place themselves. Writing uncovers us, leaves us exposed and susceptible to scrutiny by others, one of the most precarious positions in which an adolescent can place himself or herself. Therefore, the nature of our relations within that classroom space must be carefully shaped. As instructors we must have, and must model for our students, an acceptance, even

tolerance, of others' expressions of their realities: who they are, how they experience, what they feel, believe, and know. They are in the process, at times, of discovering those very realities, and as an instructor, my own empathic acceptance of what reveals itself to them, what emerges, remains central to my practice. In the early phases of writing; particularly, during the exploration of ideas, it is the writer to whom I attend. Later, when the writing takes shape, and the ideas begin to formulate, my attentiveness gradually focuses toward working with the writer, helping her articulate those ideas and explore ways in which they might be expressed. In the life of the student-writer, as Rogers writes of the client, "There is a growing and continuing sense of acceptant ownership of these changing feelings, a basic trust in his own process"(1961, p. 151). A client of Rogers describes this experience in a way that reminds me of what happens within student-writers, as well:

In therapy here, what has counted is sitting down and saying, "this is what's bothering me," and play around with it for awhile until something gets squeezed out through some emotional crescendo, and the thing is over with—looks different. Even then, I can't tell just exactly what's happened. It's just that I exposed something, shook it up and turned it around; and when I put it back it felt better. It's a little frustrating because I'd like to know exactly what's going on... This is a funny thing because it feels as if I'm not doing anything at all about it—the only active part I take is to—to be alert and grab thought as it's going by... And there's sort of a feeling, "Well now, what will I do with it, now that I've seen it right?" (1961, pp. 151-152)

My students have expressed similar experiences in this process of writing, learning to "play around with it for awhile" and learning "to be alert and grab thought as it's going by." The conferences often initiate that ability to play, as Harlene Anderson writes, "...to access the courage and ability to 'move about around things,' to 'have a clear view,' to achieve self-agency" (1997, xviii), to "focus on generating possibilities" (p. 4).

Eli was a junior in my writing class. She had also been in my sophomore English class the previous year. She was quiet and shy, rarely speaking, and her writing never went beyond a few paragraphs. In the writing class, seniors were working on college essays, and I asked the juniors to consider them as seriously. Eli drafted a letter to a prestigious private school in New Hampshire.

I would like to attend you're post graduate program so that I can further expand my education. I wish to attend medical school at the University of New York and I do not feel that I have enough educational background to forward myself toward the medical field. I do realize that medical school is hard to get accepted in to, and this is why I would like to attend you're school.

I responded in writing, "How can we get you to talk more about who you are, Eli? You aren't your transcript—you have a wonderful presence. What questions might help you write from that strength?" She tried again, but the attempt was not much more effective:

I would like to attend your're post-graduate program so I can further expand my education. My goal is to attend either the University of Vermont or University of New York. The requirements for mathematics and science I can not fulfill in High School and I would like to get the most out of them.

I'm captain of the varsity Field Hockey team and have been playing for 7 years. Field Hockey is a big part of my life and I do plan on continuing through college. I also started swimming & diving for Exeter.

My main goal is my Education. I want to get as much out of a High School Education as I can.

My suggestion to "write from that strength" was not at all clear to her, (I'm not sure it would be to me either), and I'm sure she couldn't understand what I meant by "a wonderful presence." Writing such responses usually does little to help students explore other paths; writers merely add a little to what they are already "committed" to, answering those kind of questions simplistically or literally. She had, however, revealed something new. In conference, I told her I was surprised to learn that she was a captain of the varsity Field Hockey team. We talked. I asked what position she played. "Goalie!" she announced. Again, I was surprised to learn that this petite, demure girl was an athlete, and I saw a passion emerge. I asked her if being goalie were different from the other positions, and she let me know immediately that there was indeed a difference. "Write about what it means to *you* to be a goalie." I directed her toward her own passion. I encouraged her to recognize her own expertise and admitted, "I am not an athlete. Don't forget me. I don't know anything about it."

Her next draft came quickly. It is beautifully written, powerful in its expression and voice. Few English teachers I've known have been able to define "voice," something we all consider important to writing. I heard Eli's description of the field hockey player out

of a voice I had not before heard. Each line and each paragraph pushes the piece forward, creating a clear, strong image of the player she is:

THE FIELD HOCKEY PLAYER

As she walks on the field, kicking the dirt and grass with her cleats, she plays around with her mouth guard, slaps sticks with a team mate and takes her center position. She looks her opponent in the eye, both eager to play and wanting to taste victory. She takes a deep breath, kicks the mud off her cleats, gives her stick a good luck rub and plays.

“Elegant Violence” best describes a Field Hockey player. Violent in the way that she would do anything to see the ball go in to the net. That includes beating down a Goalie to even beating or running down herself. It doesn't matter what or who she hurts. If the score is tight she can and will do anything. Violent in the way that she loves to see a pile in front of the opposing net. When the Goalie is down that means players are down and that certainly means action.

Elegant in the way that she looks so agile handling the ball up field. Her skirt moving with every move she makes. Under the girly uniform lies a tough, rugged woman. All the broken bones, scared up knees and black eyes only remind her of a game she can never re-play.

I can best describe the feelings and frustrations of a Goalie. When the team is doing well and she stands all alone with no one to talk to. She just stands and hums to herself. When the team is not doing well and she gets hit where there is no padding, she's a Goalie, she practices being tough.

I chose this position because I love excitement. I love being the one with a view over the field and what is going on. To be a Goalie you have to be able to take pain and hide hurt. When the team sees their Goalie hurting they panic and don't concentrate. When you get hit in the face with the end of a stick you have to pretend it doesn't hurt. When you let the winning goal in you have to pretend it doesn't hurt.

A Goalie and a field player are two different people. A field player develops skill and speed. A Goalie develops self esteem and aggressiveness.

Goalies have a personality of their own because they are secluded from the team. She is more reserved and only has a few good friends. Because she has to direct the people on the field, she tends to be a leader. A true goalie at heart is a leader, but also very protective of her friends.

I love being a Goalie. It lets me show myself at my best. I'm a true Goalie at heart.

As Eli defines the term “goalie,” she also defines a significant aspect of who she is:

“Under the girly uniform lies a tough, rugged woman.” She is able to articulate “feelings and frustrations” through her identity as a goalie, both physically and emotionally. Eli is

able to see herself with “self esteem and aggressiveness,” as a “leader,” a good “friend,” with the ability to “take pain and hide hurt.” This is a remarkable expression of her personal identity.

In “What It Means to Become a Person,” Rogers observes, “It seems to me that at bottom each person is asking, ‘Who am I, *really*? How can I get in touch with this real self, underlying all my surface behavior? How can I become myself?’” (1989, p.108) As a therapist, Rogers believes that his purpose is “to understand the way [the client] feels in his own inner world, to accept him as he is, to create an atmosphere of freedom in which he can move in his thinking and feeling and being, in any direction he desires” (p. 109). Working with my high school student writers, my purpose, at least initially, is the same: to teach them how to “move in [their] thinking and feeling and being, in any direction,” and to allow them the means to do that, partly through my own developing capacity for empathic understanding of their “inner worlds.” How we create such an “atmosphere of freedom” is something which remains controversial in our profession.

Carnicelli argues the distinctions between the functions of the teacher and the therapist:

The teacher’s function is to lead students to adopt the teacher’s values, the common criteria of good writing shared by the teacher, the English profession, and, with certain wide variations, educated people in general. The therapist’s function is to lead clients to clarify or develop their own individual values. Because of this basic difference in function, the writing teacher has the obligation to be more judgmental, and more directive, than a therapist should be in the Rogerian approach. (1980, p. 116)

I would agree with Carnicelli to some degree, yet I would like to qualify the interpretation of this traditional perspective in terms of the ways in which we might “lead students to adopt” our “criteria of good writing.” Rogers’ notion of “freedom,” like Murray’s of discovery, are processes which “lead students” toward greater competency in several respects. Rogers describes this process of freedom:

It is my experience that he uses [the freedom] to become more and more himself. He begins to drop the false fronts, or the masks, or the roles, with which he has faced life. He appears to be trying to discover something more basic, something more truly himself. (p. 109)

..[T]his experiencing of feeling...is really the discovery of unknown elements of self. (p. 111)

I believe Carnicelli's distinctions between the teacher and the therapist are far more obscure in reality—or we should consider them so. If we regard as part of the criteria of good writing more than the elements of syntax, diction, grammar, organization—that is, if we include in “the teacher’s values” considerations of the expression of the writer’s own values, the development of voice or voices, the capacity to change one’s perceptions, perhaps even the development of a sense of identity—Rogers’ sense of “this experiencing of feeling” (1989, p.111) is as critical to the process of writing as the adoption of standards. I would propose that they are not mutually exclusive, that the dichotomy of purposes limits our perceptions of the complex work of teaching writing. Dewey emphasizes that the “formation of enduring attitudes...may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future. The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning” (1938, p. 48).

Sue: The Freedom to Nourish an Inner Life (Palmer)

The following section in italics is taken from my article “Listening beyond the text,” in *To Compose*.

Sue (a senior) had written all period and came up to me as the bell rang. She said she had been writing about her experience in junior high school. She had two older sisters whom many of the teachers had known, and her father was a coach in the school. She wasn't sure what to do with it all. She felt “something missing.” Sue and I had earlier identified one of her writing problems. She could easily write twenty pages, but couldn't seem to shorten anything. On a whim, I asked her to define ‘Marangelli,’ her last name. “Assume I know exactly what you went through, all the facts. See if you can

define the essence of Marangelli. I don't know what will come of it. Try it!" She seemed to like the idea. Next day she announced to the class she wanted to read her piece.

Marangelli is a term that has stereotyped me many times. Besides being my last name it is a definition of what I'm SUPPOSED to be like. A Marrangelli must be academically strong as well as socially popular. She must be an over-achiever and actively involved in music.

Of course, she MUST enjoy football and various other sports.

When I was in junior high I hated being a Marangelli. I couldn't live up to many of the standards. Now I am slowly gaining my individuality. I don't need to live in the shadow of my last name. I can be a Marangelli without expecting a stereotype. I am my own person, Marangelli or not.

She was excited. She had successfully written a short piece, and the class had responded well. She was ready to write. In conference we talked, mainly about focus—what it was she was learning about her own feelings. She hadn't recognized at first that some of her feelings about her family name were negative, and once she did she began to explore those feelings. Her next draft addressed those issues:

By simply mentioning that I belong to the family, I have the potential to gain respect. But "Potential" is a confusing term. In the past I had never thought of myself as respected or equal. I always assumed I had to live in the shadows of my older sisters, never living up to my potential. I used to think I had to be musically active and involved in sports. Many of my teachers expected me to be as gifted as my sisters seemed to be at everything. I went through junior high as "Marian's baby sister," "Martha's photocopy," "the coach's daughter." It was hard to see who I really was. Now, when I look back on my life, I see myself constantly trying to improve myself. I have become the achiever my oldest sister was, not because I had to be her photocopy, but because I wanted to better myself through the reaching of my own goals. I try to be as witty as my other older sister, as well as her musical equal. But I still have my own techniques and serious moments. I have become an avid football spectator and can finally boast a thorough understanding of the game. I can say I reached this plateau by myself. He didn't need to teach me. I learned on my own.

I am my own person, Marangeli or not. I am proud of my family and their accomplishments. I am also glad I can be the youngest in an easily recognized family and still be free to experiment with my own uniqueness and individuality.

The attempt to capture a definition of Marangelli successfully elicited for Sue a clearer, more articulate expression of the feelings with which she was struggling. Those quickly written, initial eleven sentences helped her generate the ideas which she could think through more clearly. This writing helped lead Sue "to clarify or develop [her] own individual values," a purpose inherent in what Carnicelli points to as "the therapist's

function.” It is, however, as integral to the complexities of this process of teaching writing as directing students toward our common values of good writing. Teaching writing is about my finding ways of helping my students open up possibilities for determining how they see themselves and the world and the ways in which they can express those thoughts and emotions. Sue has transformed her understanding of who she is as both an individual woman and a daughter/sister in the Marangelli family. Linda Flower asserts that such a “transformation process may take place regularly when a writer is trying to express complicated information which is not yet fully conceptualized.” The processes of revision often engage the writer in “the act of transforming a narrative network of information into a more fully hierarchical set of propositions” (1990, p. 137). This transformation does not exclude the development of the writer’s “own individual values.”

In *Radical Presence*, Mary Rose O’Reilly asserts that “students have an inner life and that its authority is central to understanding cognitive development.” She asks us to consider “what spaces we can create in the classroom that will allow students freedom to nourish an inner life” (1998, p. 3). It is not an easy answer.

To ‘create a space’ acknowledges both our sphere of responsibility and our lack of control. The idea of filling students, well-intentioned and nurturing as it may be, rests on the conviction that we know what they need, that their hunger is like our own, or something like the hunger we felt in college. This may not be true. How do we find out? Probably by keeping quiet much more than we have ever imagined possible, and by listening more astutely than we have before, even if we have listened long and hard....Respect the blocks. Respect the stutter. We know so little about what’s really going on. What seem to be mistakes are often gifts of the spirit. (1998, p. 2)

The answer for my own practice lies within my capacity for creating dialogic space in which I develop ways to teach not knowing.

Vinnie: “No One Ever Told Me I Could Write!”

The following section in italics is taken from my article, “Listening beyond the text” in *To Compose*.

Many of my students feel incompetent about their own capacities for thinking and even more so for writing, a far more accessible and gradable entity. Teaching them how to take control of their writing means helping them learn how to make decisions. When they discover they have the power of choice, they have to begin to take responsibility for what their writing does or does not do, and they can no longer disclaim any connection to the writing.

Vinnie had written from a writing prompt early in the semester. It was an exercise for students to write about a phase in their lives.

There was a phase in my life during the 7th and 8th grade. That summer before 7th grade I got a job feeding the young calves at a farm in my town. That was a good summer. It was the first real job I had. I always wanted to milk the big cows with the owner of the farm. The next summer that is what I got to do. I wanted to be a dairy farmer from 7th grade up to the beginning of 9th. I milked the cows 3 _ hrs. every night and I got \$10 a week.

Vinnie didn't hide the fact that he had not invested a great deal of time or thought in the writing. An apathetic junior, he was doing minimal work in school. Later in the semester, however, he returned to this piece. He added more details, about the work, about the farmer and the farm.

I was moving around the room when I spotted his piece. A quick glance gives me lots of information. Vinnie was evidently involved in this writing. I commented that the piece told a lot about his job, about the farmer, and about the farm, and I asked him which one he meant to focus on. He hesitated a moment and admitted that he hadn't thought about it. Before I left him, I asked him to remember me. I explained that, having come from the city, I'd had a rather romantic view of farming, and how my husband had laughed when I had told him how delightful it must be to live on a farm. Vinnie was laughing. He began talking about the farmer's life. Before I left he said, "Well, I thought I was writing about my summer job, but I think it's really about the farmer." He wrote again, exploring the details of the man and his farm.

He had kind of a pot belly and his pants were baggy and dirty. He was always working around the farm. He had a few horses and some geese and many cats. He looked very old but I don't think he was. His face was weathered and had many wrinkles. But it looked so kind and soft. He had the kind of voice that when you hear it you will never forget it. He didn't talk much and when he did it was usually a joke. Little changed from day to day he did almost the same things every day....

Vinnie had consciously refocused his writing on the farmer and his farm. I met him in conference again and asked what he needed to do next. He knew. "It's not organized." I asked him to tell me how he might do that, and we looked at the physical descriptions of the man and the descriptions of the farm. He said he wasn't sure how he would organize it yet and went back to the writing.

In his next draft, Vinnie had titled it "The Farmer." He had made a choice about his focus and organization, as he put it, "The order: The man, a description, personality, and then related to the farm." It was no accident. Once Vinnie began to make decisions about what he wanted the piece to do, it took its course. The next draft came quickly.

The Farmer

The man I worked for at the end of the 6th grade was a farmer. He was an old yankee type man. I looked around the farm and I was surprised at how messy and unkept it was. At that time I had no idea of how much work there was and how merciless the farm could be.

The man I worked for, the owner of the farm milked cows. He did most of the work and his sons did the rest. My second year I got to work with him all summer. He had kind of a pot belly and his pants were dirty and baggy. He always wore a hat and black runner boots over his work boots. His face was dark and it had many wrinkles. It look very soft and kind. the man looked very old but I don't think he was. He had a voice that once you heard it you never forget what it sound like. He was one of the kindest most concederate people I ever met.

Little changed form day to day and I liked the man even more as I got to know him. He did not talk much and when he did it was usually a joke about the work that a farmer has to do. I think it was his way of relieving the stress of working all the time. One job after another.

Every day when I arrived I saw him plowing out the yard. He looked like he enjoyed this part of the work. I think he liked riding on the tractor. He had a lot of equipment and he took very good care of it, but the farm itself always had an unkept look about it. The animals and equipment need so much attention that there was no time to clean the place up.

The piece evolved because Vinnie was interested in the subject enough to take the time, which in turn brought commitment and more interest in what he would learn each time he wrote. And he was willing to write because I made no “corrections” from the beginning. Once the process of correcting and editing and polishing begins, the writing stops.

The original idea of Vinnie’s “summer job” finally left this draft, and the piece became clearly focused. Vinnie’s concept of the “merciless” farm came to him as he worked his way through the draft. There was no such clearly defined and articulated statement in the earlier drafts, no sign of these connections between the farm and the man. I could never have suggested such an insight nor had Vinnie anticipated this kind of writing.

Dewey discusses the delicate balance of authority in our relations with students and offers insight into the ways in which the teacher’s purposes may challenge, but not overpower, individual writers in the conference:

The teacher’s suggestion is not a mold for a cast-iron result but is a starting point to be developed into a plan through contributions from the experience of all engaged in the learning process. The development occurs through give-and-take, the teacher taking but not being afraid also to give. The essential point is that the purpose grow and take shape through the process of social intelligence. (1938, p. 72)

And he articulates something of the tensional quality of which Steward and Zediker (1999) write:

It thus becomes the office of the educator to select those things within the range of existing experience that have the promise and potentiality of presenting new problems which by stimulating new ways of observation and judgment will expand the area of further experiences. He must constantly regard what is already won not as a fixed possession but as an agency and instrumentality for opening new fields which make new demands upon existing powers of observation and of intelligent use of memory. (1938, p. 75)

Joe: The Line of Tension

Joe picked up one day on the language I often use with the class—“Just write.” His first line began, “‘But first, you write,’ said she to her student; reminiscent of first principles and oriental philosophy.” He was a senior and the only student I knew who

took an extra semester of writing without credit. Quick, playful writing came easily for him, perhaps too easily. For many of my students, it is *the* obstacle they must overcome in order to begin developing their writing.

Early in the semester, I assigned the class twelve to fifteen pages of quick writing, giving them some questions about their lives that might prompt some topics. Their goal for the week was to produce lots of writing. My goal was to have them learn that quantity was not a problem, and to allow them to be playful in short bursts of writing practice. After ten minutes of quick writing in class, they saw that one page was easy to produce. It was not about the quality of writing at this point, and, ironically, some needed to free themselves from internalized standards and expectations in order to learn to write well.

Joe continued, free-associating and playing with metaphor and style:

Firsts—that is what it is all about. The First to be born—when? Who?—the first to crawl, walk, swim, run, jump, swim, fly. The first to fly not necessarily an experiment with simple mechanical gadgetry—is perhaps the first to realize his potential, his worth. Maybe he is the first to wonder—dare to behold—through life without fear, pain, anger happiness, sorrow, hatred, or prejudice. He is certainly conjured to us in a wonder.

There are firsts—necessarily. Also so must there be lasts. If there were no lasts, the first would have no place to start from, no place to go. However, who is to say what is first? We believe in an order—so simple to us as not having to be told. First you stand up, then you walk. Is it simple? Maybe. Imagine walking First, then standing up. The conditioned, “learned” mind says that walking first would be an absurd thought; Impossible.

“It’s too logical,” said another. I will try to be illogical. I will walk before I stand, simply because no one ever told me I could not—there was never a thought, a question, about the subject. It was understood that I could walk once I stood, but the thought (or desire) to do the opposite never occurred to me, nor was it said to me that I could not do the opposite. And so I will fly before I run. I will, and before I begin.

I want to start over again at the end and begin, ending at the beginning. Is this logical? I hope not, because what we are living now is not. It is illogical, and irrational, and so in reversing it, one cannot expect it to come out entirely logical.

I want to defend myself against adulthood. I hate what it makes. It produces, from children deaf, dumb, blind robots who cannot create beyond the limits to which they are confined, where children often create. Adulthood, brought on by “education,” language, religious beliefs, politics, and meaningless or even detrimental jobs, effectively puts walls around the child that prevent him from reading too far with his mind, his imagination.

The seemingly innocuous writing about firsts and lasts moves gradually into a statement about “conditioned, ‘learned’ minds” and the “logical” mode that he perceives as “the irrational,” criticizing modes of society that deter the development of the child. Joe makes a lucid claim: “I want to defend myself against adulthood. I hate what it makes.” The writing has brought him to a tentative focus that makes more and more sense as he defines and narrows down his topic. Continuing, Joe begins to address language as a primary detriment to imagination:

Language is perhaps the most limiting. When language—complex sounds and symbols are imposed--and they are imposed—a very important part of the child's mind is lost. The part is wonder. Wonder, (merely one of these complex symbols that I find myself trapped by, using, and hating) describes a feeling that really should not be described. It should be forgotten. Only then will the idea it represents be possible. The symbols mean nothing—it is the ideas that are important. However, ask an adult to define the idea behind the symbol “I” and he will probably respond with another symbol. The child, unaccustomed to such symbols, whose beautiful simplicity allows him to see without them and wonder. The child uses the symbols, unimportant to him, save tragically mimicking the adult, in different ways often which are scorned by the adults who, for some reason, insist that they are wrong. By “correcting” the child, the adult closes his simple, secure mind, and stifles his imagination. I am trapped. Because of this, I am angry. However, I cannot forget the language.

He enjoys the play with paradox (“Wonder...should be forgotten. Only then will the idea it represents be possible.”) Some of his statements are contradictory. His meaning remains ambiguous, and Joe could very well be talking about writing assignments and implying the expectations we place on students, or, nothing at all. This ability to create language to which teachers are quick to interpolate the writer's purposely vague meanings carries some students through high school. Years before, Erin had written an essay and, after having read the first paragraph three times and still having no idea what she was saying, I'd asked her what she meant. She shrugged her shoulders and laughed: “I don't know. I thought maybe you'd figure it out!”

Once I opened up to the writing that happened when I no longer placed my own expectations of good writing on my students, I began to see the possibilities teaching not

knowing offers us. When I removed myself as the primary audience; when I listened beyond the text; when I participated in various ways in the creation of these pieces of writing; when I became a reader rather than a teacher; when I acknowledged their expertise, the student writers began to allow themselves to turn inward to listen to the voices that emerged and the questions and knowledge they possessed, and realized the significance of writing *for themselves*, as well as *to others*. It meant, too, developing my capacity to tolerate poor writing—artificial writing, pseudo-intellectual writing, empty rhetoric, simplistic generalizations, undeveloped writing—and attend still to the potential capacity of the writer to have something significant to say and to learn how to say it well.

Learning to read what Murray calls “the line,” an elusive concept, has become, perhaps, one of the most critical means for developing my practice. Murray defines it:

The line is a word or a series of words that points the writer toward a potential meaning...The line need only communicate to the writer, and therefore the line is often made up of code words that have private meanings that appear general, vague, or cliché to other readers but which are loaded with precise meanings for the writer. (1989, p. 41)

I constantly read for the line in the text or listen for the unwritten line in a conference. Once I can locate places in which private meanings may linger beneath the surface of language, and encourage the writer to dive into that place, I can begin to teach students how to read for the subtleties of their own meaning. Murray describes the way in which the writer, (as I model it first), learns how to read his own text:

Working against this powerful force of writing is the counterforce of reading...The writer has to develop new forms of reading, to read loosely at first, to give the piece of writing space so that the embryonic patterns of meaning which are making shadowy appearance can have time to come clear. Writers have to learn to listen for the almost imperceptible sounds which may develop into the voice they do not expect. As the meanings come clear, the voices grow stronger. The writer has to read with increasing care, has to be critical, even surgical, but not at first. (1982, p. 23)

In her unique work with reading and theatre, Salvio has helped teachers explore many ways of being in the classroom that enhance teachers' repertoires of “reading against the text.” Such a practice requires the ability to “establish a temporal and emotional

distance between her writing self and her written narratives.” (1994, p. 24). It is the shift from expressive to transactional writing, from Writer-Based prose to Reader-Based prose. It is stepping outside oneself to read one’s writing from another position.

Discussing her students’ autobiographical writings, Salvio reveals something about what Murray calls the “line of tension”:

[C]ontradictions [within student texts] are indices to the dramatic tension in their narratives...important guides away from readings that are normalizing or simply cathartic. To locate a contradiction requires an intense level of concentration on the part of the reading community, it requires re-reading and often unraveling threads in our autobiographies, that while alluring, are often road signs to gaps in our conscious memories, silences, places where we are yet to be more fully implicated. (Salvio, 1994, pp. 17-18)

Bakhtin’s work has always spoken to me of the writing conference as a place in which the dialectical movements of the writer, the listener/reader, the writing itself and the possibilities of that which may be written move us toward an epistemological event:

To some extent, primacy belongs to the response, as the activating principle; it creates the ground for understanding, it prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition each other; one is impossible without the other. (1981, p. 281)

This concept of the dialectical interaction between understanding and response underlies much of my own experience teaching not knowing. Bakhtin’s theory and language strike me as describing the very processes of meaning making, particularly valuable in my understanding of writing conferences. His basic unit, “the utterance,” is defined as “a contradictory-ridden, tension-filled unity to two embattling tendencies in the life of language” (p. 272). This notion of tension resonates with much of Murray’s work. Murray writes about the line of tension as a place out of which the possibility of new meaning may arise, a place to explore further, for new awareness or memories or understanding or questions. As an instructor I have learned to look for those lines of tension and to present them to my student-writers as possibilities for further discovery of language and insight. Bakhtin’s depiction of the response portrays the interaction between a teacher and student in a productive conference, when both are actively

engaged in understanding that pushes "beyond the boundaries of the word's context" and in the process, "enriches the word" (p. 282). Teaching students how to be present in such a process, to become what McNamee calls "relationally responsible," is a profound and complex process:

Each individual locus may be rendered intelligible and thus subject to deliberation and action—but only temporarily. Because the conversation is inherently open-ended, each moment of insight can give way to further exploration; each clear and compelling understanding can be treated as but a single atom in a field without boundaries. As the exploration continues not only is each conversational object transformed through an array of understandings, but the relationship of those engaged in the pursuit may be altered. (1999, p. 18)

To acknowledge the complexities of these processes and of the persons with whom I work is to acknowledge the uncertain and unpredictable nature of dialogic relations.

As Joe continues, the writing becomes more personal. Despite the fact that he later calls this first writing "BS," there is provisional meaning underlying the language, and his ability to be facile with language allows him free reign to move, digress, shift meaning:

We have names—symbols—for everything we do, hear, see, and encounter. As a result, we develop hate toward some things and misdirected love of others. The child I was knew no hate until the adults taught it to me. There was no question or choice. It became understood. It was walking after standing. So I have walked. Now I want to fly before I run. I fear that, being labeled a relative "adult" now, flying would be a hopeless endeavor. I find that after eighteen years of growing physically, I have learned little. I have been told things, but I will never be able to learn until I forget. I may be able to forget some but I will always have the biggest set of precognitions ever designed and taught—language. That, I can never forget, no matter how much I desire. It will likely be a last.

This ended his first writing. Joe is savvy enough to weave the original motif of firsts and lasts back into this "closing." He then moves to another topic, his grandmother's funeral. The narration itself is quite different from the earlier writing. It takes on another attitude, another voice:

In that tiny room, there were two very big men; strong men. One wept. The other sat motionless, and, like me, seemingly emotionless. My grandfather, who walked in first, with my uncle, knelt down in front of the casket and began to cry, dropping his head. I never saw my grandfather cry before. He was so strong. Somehow, an entire system had failed—was gone. I was not sure how to act. This was the first time I had

ever experienced this situation before. I had not stood before I began to fly and it confused me. Still, I did not feel sad. I was unhappy that my grandfather was sad, but I was not sad. I turned and looked over at my father. He sat not looking at anything in particular. The expression on his face was emotionless. He did not look sad. Of course, he was not happy. My father is strong but not cold. This was a first for him and I think he finally flew. I watched him approach the casket with my mother, kneel and bow his head. Still, the expression on his face was indeterminable. I would guess that he was feeling the same confusion that I was. Was it an end or a beginning? It was neither for me, I think. For my father, I think it was both. It was my turn to “pay my respects”. No one ever told me I had to. It was, again, understood. As I knelt at the open casket I looked down, first at my feet, then, slowly, I lifted my eyes to the empty shell that lay in the casket. I call it a shell because it was not my grandmother; that much I was sure about. I was told it was her. However, as I understood my grandmother, what lay in the casket was clearly not her. Perhaps my father thought this way as well. No one had ever told him how to be at his mother’s funeral. All he understood, perhaps, is that he was an unwanted child; unexpected. He was told this when he was fourteen. He is a strong man. [Written into the margin] With this thought in mind, I began to understand my father’s emotionless state. However, I could not attribute my lack of emotion to anything. It was something completely foreign.

It was the line “He is a strong man” added into the margin that I noticed. The lines surrounding it offer fragments of life stories of his father. The line itself is strong and clear. There is an implication in the two lines adjoining the statement: “He is a strong man.” and “I began to understand my father’s emotionless state.” Joe then shifts back again to his earlier stylistic writing about emotion and inserts his motif of “walking” and “standing.”

As I left the tiny room after the two large men left, I realized that the flowers had taken on feeling. They were not told to do so. Maybe they simply learned to because nobody ever told them they couldn’t. At that moment, I also realized that I had walked—Even though I had never stood.

I hold no hatred toward my grandmother. That would be pointless. I do not know if my father does. The flowers, unassuming and without preconceptions, do not hate. No one ever taught them how. If they are emotionless, then they do not hate. They grow, however, like the flowers around them simply because it is understood. We grow like the others around us. We understand fear, pain, anger, happiness, sorrow, hatred and prejudice. These are not taught but they are learned. One very important emotion is [in a manner of speaking,] taught, but it is not learned: love.

I want to fly before I stand. (simply because I)

Joe felt he had *done* the assignment. He had written. When he came up to put it on my desk, after just two days of writing in class, I told him that the next step was to focus in

on something. He already had, he assured me, and walked off. I read through it quickly and spotted the line about his father—a place that seemed to hold tension between emotional and intellectual writing. I told him I thought the writing around his grandmother's funeral was potentially a place he might explore further. I pointed out the line he had added about his father. What is this really about? I asked. He returned to his seat and wrote again. The next day he made some slight changes that focused the piece a little more, and he handed in his "final" paper:

My grandfather, my father, and me: three generations of identical, drastically different people. My grandfather is a strong, stubborn man. His body is alive, but he is dead. He died when my grandmother and her body died. My father is strong and stubborn, as well. He has died a thousand times, I think. Each time, however, he seems to be reborn; perhaps out of his sheer stubbornness. I am certainly not strong, but I am definitely stubborn. I guess I'm alive, but I do not know what is "real" anymore. I used to. Riding a bicycle was real. Playing in the sandbox was real. Playing "cops and robbers" and "cowboys and Indians"—that was real. Watching cartoons on Saturday morning, with the volume down low so as not to wake up my parents, then fighting with my brother over which ones to watch. Bugs and Daffy were funny. All that was real. Playing catch with my father was real—even though I never really could catch very well. He didn't seem to mind. For the brief moments of hearing them, my grandfather's silly stories were real. They were certainly not truthful—they were downright absurd, but they were real. He doesn't tell those stories anymore. Maybe they died with him.

Reality is now an ugly, twisted, confusing beast that is honing its claws and cleaning its teeth, preparing to tear my flesh and crunch my bones. He stole my bike. He turned the sand in my sandbox to mud. He retired the cops and caught all the robbers, killed all the cowboys and put the Indians on reservations. Even Daffy's stopped losing his bill.

I haven't played catch in a long, long time, but I'm sure I probably still can't catch. Reality has stolen my grandfather's stories and destroyed them.

I think I've got to kill the beast and take back those things. It will not be easy; I may not do it until I die. My claws are being sharpened, my teeth are being cleaned. I begin by smiling. I end by forgetting, and I win.

This revision reveals his emotional connections to the two older men. His diction is vigorous and effective. Joe liked this writing and refused to consider revising the last paragraph. I felt that it remained artificially linked to his earlier themes, but he felt strongly about it, and I had to laugh at his ability to dismiss my suggestions.

Along with the writing, I asked students to hand in what I called a “process piece,” a commentary on the process of writing itself. I often found this to be a valuable tool with which to read and respond to the writing. Students often inform me about their own feelings and responses, most of which I couldn’t know otherwise. Depending upon the comment, I might have another conference with the student before evaluating the piece, particularly if he or she has expressed opinions or concerns about the writing. Many of the comments are revealing, instructing me in ways of reading both the writer and the processes of his writing. Joe wrote:

The process of writing this piece was very different from any other piece I’ve ever written. I began by exploring the concept of “first”. This developed into a large amount of amateur philosophizing and relative B.S. However, from this mess, I discovered something—some experience of my own that I could relate to what I was writing about—that of my grandmother’s funeral. It was very enlightening.

The biggest surprise I had when writing 12 to 15 pages was the fact that I could write, without editing and rearranging text in a reasonable coherent manner. I didn’t write on a bunch of little topics—I picked a topic that was very broad, and I think, perhaps a little odd. It was a bit difficult to understand, even in my own mind at first, but it was something I had to work out the best way I knew how. I just simply wrote it, not thinking it was going to be 12 to 15 pages long. I found that the topic easily branched in many ways. It was also easy to choose which way because it was the way I had to follow. From this point, I let my mind wander where it wanted to go. That place was my Grandmother’s funeral. This writing showed me something important about the relationship between me and my father and my grandfather. (sorry – my father, my grandfather, and me.) I used this specific topic when we focused our writing.

The piece developed quite easily, but kind of emotionally, after I discovered, or more appropriately, slammed into, the ideas of my Grandmother’s funeral. That was the important part of the development. Now, the piece is complete, I think. To discuss what’s in it further or to change anything in it, would be rehashing. Changing anything in it would lose my honest, original thoughts. The emotions are correct; yes. I think so.

These last lines were for my benefit. Joe is assuring me that it is the way he wants it, and I am not to question him further. He likes the style and wants the meaning to remain implicit. One of his goals, as he explained, was to develop the “odd” in his writing. Carl Rogers writes of clients who have similar experience in the process of discovering or “slamming” into ideas, (as Joe put it):

Indeed I wish I might share with you much more fully some of the excitement and discouragement of this effort to understand process. I would like to tell you of my fresh discovery of the way feelings 'hit' clients—a word they frequently use. The client is talking about something of importance, when wham! He is hit by a feeling—not something named or labeled but an experiencing of an unknown something which has to be cautiously explored before it can be named at all. (1961, p. 129)

James Britton considers the structuring of experience to be an essential function of writing: “[W]e structure experience; experience itself—what is structured—is of course far more than language; it is the sum total of our responses to environment, whether in action, thought or feelings; and all that our senses report” (1982, p. 75). The ability to create such structures entails complex processes. In the act of so engaging, students may gradually learn to recognize and value structures which the processes of writing elicit and which set experience into an “array of possibilities”(McNamee). The conscious choices students learn to make then become means for reflection, analysis and interpretation. Anne Berthoff concludes “that meaning is dynamic and dialectical, that it depends on context and perspective, the setting and the angle” (1987, p. 12). Early drafts necessarily portray this dynamic and dialectical shifting, erratic patterns of thought, inconsistencies of style, syntax, diction, even meaning. At this stage in writing, audience can often be detrimental to this initial process of discovering what we mean, what we know, and what we want to express. To their benefit, Holden and Joe both unwittingly ignore audience as they write their way toward more complete, more comprehensible expressions of their own thinking. Elbow has argued in their favor:

[W]e often do not really develop a strong, authentic voice in our writing till we find important occasions for ignoring audience—saying, in effect, “To hell with whether they like it or not. I’m saying this the way I want to say it.” Ignoring audience may permit an overly self-conscious, mannered, or cute voice finally to run clear... Admittedly, the voice that emerges when students ignore audience is sometimes odd or idiosyncratic in some way, but usually it is stronger... We cannot usually trust a voice unless it is unaware of us and our needs and speaks out in its own terms. (1987, p. 25)

That I remain aware that students want to say what they think I want to hear remains critical to my practice; so few can afford to ignore the teacher-audience to which most of

their writing, unfortunately, has been directed. I've often used the term "breakthrough piece" to identify for myself those powerful pieces of writing in which the student-writer was able to get out of his or her own pattern of writing-for-the-teacher and charge headlong through their "not knowing" into new, compelling language. Elbow writes articulately about this phenomenon:

When...we examine really good student or professional writing we can often see that its goodness comes from the writer's finally getting so wrapped up in her meaning and her language that she forgets all about audience needs—she finally 'breaks through.' ...consciousness of readers is burned away; involvement in subject determines all... The writer is not leaking attention away from her meaning or her language into awareness of the audience. (1987, p. 24)

Teaching students to discount the teacher as audience remains for me a difficult task, especially in our school systems that have trained them to do exactly what the teacher asks and rarely encourages them to initiate their own voices. To do so is to take true risks—unless we are able to counteract that concern by insisting that grading their writing cannot be the prevailing goal and that learning necessitates risks in the sense that they must enter those processes which initiate learning.

Jess: The Letting-Go Experience (Pennebaker, 1997)

Jess wrote a poignant, albeit disturbing, personal piece about her experience in a family affected by drug addiction. It was a distressing account of abuse for which I was not prepared to respond.³

Dad was always paranoid, and always depressed. I can remember many times when dad would lose his temper for no apparent reason, and it would never be good when it happened.

He would be happy one second and then the next thing you know he'd be swooping down on us, mad again.

He used to remind me of the eagle you'd see swooping down and spearing up a fish from a lake on those nature shows. He'd just pick one of us up and throw, kick, or smash us into the furthest wall.

He always felt bad about it after, but for some reason the drugs made it so that he couldn't feel bad about much of anything until it was all done.

I remember getting my head smashed of the kitchen floor just because I couldn't use a dustpan and broom with my right hand. I am a lefty, I was 3 years old.

I remember seeing my brother get drop-kicked across the living room because he was in the way. I never saw anyone fly so high, and violence became no big deal.

I guess that it is possible for a person, especially a child to get used to things particularly things which they know they can't change.

Dad and Mom gave us plenty to just accept, but at this point of time, a lot of it was from dad.

He would just explode, then he'd smoke a joint, and or take a pill and he'd be okay for a little while.

After a while he started doing cocaine. Things got really rough then. He began to get even more iratic. He'd get payed and then he and mom would disappear to a friends house for a few hours, then they'd come home happy. At first I was naive enough to think that maybe they were just going to the movies or something fun like that together, to maybe try and maybe to even become friends again.

It didn't take too long for me to figure out what they were really doing. I also figured out quickly that this meant that they weren't even trying to deal with their problems, they were just avoiding them.

That's some of the memories that make me now realize what a mistake doing drugs can be to yourself and those around you.

She brought me the piece in class and asked me to read it. I read it, appalled, and when I finished I was speechless. We sat for a moment, in silence, and I finally told her that she'd "said it all," she had expressed all there was to say, and well—that this was probably more than most people even wanted to know about such abuse. She seemed satisfied with my response. Then, I asked her if she would be willing to try something else, and she nodded. "People know the technical term, chemical dependency. Write its definition with *your* personal knowledge, something they don't *know*." The last line of her paper had drifted between talking to herself and another audience. I thought the movement toward a more real, specified audience could help her advance both the writing and her knowledge. She seemed to understand what I asked and left to write a second time. She left the first with me and returned the next day with a new piece of writing:

The technical term which people know as a chemical dependency does not fully state what it actually is.

Although it adequately describes what the cause is, it fails to state the effects which make the problem a problem.

I have grown up with this problem due to the fact that both of my parents are or were drug addicts.

The words chemical dependency, or drug addiction means something completely different for those people who are struggling with it, or loves someone who is trying to overcome its effects.

It means anger, hurt, it is a force that tears apart families, destroys friendships, even alters people's personalities.

I have many memories of the changes in both my parents. Dad was always paranoid, and mom was always searching for a kind of freedom that she couldn't have while married. They weren't even friends after a while. I remember all the violence we had to live with.

There are never reasons for people to start taking drugs. There are only excuses, and maybe factors that led up to the decision to try drugs.

Mom & Dad had friends who did drugs, and they were under a lot of stress, and that was their excuse for trying the drug scene.

The decision, no matter how obscure or off-base the reasons, is a conscious decision that can't be made for anyone.

I suppose that the worst part of the whole thing is the one thing that is the basis for the problem.

Lies.

The lies are to cover guilt. The lies cover everything. They end up lying to themselves, the people who care about them, and anyone else who becomes involved in anyway with their lives.

The lies also come in a series of empty promises designed to also handle any left-over guilt. "Sure I'll quit" I've heard that phrase more times than anything else.

At first dad really did try to quit. Then he started to sneak around until the drugs had another firm grip on him and finally he just didn't care again.

He's back on a sneaking around kick again and this time is worse.

The unfair thing is what it does to the kids. Those who grow up around parents who are addicts, and are constantly and unendingly getting shafted by the people they should be depending on most.

Parents think that kids, especially young ones, have no idea what is going on around them. Mine had this attitude.

I can tell you that this is completely untrue. Kids in all their abstract, innocent wide-eyed wonder probably have better ideas about what's going on and why than most adults.

Unfortunately, children are also the most trusting souls on earth, that is until they learn from the people around them that people hurt each other.

I only wish that all kids had enough insight to stay far away from drugs. I'd be lying if I said I had never experimented before, I did, if only to find out what made this stuff more important than family. I never found out, it just wasn't there for me. It was an empty act to hide behind a puff of smoke. Cowardly. Any respect I once held for my parents vanished. What a pity.

I would like it if those kids who want to try drugs or alcohol would find and talk to someone who lived through it. To find out what it does to the heart as well as the mind. From a non-technical perspective.

Sure you get a few minutes or hours of a high, but you get a whole life of pain, denial, and lies in return. It doesn't make much sense.

Revision has been an intriguing concept for me, and a significant one in my practice. Its meaning, to "see again," to perceive an object or subject in new ways, is at the very heart of teaching writing and one of the purposes of my conferences with students. The possibilities of understanding, of eliciting memory, of creating interpretation, of coming to

know new meanings offer significant experiences to their writing lives. Murray writes in many different ways about revision. In *Learning by Teaching*, he theorizes: "In the writing process approach, the teacher and student face the task of making meaning together. The task is ever new, for they share the blank page and an ignorance of purpose and of outcome" (1982, p. 26). Both Jess and I were astounded, and pleased, with the outcome. The question I posed offered her a significant audience to her life experience. She had intimated in the ending of her first writing a note of warning to others, "what a mistake it can be to yourself and those around you." I asked her to give a new understanding of chemical dependency, or, as we both understood it, drug abuse, to those of us who can't know what it really means: "It means anger, hurt, it is a force that tears apart families, destroys friendships, even alters people's personalities." What powerful testimony. She defines her own experiential knowledge for others in this second writing. And she offers that experience in ways she hadn't earlier, admitting, for example, that she'd tried it "to see what they could see in it."

I believe her ability to transform this writing from herself as the primary audience to an audience of others lay in part in the relationship we had established in the conference. Had I focused on another question, had I responded differently, had she been in a different place psychologically or emotionally, this knowledge may never have revealed itself to her. She is able to universalize, to an extent, her own childhood suffering and communicate what other children and families suffer from drug abuse: "a whole life of pain, denial and lies in return." And most importantly from my perspective, had I initially been unable to respond to her pain and suffering, to acknowledge her experience as well as her knowledge as a person living beyond that experience, this writing might never have emerged. As listeners, we are witnessing our students' stories. Whether autobiographical, fictional or analytical, their writing represents the ways in which they perceive and interpret experience. One by one, conference by conference, as listeners, though "ignorant," we elicit aspects of a telling which might not emerge from other

questions or responses or persons or spaces. What we might see, as I emphasize again and again, is neither clear nor can we reflect on it until the language of the student writer becomes documented. There it is, then, between us, both on the page and in our conversation.

O'Reilley speaks of writing as "contemplative practice" (1998, p. 6) and writing exercises a means to it. For us as teachers, part of that "contemplative practice," as we engage with our students, is simply about "hospitality." O'Reilley writes, "Hospitality defines a space for the visitor—the student—to be herself, because she is received graciously. Indeed, if real inner searching is going on, real multivocalism practiced, the transcendent disciplines of courtesy become essential to civil exchange" (p. 8).

In *The Performance of Self in Student Writing*, Newkirk addresses the critics of personal writing who object to the writing teacher's "role of therapist."

Underlying this criticism is one questionable assumption—that when students write on these topics, they *want* us to assume a counseling role. In most cases this represents a profound and presumptuous misreading of student intent. Paradoxically, these writing situations can be therapeutic precisely because we don't act as therapists. If the first response is "I can't respond to this as a piece of writing because it is so personal. Have you thought about talking to a counselor?" we are denying the student the "normal" role of writer. The experience is stigmatized, it is represented to the student as outside the bounds of normal classroom discourse. The student who may have spent considerable time and energy on the writing sees it confined into a strange category—writing that can't be treated as writing ("I really can't *grade* this.") (1997, p. 19)

Newkirk suggests that a "therapeutic power" lies in our responses, those, at least which offer a normalizing effect when we regard such experiences as "an artifact, a construction, a relatively stable representation of experience" rather than as a symptom of an individual who writes about abnormal subjects. "By asking many of the most basic conferencing questions—those that encourage elaboration, reflection, and the exploration of other perspectives—I believe we can respond sympathetically and helpfully. Paradoxically, the writing can most effectively be therapeutic by not being directly therapeutic" (1997, pp. 19-20).

Jess's own evaluation of her work included the following observations:

It took a while for me to effectively write my experiences into one piece with an objective one. I liked writing it though because it gave me a chance to figure out who I was mad at and why. I tried still to make it seem like an objective, not angry peice.

During this course I have learned that really good strong writing comes from both the head and the heart, it is honesty. To make the writing good I had to take *what I knew and how I felt* and combine them. I had trouble figuring this out for quite a while.

I think my best peice of writing was the one I did about drug addiction's effects. It shows a side of me that not many know about, not even best friends or family but it's a side that *I needed to go through and finish sorting out*. This piece helped. It is also the best piece I did with showing emotion and objective fact in one. It turned out something I was comfortable sharing.

I tried to make it as objective as possible without cutting short my personal side of it. It was impossible to do with only one draft.

In his work *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*, James Pennebaker presents his research on the uses of writing to effect cognitive change. Pennebaker employs what he considers to be the non-evaluative nature of stream-of-consciousness writing to attain what he calls "the letting-go experience" (1997, p. 56) to encourage patients to explore traumatic events in their lives. His research found that in the practice of writing, writers gained not only a better understanding of the circumstances of their lives, but of "their own feelings and emotions" (p. 42). "The letting-go experience signals the temporary stripping away of many of our normal social constraints or inhibitions" (p. 47). Inhibition, as Pennebaker explains, requires a "profound effort" to sustain. He found that "when individuals inhibit they fail to translate their thoughts and feelings into language" (p. 103).

His research offers us a theory of free-writing as a "disinhibited psychological state" (p. 100). Pennebaker concluded from his study of groups of students, "High-level thinking is characterized by a broad perspective, self-reflection, and the awareness of emotion. Low-level thinking is the relative absence of these attributes" (p. 61). This perception of the highly personal nature of writing may offer other means of "reading"

and responding to our students' writing, of giving validity to their feelings, emotions and personal experiences, particularly in their initial attempts to make sense of experience.

Yet encouraging student writers to relinquish inhibitions that have become a learned tendency in school, and particularly in their adolescent lives, becomes an ethical concern. We encourage our students to "take risks" in order to learn, but our classrooms are not necessarily risk-free. Rogers offers some parameters within which students might take such risks without risking vulnerability. In discussing the creative act as an ability "to juggle elements into impossible juxtapositions, to shape wild hypotheses, to make the given problematic, to express the ridiculous, to translate from one form to another, to transform into improbable equivalents" (1961, p. 358), Rogers advises that such "spontaneous toying and exploration" require certain conditions: First, it "cannot be forced but must be permitted to emerge" (p. 356), and second, "a condition of psychological safety must be established in order to foster such internal possibilities" (p. 358). This "condition of psychological safety" depends upon the nature of relations established between therapist and client, between teacher and student: an attitude of "accepting the individual as of unconditional worth"; having "unconditional faith in him, no matter what his present state"; "providing a climate in which external evaluation is absent"; and "understanding empathetically" (p. 358). These criteria have become to some degree the criteria of my own practice. I have learned that to the degree to which I can sustain these conditions with individuals and classes, the greater their sense of personal and academic success.

H. Anderson's work supports this perception of relations. Her approach to a therapy of not-knowing suggests

...that we position ourselves with our clients in a different manner. This altered position is what I refer to as a *philosophical stance*—a way of being in relationship with our fellow human beings, including how we think about, talk with, act with, and respond to them. (Anderson, 1995)...It is an authentic, natural, spontaneous, and sustained position that is unique to each relationship and to each discourse...And it shifts away from thinking in terms of our roles and functions as therapists [teachers] to considering our *relationships* with the people we work with. (1997, p. 94)

In some respects it was for me simply that shift from concentrating on my teaching to concentrating on my students and their learning—a major shift, nonetheless.

In *Relational Responsibility*, Sheila McNamee articulates the possibilities that altering “the positionings” of those engaged in dialogue can open, in a way that is significant to the writing conference:

To talk with a new voice is to invite the other to treat one in a different way; to define oneself differently also defines the other in a new way. Alternative dances of relationship are thus invited. For example, to move from the position of authority to questioner, from the assured to the ambivalent, or from the angry to the sympathetic invites an alternative identity from the other. To become the questioner invites the other's authority; to be ambivalent opens the way for the other's ambivalence... If effectively pursued, relationally responsible inquiry has transformative potential for the participants. (1999, p. 27)

These relational shifts in the conference, and in the classroom, serve to reduce the resistance with which students enter my classes. The shift from my role as the voice of authority, both in teaching and in controlling behavior, to that of a knowledgeable, empathic individual interested in the voices of my students, without judgment, remains my most difficult, and most effective, challenge. From my experiences, I believe these conditions are essential to the writing relationship. Under such conditions, as Rogers claims, the “locus of evaluation” becomes internalized, no longer outside oneself; thus “the student can permit his ‘real’ self to emerge, and to express itself in varied and novel formings as it relates to the world” (1961, p. 358). These criteria are significant to our purposes in teaching writing, particularly. Our goal is to model for the student what she can later do for herself, i.e. learn to become a critical reader of her own writing in various ways, sustaining empathic abilities as well, relying less and less on externalized forms of evaluation and final judgment such as the teacher's responses or the grade. The ability to express herself becomes tied to her developing sense of identity.

“No one ever told me I could write!” was a statement Vincent made indignantly after winning a school-wide writing contest with his simple piece about the farmer. Sue gained a more conscious awareness of who she was in relation to her sisters and her

coach-father. Joe created a small opening in which he could see himself through his father and grandfather. Eli discovered qualities in herself she had never before expressed. What I did was to give permission to try, to falter, even to fail, encouraging all the while, acknowledging their efforts, affirming what each writer created and uncovered in the process. The writing conference became, for me, a central means for teaching. It was the space in which I learned how to listen, to give attention to students, rather than perpetuate the "teacher narration" about which Freire speaks, and to which I had a trained propensity. In learning to listen, I had to learn other things in the process. As H. Anderson emphasizes, "The stance is not a technique or a theory. It is not manipulative, strategic, nor contrived, as thinking about it cognitively might suggest. It is not deliberate in the sense of being acted; however, it is intentional. I purposely want to be open, genuine, appreciative, respectful, inviting, and curious..." (1997, p. 107).

Carl Anderson proposes, "When we finish a conference, we should be able to name what it is we did to help that student become a better writer" (2000, p. 9). More often than not, I'm *not* able to do that. First of all, his statement implies an expectation that every conference successfully teaches an immediate and assessable objective, and minimizes the significance of creative and relational processes. It also denies the unfinished nature of the conference. It may take several conferences, perhaps even several months or the entire year, to be able to "name" what it is I have "taught," if it is nameable at all. And my experience is that until the student can begin to articulate that learning, my teaching is not complete. Neither the student nor I know what is going to happen with the writing. In teaching not knowing, we engage our students in processes, in relations and in dynamics in which they learn to become comfortable in their not knowing and thereby learn in ways that are unanticipated and unpredictable, creating what H. Anderson calls "the potential for unknown newness" (1997, p. 32). In my experience there is no predictably logical or linear movement or development in the context of the conference. This same unpredictability can be attributed to the internalized

dialogue that continues in the writing that ensues. These young writers learn to pursue their ideas in non-linear ways, following the language of their own voices, those they have internalized in their experiences, and those voices that begin to emerge in the process of dialogue.

In the next chapter I focus on the nature of resistance that comes with the territory of teaching and challenging adolescents. Bakhtin (1981) distinguishes the authoritative word from what he refers to as "internally persuasive language," our real goal for our students, i.e., to teach them how to struggle within the creative tensions of language and meaning in order to integrate them into their own claimed meanings. Kay Halasek (1999) adeptly refers to "purposeful resistance" as an essential process in the development of individuals. How we perceive and respond to those forms of resistance shapes our conferences and, consequently, the possibilities that may open for their writing.

CHAPTER 4

"PURPOSEFUL RESISTANCE"

A pedagogy of possibility seeks to engage students in purposeful resistance. Once students have understood the nature of languages to influence and inform their ways of seeing and constructing the world, students are in a position to release themselves from the power of the authoritative word...A student's claimed languages and freedom from the authoritative word simply prepare her for the larger task of purposeful resistance. That is, her discourses must not simply name and reject the authoritative word but must generate answerable utterances that provide alternatives to or improvements upon those conditions she sees as unsatisfactory. (Kay Halasek, *A Pedagogy of Possibility*, 1999)

Resistance and the Authoritative Word

Adolescents live resistance moment by moment. We know that resistance is a natural and necessary part of adolescent development, yet our educational systems make every attempt to repress, rather than to encourage it. The system calls for 'sameness.' Fairness and consistency, in educational terms, mean acknowledging only similarities and not difference. Students, despite their uniqueness, are constantly measured against rules for behavior, standards for grading, requirements for course work. Tests often reflect the questions and priorities of the teacher with little if any opportunity for the student to engage in original inquiry, to pursue questions and issues outside a pre-defined curriculum. There is little time for actual learning and for extended periods of reflection and response; furthermore, in this model, there is little room for allowing students to become comfortable in the confusion and uncertainty that inquiry entails. Learning to live for a time with paradox and ambiguity, with conflicting and opposing views, is a critical skill. This process is rarely invited into the classroom, however, nor are the stories of their own realities invited into the curriculum. Shaping their own identities becomes a process separate from their experiences as knowers. The result, of course, is resistance on the part of the student to learning based on their

own powerlessness and on the exclusive power of authority to define their learning—a resistance to an “ideology of control” (Noddings, 1992, p. 62).

My students’ resistance to dialogue often proves to be an initial factor in their capacity to accept my invitations into conferences. Schooled in what Bakhtin calls “authoritative discourse,” that which “demands... unconditional allegiance” (1981, p. 344), students have been trained to remain passive, waiting for directions and assignments, the “word,” that will move them along in school. There is little time, opportunity or space for engaged listening beyond that authoritative word. An alternative process, requiring a process of relations, relies on the teacher’s capacity to concede, not impose, authority and power. Often, however, when the control of the teacher’s authoritative word is removed, having not learned how to engage with others, student discussions easily deteriorate into anarchy, arguments and debates which allow few if any participants to think carefully about issues, opinions and ideas. In the heat of what some students love, the battle for the word, learning dies. Teaching students how to become receptive in Noddings’ terms, to become comfortable in the presence of conflicting and as yet unnegotiated ideas and language, requires that we offer them opportunities to develop these skills on a regular basis.

Shawn was a senior in an advanced English class, a place in which he wasn’t comfortable. He didn’t like school in general. His work was often incomplete or inadequate. But like many kids in high school, he talked a good talk. He loved arguing, and he turned most attempts at discussion in the class into arguments which he easily manipulated through strength of voice, semantic play, interrupting and attacking others—characteristics that inhibit everyone’s ability to engage in productive dialogue. In her article, “A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method,” Janice Moulton points out that “aggression is thought to be related to more positive concepts such as power, activity, ambition, authority, competence, and effectiveness—concepts that are related to success...” (1989, p. 5). The danger of such aggression in classroom discourse,

although considered “fun” by many of my students, is that its effectiveness in silencing others promotes the belief that the most aggressive person may be right (since his perspective is the most enduring) and that the development of aggressive behavior is therefore necessary to voice one's ideas.

Frustrated, I asked Shawn's class one day to distinguish between their perceptions of argument (or debate as they called it) and discussion. I put the words on the board and invited them to offer their gut responses and associations with each. Almost immediately, many realized what was happening. Discussion, they said, was open to others' ideas, to listening, to learning. It meant delving into the deeper aspects of ideas. It was, they said clearly, “a win/win situation.” Everyone came out of it with something. Arguments or debates, on the other hand, were competitions about winning, and often only about that. The aim was about whose voices were the loudest or most aggressive or intimidating or the most confident sounding, or even just the most enduring. These seniors understood that it often had little to do with learning. In arguments, they “listened” (or perhaps heard) only long enough to plan an attack or formulate in their own heads what they would say next. They pronounced it “a win/lose” situation. It was about ego, about impressing others, anything but opening themselves to new or different ideas. But Shawn spoke up and suddenly made it clear to me that for some, it was also about a sense of “self,” as he put it. He expressed his own fear that he might be wrong, and that he might, as he phrased it, “lose my sense of self” in the dialogue. I was stunned by the honesty of his comment. It was something I had never considered.

Palmer states, “We fear encounters in which the other is free to be itself, to speak its own truth, to tell us what we may not wish to hear. We want those encounters on our own terms, so that we can control their outcomes, so that they will not threaten our view of world and self” (1998, p. 37). Such insights helped me to learn how to be in dialogue with students in ways that might mitigate their anxiety about being “wrong,” ways to be myself and not the authority on their writing, ways to listen and to respond

that would encourage them to enter the complex tensions and negotiations of dialogue as Bakhtin describes it (and as Shawn experienced it):

The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse....(1981, p. 276)

In the struggle for meaning to emerge, the authority of voice is born. As James Wertsch states, Bakhtin viewed meaning “as an active process rather than a static entity. He insisted at many points that meaning can come into existence only when two or more voices come into contact: when the voice of a listener responds to the voice of a speaker” (1995, p. 52). For Bakhtin, understanding *is* a dialogic process. “In Bakhtin’s view, the notion of sole, isolated authorships is a bogus one. An essential aspect of his construct of dialogicality is that multiple authorship is a necessary fact about all texts, written or spoken” (p. 49). If we accept this as writing teachers, then we must acknowledge the space of dialogue as essential to our work with students.

Nel Noddings states, “Dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process oriented, but it is always a genuine search for something undetermined at the beginning” (1992, p. 23). The improvisational play of dialogue and the unrehearsed negotiation of meaning that ensues implies a relational context in writing conferences that requires of us ways to understand what it means to teach not knowing. Implicit in this context is our engagement with others. Resistance is a necessary factor of adolescent life, and acknowledging that reality is a necessary factor in our teaching lives. The ways in which we choose to perceive, acknowledge and meet it in our work with students profoundly affects our relationships in that process and, ultimately, the quality of their learning.

Loosening Resistance

When my students come to conferences initially, I have to be prepared for the reticence or even resistance that has built up within many of them over the course of years to the kinds of criticisms and the attitudes of teachers that train them only to obey a narrow set of instructions for writing. As Carnicelli states,

Involving students in the criticism of their own writing can be a long and slow process. Students must learn to trust the teacher, the conference method, and their own abilities. They must learn to view the teacher, not as a grade-giver, but as a resource and guide. They must learn to understand that errors and bad drafts are part of everyone's writing process, that their mistakes will not be held against them. They must learn to develop confidence as writers and self-critics. *Such profound changes don't happen overnight.* [emphasis added] (1980, p. 115)

But how do we begin? Romano and other composition teachers have often used the phrase "to cut students loose" (1987, p. 102). From what, we might ask? From the authoritative attitude of the teacher, perhaps; from their own anxiety over grades, an anxiety which I believe inhibits learning; from their habits of comparing their work to that of others, when, in fact, they need to look at their own histories and development as writers and personal challenges as learners; from old voices that discourage or criticize or disparage—voices internalized long before high school; from their naïve assumption that the first writing they do is all they can do; from a fear of uncertainty—an attitude learned in the systematic grading of everything they do. Romano encourages us to "get them to value their own words, respect writing, play with words, exercise options, and question themselves about their drafts" (p. 102). Opening up these possibilities initiates processes for meaning and understanding.

To begin that aim is to acknowledge the integrity of our students. Some high school teachers with whom I have worked have expressed a cynicism about giving students "false praise," being too mindful of their "self-esteem" and not their education. Being labeled 'the process person' in the '80's in my own department—a pejorative term implying an inadequately developed philosophy of undisciplined, less rigorous approaches, with few expectations of students and their writing, and with "suspicions,"

as Herrington and Curtis remind us, of “laxity and ineptitude” that often seeped into our own doubts (2000, p. 3)—my practice was seen as lacking rigor by some teachers whose traditional, intimidating approach to students, by all appearances, were more demanding and exacting. Parker Palmer reconceptualizes a notion of ‘rigor’ in relational terms, more appropriate to the concept of a process pedagogy: “The practice of intellectual rigor in the classroom requires an ethos of trust and acceptance. Intellectual rigor depends on things like honest dissent and the willingness to change our minds...” (1993, xvii). Romano (along with Murray, Newkirk, Carnicelli and others) has modeled such an ethos for many of us:

Humanely conducted conferences begin relationships of trust, understanding, and support, which nurture and seal positive bonds between teacher and students. When such relationships develop, communication lines clear; student and teacher are receptive; learning is ready to happen for everyone.

The initial job of the teacher is to make the student feel worthy, comfortable, and accepted. The teacher’s tone of voice should extend respect and courtesy, not imperiousness or condescension. (1987, p. 86)

Rogers emphasizes this attitude, what he refers to as “being fully *received*,” as basic to development as a person, “the concept of being understood, empathically, and the concept of acceptance” (1961, p. 130). He explains,

It is my purpose to understand the way he feels in his own inner world, to accept him as he is, to create an atmosphere of freedom in which he can move in his thinking and feeling and being, in any direction he desires. How does he use this freedom?

It is my experience that he uses it to become more and more himself. He begins to drop the false fronts, or the masks, or the roles, with which he has faced life. He appears to be trying to discover something more basic, something more truly himself. (1961, p. 109)

When a student enters the conference with me, I try to acknowledge that his inner life experiences may inhibit his ability to converse or write, at this moment, and I assume that each individual student wants to be able to communicate well, to find ways to express himself so that others understand and respect what he believes and knows. I have recognized serious psychological problems in students who I knew could write but who weren’t able to produce any writing over a period of time. One student admitted that he

had been punished as a younger child by being forced to write for hours at home, what he recognized as abusive behavior. Another student needed several days' private time in which to write and not share with anyone, including me, an easy request to manage. Such personal situations in their lives need to be acknowledged and respectfully addressed. Writing requires a different kind of psychic energy than most disciplines. In the processes of writing, students need to access their complex, inner lives as well as find ways to articulate their realities in a public domain. What a profound process in which to engage adolescents.

In his attempts to form a "conceptualization of the process of personality change in psychotherapy," Rogers offers one "basic condition":

...that the client experiences himself as being fully *received*. By this I mean that whatever his feelings---fear, despair, insecurity, anger, whatever his mode of expression---silence, gestures, tears, or words; what ever he finds himself being in this moment, he senses that he is psychologically received, just as he is, by the therapist. There is implied in this term the concept of being understood, empathically, and the concept of acceptance. (1961, p. 130)

My own ability to accept this "basic condition" in working daily with adolescents, developing my own capacity to reach beyond the fears, anger or silence in students, has become critical to establishing the kinds of relations within which students are willing to make a commitment to their writing.

I sit and face angry students, a few students every year, most often boys, whose writing is facile, objective, general, filled with empty rhetoric. They have been considered good writers in school. They become defensive when I ask them to engage with me in dialogue about their writing. I explain my concerns: Their writing offers no insight into how they arrive at such generalizations. It usually lacks voice, passion, and, unfortunately, meaning. I acknowledge these students for the learning they *have* done, their apparent ease with, and ability to manipulate, language. They have been trained in "the demands of linear, discursive practices that diminish emotional life" (Salvio, 1994,

p. 21). They have not, however, moved into their own lived experiences—too often I find they don't trust those spaces, they have not yet been led there—and their writing usually does not move beyond the superficial until they experience, even once, writing for their own, real purposes. Once that happens for these young writers, their writing and their perceptions of themselves as writers, and the possibilities of their future writing, become altered, transformed in some ways.

The following section in italics is taken from my article "Listening beyond the text," in *To Compose*.

Rich was one of the few students at the beginning of a semester who said he felt comfortable with writing. He made it clear he didn't have any problems or anxieties and didn't need to do drafts. Like many "good writers," Rich was wary, and he avoided meeting me at the conference table. For confident writers, writers who have met with some success before, the risk is greater, the criticism more devastating. Rich tossed his first paper on my desk and walked away, announcing that he had "completed the assignment."

*I wasn't quite sure how to deal with his attitude, so I took the paper home that night and read it. Twelve pages on *The Grateful Dead*, on every conceivable aspect he could think of, from standing in line for tickets to naming members of the group, a little of their history—a montage of his knowledge. Around page nine a phrase caught my eye: "their musical evolution." I circled it, the only mark I made on the paper, and called him to the conference table the next day.*

His body language let me know that he didn't want to hear anything critical about his piece. I know this feeling from personal experience, and my purpose is not to be critical in a way that might discourage the writer—certainly not until he has become comfortable about the worth of his writing. For some student writers, that point takes months to achieve. I talked with Rich about my observations, said I'd learned some

things about the group from the paper, that I knew many students who liked the Dead. I just talked. He waited.

Finally he said, "Are you going to ask what it's about?" He'd heard the question from me before.

"Go ahead. Tell me what you intend it to be about."

"It's obviously about The Grateful Dead."

"Yes. But what about them?"

He was ready. "Their concerts!"

I ignored him. "It seems to me one of the most significant ideas in this piece, here on page nine, is this idea of "musical evolution." It struck me as pretty interesting. It seemed to say something, though I'm not sure what."

He was listening. I continued. "Is it something, an important idea for you?"

He looked sideways at me, skeptical of what I was trying to do. "Yeah. But you mean I have to rewrite twelve pages?"

It was an accusation. But I was ready for him.

"No. This short section alone offers a wonderful subject. Seems to me you could just focus more on that. What do you think?"

He was quiet for a moment.

"Yeah. Good idea," he mumbled, and left.

Rich went on to revise those pages, developing that specific focus. More importantly, he began to trust the conferences because he saw the meaning of them: finding ways to improve what he had to say, not what I wanted him to say. I listened as a reader who wants to know, not as a teacher who controls and directs his writing. This was part of my initial struggle with learning how to negotiate my way in writing conferences. Adolescents are naturally resistant to sharing and particularly to criticism. It is not about "false praise"; it is about acknowledging the worth of the writer and his or her ideas, no matter how they are expressed initially.

I am interested in the language Rogers uses in "A Process Conception of Psychotherapy" as one means of exploring what happens when my student writers engage in writing processes. In his own effort to understand process, Rogers offers a

language applicable, I believe, to an understanding of processes that take place in writing and which are valuable in the teaching of writing. As a therapist, he speaks of “wandering naively in the incredible complexity of the therapeutic relationship. Small wonder,” he says, “that we prefer to approach therapy with many rigid preconceptions. We feel we must bring order *to* it. We can scarcely dare to hope that we can discover order *in* it” (1961, p. 130). My own traditional training required that I read carefully and correct student writing and, if I met with students at all, it was to explain the problems of the paper (usually grammatical and syntactic) and the solutions that would make the paper (but not the student’s writing, I learned) better. The problems of the paper were mine to discover and solve. Once I had inadvertently had a conference in which a student held her paper and for which I had no reference other than her own questions and observations, the writing conference became a place in which I learned to listen differently. I no longer required of myself the responsibility of bringing “order *to*” the conference or to the writing, but began instead to look for kinds of order within the context of our dialogue and within the unfinished quality of their writing and thinking. And the immediate effects upon students proved invaluable. This discovery made radical shifts in my teaching and in my relationships with students.

Acknowledging Resistance

Molly, a freshman, was an excellent writer, prolific and often eloquent. Perfectionism was her obstacle. Many students will not write unless they know it will come out well. Their standards are so high that they cannot breach the threshold of perfectionism, and it prohibits moving further in their writing experiences. In Molly’s class, a fiction workshop, I created a writing experience influenced by a novel I had read by Ursula Hegi. In *Intrusions*, Hegi’s protagonist, a writer/mother/wife, encounters her fictional characters in person and they pursue her, literally, throughout her house, arguing about decisions she has made for them as characters. I read a couple of those strange conversations to my students (one about buying a first bra!) and then ask them to

have a dialogue with *their* own characters. There are many objections, of course, that they don't *know* their characters, that it is "too weird," that they don't know how. I persist, ignoring their complaints and get them writing quickly.

Molly sat in frustration through the fifteen minutes, unable or unwilling to try dialogue. Her fiction story was well written, but I pointed out in conference the next day that she had no dialogue, merely narration. She refused to write dialogue and tried to justify her story without it. I listened. Finally she admitted that she had never been able to write dialogue well. I urged her to try, explaining the possibilities that dialogue could offer, and she relented, knowing that she didn't *have* to incorporate it into her final work. She declared, however, that she *would, instead*, write a conversation between her main character and a friend, rather than my 'assignment' of a dialogue with her character, as a way of trying it out and getting to know her better. Needless to say, Molly was skeptical, but she ended up writing two dialogues:

"Hey! I heard that you're going to your grandmother's this summer."
 "Ya, I can't wait!"
 "Doesn't she live in Europe?"
 "Germany."
 "That's so cool. I wish my grandmother lived someplace like that."
 "It's nice to see Germany when I visit her, but it's so hard not having her with us at Thanksgiving and birthday parties, and things like that."
 "So how do you even know her?"
 "Well, we used to live next door to her until she moved two years ago, and we were really close."
 "It must be hard for you."
 "She comes to visit at Christmas and Easter, but it's not the same."

The dialogue continued. Then Molly decided on her own to have her character talk with her Grandmother:

"Hi Grandma!"
 "Oh, hello, dear. Are you excited?"
 "Yes! I can't wait to see you!"
 "We're going to have a lot of fun. We can go anywhere you want or you can just relax and enjoy your summer."
 "I want to go to the top of the bell tower you told me about."
 "Yes. That truly is beautiful. Once you climb all those stairs."
 "Is the view amazing?"
 "Spectacular. It's so breathtaking. You must be able to see 100 miles of rolling green hills outside the city."
 ...

She continued their conversation. When Molly returned to me, she was pleased that the dialogue was more realistic than she'd expected, and she chose to include dialogue in her story. She later wrote:

Writing a conversation between my main character and her friend allowed me to gain insight on her background and personality. The conversation reveals a part about my character that I didn't know existed so passionately in her. I always knew that my character loved her grandmother, but I was unaware of the depth of that love. This conversation and also the other one I wrote both gave me a new understanding of my character and her grandmother's relationship and the strength of the bond between them. My conversations (especially the second one) gave me insight into a part of my character that I knew existed, but that I never suspected existed that strongly and passionately.

It is interesting to me that Molly writes about the dialogue as if she were writing about knowledge of a real relationship. The writing itself has revealed (created) a bond between the characters that the writer hadn't consciously chosen. Not believing she could write dialogue and not yet knowing her characters' feelings, Molly wrote into an understanding of both.

Mark: Teaching Through Resistance

My perceptions of teaching shifted again and again as I learned ways to "teach not knowing" and to assist resistant students into that space. I learned from conferences with Mark, particularly, about the nature of resistance that many high school students accrue over the years toward school-related learning. They recognize school as an obstacle course of meaningless facts and tests which they must endure in order to reach the goal of getting beyond it all, rather than an on-going involvement in meaningful and life-related inquiry. Their (appropriate) resistance to an authoritarian conception of knowledge expresses itself through the passivity, cynicism and, perhaps most destructive of all, silence that undermine the purposes of education. John Lofty writes of this resistance: "When students enter an institution that does not recognise the contours of their own lives and values, their time in this setting becomes inauthentic and alienating"

(1992, p. 203). That alienation, played out in our classrooms, is as demoralizing for us, as educators, as it is for our students. Early in my teaching life, I believed these forms of resistance were the faults of the learners or, at least partially, my own incompetence, rather than knowing enough to try to understand the nature and sources of their resistance.

Mark was in a sophomore literature class. I learned to put aside my expectations and to listen to him and, despite his strong cynicism about schooling, to hear his perceptions about learning. He had been in the “low level” classes before that year, those tracked classes designed for students who need more skills work “at a slower pace,” a group realistically ranging from students with learning disabilities to non-students who refuse to comply with any aspect of the system. Mark was a reticent spokesperson for the resistance many of my students experience but don’t quite understand and aren’t able to articulate.

Mark didn’t “do assignments.” He silently refused to write, yet he had strong, intelligent responses in the classroom discussions, opinions that often came across as criticism, but also as unexpected insights. He was a reader, and his voice in this class helped me to reconsider the ways in which I might teach through such resistance. His was one of the first classes in which I encouraged the students to make decisions about their reading and writing, offering selections for reading, choices of writing topics and genres, choice of peers with whom they worked, various means for evaluation. I replaced the kinds of quizzes and tests that checked to see if they were reading with journal writing, writing in which they could explore their own questions and ideas in their own language and forms. It allowed me, as well, to interact at various points in that process of discovery. If, for example, a student wasn’t ready to write a formal essay, other forms evolved: letters, internal monologues, fictional scenarios, lists, questions, each time demanding some thinking that they were not yet ready to do in more formal ways. I found that as they learned to accept the confusion that precedes discovery and

to acknowledge the often forbidding and inconstant nature of inquiry, the quality of their writing developed remarkably.

Mark had rejected the written assignments throughout the first months. As a strong reader, he felt competent understanding anything he read and saw no purpose or need in writing down what he felt was already obvious to him: "I don't think I have to do journals for you to know that I'm learning, even though you assign them and I don't do them. Cause I, well, I read the book and I know I understand it, and I don't have to prove it to anyone." He had not before considered writing a means of thinking or a strategy for thinking out what he did not yet know—writing to learn. I didn't understand all this at first; I just gave him some leeway until I could make sense of his resistance and encourage him, rather than stamp him with failure. I tried to focus on what he was doing well and what he was learning, rather than what he refused to do. It was in the conferences that I was able to learn better how to help Mark find purpose and motivation.

In a reading workshop, he chose to read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* because, he said, a friend had recommended it. He finished it in a matter of days. It wasn't until our conference that he began to respond to the kinds of searching questions I was asking of them. I asked a question he could not answer:

"Is Malcolm X a hero?"

He qualified the question: "Is he a hero? Does that mean is he my hero?"

He was a little perplexed, intrigued by an idea that left him thinking, but careful not to fall into any traps. He left to write and to explore his own ideas. It was the first time he had found a reason to write. The conference offered a space in which to acknowledge his ability to think and to challenge that thinking. Without my suggestion, Mark made a list of the pros and cons for himself:

Is Malcolm a Hero to Me

CON'S

Was racist to whites
 Told blacks to by from blacks
 Told blacks to work for blacks
 Didn't like Jews
 Blamed all bad black historical happenings were cause by whites
 Didn't like integration
 Didn't like it when people from his own race wouldn't side with him
 He was a Hustler and a cronic drug user
 Dropped out of school in the 8th grade

PRO's

Over came his racism
 Lead other blacks to become
 Reformed from his street life
 Didn't waste his mind
 Became aware of his presence in a "white mans world"
 Realized he was a man
 Strived to become his best
 Influenced millions to change thier ways
 Understood he was not greater than Elijah Muhammad and Allah

CON

Liked white muslims because they had forgotten thier whiteness, but he would never forget his blackness.

I don't know if Malcolm X is a hero to me. He is sort of a role model because he taught his people that they were men and women that should be treated like humans and not an animal.

Mark had created an assignment that made sense to him. He uses the listing as a means to think more critically about the question, and from that he begins to write. He wrestles with definitions of racism, with what he views as contradictions inherent within Malcolm X's philosophy, and with his own meanings of 'hero.' He wrote out what he labeled "First Draft":

Malcolm X was and still is idolized as a hero by millions. Not only blacks, but by all other races. He was one of the most intelligent men in America because he influenced people to do the right thing, and he helped his race to become "men" by the governments standards. He gave his life for his people and he would probably do it again if he had to. He would never give up his pride and his color because he knew that if he did he would have to give up the past, and all the wrongs done to his race.

He never liked a white man until he saw one that had forgotten his whiteness. He said he look at things that were done to black people collectively, and not individually. I think he should have looked at people individually.

He had begun by addressing the idea of hero for "millions," and he questioned the "collective" lens through which Malcolm X viewed racism. He doesn't include himself until the second paragraph in which he uses the evasive term, "role model," not yet ready to address the concept of hero, and again he is critical of the ways in which Malcolm X expressed his philosophy.

To me Malcolm X is a role model because I like what he had to say about the black race but I didn't like the way he said it. Every time he spoke he had something bad to say about the white race or white men. But what he did not realize is that if white men had never brought black men to America there would have been less inventions by black men.

By the third paragraph, Mark has tentatively arrived at his statement:

Malcolm X is a hero to me because he never quit he always strived toward his goal and he died for his beliefs and his goal. His goal was to have his race recognize as human beings not as black men or women, negroes, niggers, or afro Americans. He knew his goal could never be accomplished but he still tried as much as he could to succeed. He overcame his drug problem.

He answered the question for himself, using his own values by which to define Malcolm X as a hero. When we met about this first draft, I asked him to look more critically at some of the statements he had made. I was aware of the risk of losing him at any step in this process. This was the first he had written. He acknowledged that some of the lines, like the reference to inventions, made little sense: "I'm not sure why it's there, anyway." He was willing to look again, to revise, what he had written. He wrote what he labeled the "first draft expansion":

To me Malcolm X is a hero and a role model because I like what he had to say about the black race but I didn't like the way he said it. Every time he spoke he had something bad to say about the white race. He blamed all the bad things that had happened to his race on white men. He should have recognized his race as a very self-destructive race because he used to be self-destructive. He was self-destructive because he did cocaine, pot, heroin, and downers. He also sold drugs and was a pimp. Malcolm is also a hero to me as well as a role model because he overcame his past to help the future. His goal was to have a peaceful future where people of all colors united and became one large race. He never quit he always strived towards his goal.

Mark then reworked the piece, eliminating what he felt was not important and continuing to write toward a clearer perception of his own attitudes and responses to his reading of the man. His final line read, "He pushed towards a goal he knew could never be accomplished, but he still tried as much as he could to succeed at life and his goals."—his clear definition of a hero. In this writing Mark continues an inner dialogue about what Malcolm X had to say and how he said it, critically evaluating what he had read. His resistance to rethinking and revising his work disappeared as he sought truth, as he tested out his own ideas and opinions, as inquiry became a personal process. John Lofty's concept of "existential time" (1992, p. 201), an intense, concentrated, genuine personal engagement in learning "in the here and now" is the rare experience in which we must help our students engage.

Mark stopped working for several days after writing his paper, as the class began a writing workshop. Many students were writing fiction. After some attempts at writing something "different" from the others, Mark asked to be able to read, instead of write. Reluctantly, I let him. In the next three days he read *If I Die in a Combat Zone* by Tim O'Brien. This time he came voluntarily to the conference, asking what I wanted him to write. I knew I needed to be quick about it. I wasn't sure what we could sustain yet in this tensional space.

"Tell me about his [O'Brien's] perspective on war."

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

"Try this. You are Tim O'Brien and your brother..."

"He doesn't have a brother."

"OK, your favorite cousin is signed up to go to Vietnam. Write him a letter and tell him what you think."

Silence. "OK, I can do that."

Mark was not yet ready to write on his own, without our conference; however, his willingness to initiate a conference, as well as to write, marked changes in his attitude

towards his own learning. Our brief dialogues and the questions that arose within them helped him to internalize the questions he would choose that would move him to think further. He returned with the letter:

Jeff,

How are things back home? Over here life is unexplainable. I've heard that you have enlisted, and I regret your decision, but I'm not going to tell you not to join. It's an experience we will never forget (if you come here). All a man has here is his pride and his courage and his death. Over here there are no laws, no rules, killing is something to be proud about, you can't think about what you do because you'll never figure it out. Have you ever seen a man die? or a man get his legs blown off by a mine? How about seeing the person you just shot still alive watching them die? Over here your just another statistic, or just another victim. The media tells you about the victories, but what about the losses? All you have to do is blink at the wrong time, and your life is gone. I've seen it happen in a mine field. Almost half our platoon dies, men with thier legs blown off, and those were the lucky one's some men have been blown to pieces there wasn't enough left to put them in a trash bag. I live this now, and will forever. I'll never forget the people that died, and lived it will haunt me forever.

You should see some of the guys here. They love it. I'm not saying I don't try, but I don't go over board. You can't push it because when you do you usually end up dead.

I'm not trying to dissuade you, but I think you should wiegh the options before you make your own disicion, Jeff.

Sincerely,
Tim Obrien

P.S. Send a picture and write often.

A letter written from Tim O'brien's point of view. I attempted to look at war from his point of view. I think this worked out well because I think I understand him. I have made no revisions (First draft).

The writing helped Mark to explore and express through his own language his understanding of the author's experience. The purpose of this writing is reflective. O'Reilley states, "Reflection is the enemy of authoritarian conditioning" (1998, p. 7). Mark, like Holden, resists the "authoritarian conditioning" to which most students who are successful in school acquiesce, often to the detriment of their self-image, confidence, and learning. Mark's reluctance to write is slowly eroding. Earlier in a conversation with him about writing, he had said,

"I can say things but I can't write them. I'd rather talk about it than put it down on paper, cause as soon as I grab the pen to put it on paper, my mind goes blank."

"Do you think writing is more difficult than talking?"

"I don't know. Cause when you write, you just write. No one asks you questions. Like you say, how'd you come up with that? When you're writing you don't think someone is going to say how'd you come up with that? What made you write that? You just write it."

"So the questions help?"

"Yeah. It makes you understand kinda what you think. If you write it down, that's what you think, and no one questions it while you're doing it so you think it's right, you don't know if it's right or wrong and you pass it in."

He had already begun to internalize the questions. He had experienced the processes of dialogue that helped him to elicit language and meaning as he continued to carry it back into his writing. Although he continued to be too conscious of a judging audience, my remaining unjudgmental for this length of time was important for him to be able to write for himself first. Mark, like many others, has learned the patterns necessary to help him do well in an authoritative system. He admitted what he tends to do:

"I'll just write a paper like last year, I was failing English last quarter. I wrote a paper that didn't even, I got an A plus on it. Like I don't want to swear, but I BS'd my way through the whole thing, the whole entire paper and I got an A. And that's when I figured out I could lie on anything, I could lie on any paper."

"You don't consider it real writing. You don't consider yourself a good writer."

"No, it's not real. Like it was about World War II and I wasn't there, so I don't know. All I can do is read about it. I can't relate to it. I can't, you know you say you understand it, but you don't really understand it. If you weren't there, you have no idea what the person's talking about ... Understanding and feeling are two different things. I understood what happened in World War II, I didn't feel what those people felt. Like I understand that you know people are killed everyday. Well, I wasn't one of those people, I didn't see those people killed. I can only hear about it. I don't know. You'd have to experience something like that... Like the work I did last year wasn't even hard. I had four weeks to do that essay I talked about. I did it in 3 minutes. And it wasn't even hard. It was easy, and I like BS'd my way through the whole thing, cause it's nothing I could ever experience."

"And you don't consider yourself a good writer."

"No, because I lied. If I sat down and wrote to the teachers, I can't write this essay because I wasn't there. I can only read about what they felt, I can't go through what they felt. I can't feel the pain they felt."

Like Holden, Mark tries to make sense of a system that allows and rewards such “lying,” and like Holden, because he can’t make sense of it, he assumes the fault must be, at least partially, his. Both experience cynicism (for the right reasons) and discouragement about the realities of schooling. Both blame themselves for the resistance they feel to what they find inconsequential, or worse, false. Both seem locked in a struggle for truth, for their own expressions of reality. Under such conditions, all they are required to do is minimal work, and pushing themselves beyond the edge of the comfortable and familiar seems pointless. As Mark states, “Just because I get a bad grade doesn’t mean I don’t know what I’m doing... Just because I get an A doesn’t mean I have an education.”

When he next read *Native Son* by Richard Wright, a book he chose from among a selection of ten books by African American authors, Mark described it in a journal entry as a work that could have changed his perceptions about blacks, had he been prejudiced in the time in which it was written,

... cause it shows his feelings. His emotion. And he also feels that he was called on to be black. He has to be black cause that’s what everyone says he is. And that’s the way that they see him. Because of his color. They didn’t say, “This person has feelings, maybe we shouldn’t see him that way.” They say, “He’s black.”

Other students were having difficulty reading the novel and were not able to finish the book. Some found it difficult to get through the philosophical rhetoric of the third part of the book, so I asked Mark to write and explain to them (a new audience) what he felt the last book of the novel accomplished and to choose some passages he might share:

Bigger

The last book shows Biggers ignorance to death. The passages I chose are from pgs. 388-392 and pgs. 366-367. I chose these passages because I think this clarifies Biggers character. Finally someone knows what he thinks, how he thinks, his emotions, and all his feelings. Another man understands where Bigger comes from, and how his life changes so he can live. People didn’t care about Bigger before he killed because he was “just another nigger.” Even after Bigger had killed people didn’t care about him as long as justice is served. They are wrong. They should question his actions, and learn about his life and what he went through so they can try to change his environment.

Just because he lived doesn't mean he had a life. He never even when he killed the first time. He was a human without being one. Every day he lived was just another day until he killed. After he killed he felt he could fool everyone, he was curious he wanted the attention he never had any. He wanted to be caught in spite of white people. He wanted to admit to his killing because he was ignorant to reality. What I mean when I write "he was ignorant to reality" is that he doesn't understand the consequences of his crime. He felt emotions he had never had before. He felt important after he killed. He got mixed up in his emotions and he got confused. He didn't accept death until the end of the book. Even in the end of the book Bigger still has no conception of his punishment. And he knows he will die before he can understand his punishment. No one cared that Bigger was going to die not his family, not his friends, and not the government. Bigger Thomas was someone to blame when people were racist because he was black and had killed. That made him and his race "savages & killers" instead of a confused, and misinterpreted race.

In this analysis Mark even explains his own terminology without being questioned: "What I mean when I write 'he is ignorant to reality...'. " He has worked his way through writing in these weeks to an acknowledged understanding of and empathy for others that exists beyond his own experience. He has come to value writing as a means to challenge his own interpretation of reading and of reality, a challenge he felt he had not before been offered. In an evaluation at the end of the semester, Mark wrote:

I think my reading and writing has improved a lot. Now I read a little slower than before but I have gained more understanding than before. My writing is starting to become more easily done than before this class. I can put my thoughts on paper without my answer being wrong because it has my opinion and to me my opinion is the correct one. The best book I read this year was *Native Son*, and it was the best paper I have written in this English class. I can reason with a book now except in cases of books with no point. I have learned that I can't read about boring and pointless books because they offer no challenge. I want a book that is somewhat hard to understand so I can figure out what the meaning of the book is, and once I do I think I can grasp the concept of the book and not lose what I understand about the book. I learned that I like the kinds of books that you can get into the characters head and share their feelings. I learned that my writing can take the place of talking about the book. Now I am not afraid to voice my opinion.

His greatest source of resistance, his fear that his writing would not demonstrate the quality of his thinking, (a fear we all share as writers), has been largely dispelled and writing now offers new opportunities for expressing his opinion, and voice.

The resistance many adolescents harbor emerges particularly in the processes of writing. Their exploration of personal meaning requires of them a recognition of sometimes competing demands between what others expect of them and what possibilities they may discover in their own emotional and academic lives. I would like to emphasize that this is not about attending only to what teachers consider personal writing, the personal essay, autobiographical writing. It is as much about formal essays, literary analysis, critical thinking, creative writing. It is not about form, but about what happens prior to form, prior to our ability to articulate what we have never before as clearly seen, witnessed, perceived or expressed—writing as testimony to our inner lives. Too many students have learned to craft their writing to the narrow criteria of teachers, without learning the practice of seeing into their own inner lives—their felt responses to their own ideas and the relationships they hold to those of others.

Halasek defines “a pedagogy of possibility” as a practice “which understands teaching as an answerable act” (1999, p. 180). The students’ “answer-ability” and “respons-ibility” are critical aspects of pedagogical practice. Halasek offers four significant criteria for creating such practices:

By seeing pedagogy as an answerable act, we

1. shift the focus on pedagogy from what we *do* (and what our intentions are in ‘doing’ teaching the way we do) to how our teaching is received, which, in turn, allows us to examine the ethics of teaching;
2. begin to examine pedagogy as practice, pedagogy in action—not pedagogy in theory;
3. see differently the reticence, resistance, and accommodation of students;
4. enlarge the responsibilities and contributions of students to pedagogy and the successes of classroom practice.

To this final end, a pedagogy of possibility is... student-generated... That is, a pedagogy of possibility depends upon student engaging discourse and pedagogy in a responsive manner as they strive to construct internally persuasive discourse. (1999, p. 180)

Engaging students in these acts of response means that we must begin to “see differently” the resistance of our students and learn ways to help them negotiate the distances between their own “internally persuasive discourses” and the authoritative

demands of others. Bakhtin's notion of "internally persuasive discourse" depicts what I believe to be the process of movement that language taken into the student-writer's private realm allows. It is that inner sense of developing authority through which the learner may be free to explore, even through resistance, meaning of the other's word, rather than adopting it as authority in and of itself. The experience of such journeys (the connections Joe realized to his grandfather and father; Ann's ability to capture the rhythms of the birth in ways she could not have anticipated; Eli's articulate portrait of her inner life as a goalie; Vincent's realization that he was a writer despite his academic experiences; Sue's creation of a distinct and significant place in her family; Mark's clearer understanding of, and ability to express, his own values)—mark the educative experience: affirmation of their ability to write, of their own values, of themselves as persons. This writing is about celebrations of identity, examples of young writers whose writing portrays Rogers' concept of "moments of movement—moments when it appears that change actually occurs" (1961, p. 130). As Rogers explains of therapy, "the process moves from a point of fixity, where all the elements and threads...are separately discernible and separately understandable, to the flowing peak moment in which all these threads become inseparably woven together" (p. 158). In educational terms, it is a moment of learning, a form of synthesis, when complex understandings become so interwoven that the learner perceives in new and vital ways.

As a teacher of writing, I have observed that such moments do not happen often for students. In the course of a semester, sometimes even a year, most students experience one, maybe two, such significant moments in writing. But what proves important are the beneficial effects it has on the learner. When we acknowledge such dramatic processes together, we celebrate not just what has happened, but the future possibilities of their thought and writing—what Dewey defines as the educative experience. Dewey distinguishes educative experiences by their potential influence on later learning. Educative experiences are "more than immediately enjoyable since they

promote having desirable future experiences” (1938, p. 27). The educator’s role is “to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences” (p. 28), experience that offers “opportunities for continuing growth in new directions” (p. 36). An educative experience effects or creates “the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences” (p. 36). For Dewey, the person of the learner is always essential to the teacher’s purposes, requiring of the teacher “that sympathetic understanding of individuals as individuals which gives him an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning” (p. 39).

My own repositioning as a teacher of writing has created the spaces in which these shifts have enhanced my classroom practice. In *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*, Palmer suggests that our practices must integrate our capabilities for “endurance” and must necessarily model that capacity for our students:

We will not be able to teach in the power of paradox until we are willing to suffer the tension of opposites, until we understand that such suffering is neither to be avoided nor merely to be survived but must be actively embraced for the way it expands our own hearts.

Without this acceptance, the pain of suffering will always lead us to resolve the tension prematurely, because we have no reason to stand the gaff. We will ask and answer our own questions in the silence of the classroom (thus creating more silence); we will ride roughshod over the dissenting voice that confounds our learning plan (even though we said we welcomed questions); we will punish the student who writes outside the assignment (no matter how creatively) to bring him or her back in line.

We cannot teach our students at the deepest levels when we are unable to bear the suffering that opens into those levels. By holding the tension of opposites, we hold the gateway to inquiry open, inviting students into a territory in which we all can learn. (1998, p. 85)

The next chapter focuses in on that point of living in the tension. I use transcripts from the few writing conferences I recorded to demonstrate the ways in which we might learn to respond in order to generate productive writing conferences.

CHAPTER 5

LIVING IN THE TENSION

When approximating understanding does not occur, it is partly because we may not ask the *right* questions, make the *right* responses, or have the *right* background to draw from for that local dialogical exchange. Right, however, does not refer to correct but to fit or coherence. Complete understanding is never possible, primarily because through the interactive process of telling and retelling the experience, the teller's story..., including teller's experiences and teller's understandings, changes, as does the listener's story.... In the process of trying to understand, something different is produced. (Harlene Anderson, 1997, p. 116)

Productive Forms of Tension

Writing conferences rely upon the distinction between practices and techniques. As a dialogic practice, conferences bring us into relationships and we concern ourselves with ways of being with others, rather than merely ways of applying techniques to attain a particular effect. A conference is "a unique, co-constructed space" in which the dialogical process remains "subtle, fleeting, unique, unrepeatable..." (Shotter & Katz, 1999, p. 155). Eero Riihonen names dialogue "a form of joint action, and all participants have responsibilities for its results" (1999, p. 148). A dialogic practice offers far more than a lesson in writing. It teaches learners to internalize the questions inherent to problem-solving—what Barbara Rogoff considers "thinking" —and eventually locates the authority of choice and evaluation within the consciousness of the learner. In their description of "relationally responsible dialogue" (1999, p. 18), McNamee and Gergen abandon traditional operatives of dialogue, "causal patterns in which A causes B to respond (and so on)," which remain still the primary pattern for teaching, in favor of

...A-B patterns in which each of the constituent actions depends for its intelligibility on the other... [T]he phenomenon requires the coordinated actions of both participants... collaborative practices by which persons together determine what constitute rationality and reality.... Thus, meaning is a byproduct of relatedness. (1999, pp. 20-21)

This is not a simple task to undertake with adolescent students, but it is, I believe, a critical one in their development. The responsibility of inviting my students into such dialogic practices and of sustaining them is mine; it means giving them license to ask their own questions, to make choices that I might not consider the most competent, and the freedom to disagree, as well as change their minds. Tobin describes the dynamic aspect of conferences in terms similar to Spohn's concept of what a practice is and does:

If we want to understand how writing conferences work (and why some fail) we need to move beyond a set of rigid rules for writing conference teachers to an approach that takes into account the dynamic aspects of each writing conference: the student's relationship to the text, the teacher's relationship to the text, and the student and teacher's relationship to each other. To be effective, conference teachers must monitor the tension created within and between these relationships and strive to keep that tension at a productive level—for the students and themselves. (1990, p. 99)

The notion of tension becomes intriguing in this complex process and a significant aspect of the relational workings of my conferences. In *Writing as Process: How Writing Finds Its Own Meaning*, Murray writes of a "process of evolving meaning—a constant revolt against intent" (1980, p. 3). He implies a tension within the writer and her writing, created by the very process itself: "Writing is a significant kind of thinking in which the symbols of language assume a purpose of their own and instruct the writer during the composing process" (p. 3).

Qualley writes about this notion of tension in Bakhtinian terms, expanding the dynamic of tension among the writer, the teacher and the writing, within the space of the conference:

I realize the need to provide some kind of situation that poses a counter-discourse (or, in my current language, that allows for a "dialectical encounter with another"), which might expose a students' previously unquestioned assumptions. In a sense I am also seeking to model a process I hope students will learn to perform for themselves: the habit of reexamining their ideas through the lens and frame of an other. (1997, p. 54)

The concept of tension as "counter-discourse" suggests what Gergen (1994) refers to as "some form of supplement, an act of reading and responding by another—which

serves further to shape the use—and thus the meaning of our words” (McNamee, 1999, p. 5). And in that process,

Each person of the dyad is immersed in a range of other relationships—previous, present, and future—and the multiple contexts of those relationships influence the supplementations and meanings developed within the dyad.... Thus meanings are not permanently fixed but are continuously influenced, constructed, and reconstructed over time. (H. Anderson, 1997, p. 42)

Qualley's use of the term “counter-discourse” expresses the subtle practice of challenging and expanding what students already can do and consciously have come to know, asking of them (and modeling for them in the process) what H. Anderson calls “process questions.”

Living in the conference, “We live storied lives with one another” (1997, p. 109). H. Anderson calls that space “a dialogic occasion” (p. 94). Dialogic conversation, she claims, is “a meaning-generating process...[in] its capacity to re-relate the events of our lives in the context of new and different meaning” (p. 109). By its very nature, it provides tension.

bell hooks' concept of “teaching to transgress” implies a form of dialogic practice, as well: “The engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond itself” (1994, p. 11). The tension lies in this resistance, “a movement against and beyond boundaries” (p. 12). And our responsibility becomes that of creating “participatory spaces for the sharing of knowledge” (p. 15). The implication of hooks' notion of transgression in the classroom requires our own involvement as teachers in these processes. She asserts, “That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks” (p. 21). Within the tensions of the conference lie our own vulnerabilities and capacities for movement and change.

In other language, Shashona Felman and Dori Laub (1992) write of tension as a philosophy of crisis: “Testimonial teaching fosters the capacity to witness something that may be surprising, cognitively dissonant. The surprise implies the crisis”:

[I]f teaching does not hit upon some sort of crisis, if it does not encounter either the vulnerability or the explosiveness of a (explicit or implicit) critical and unpredictable dimension, it has perhaps not truly taught.... I therefore think that my job as teacher, paradoxical as it may sound, [is] that of creating in the class the highest state of crisis that it could withstand, without "driving the students crazy"—without compromising the students' bounds. (1992, pp. 53-54)

McNamee's work of "relational responsibility" (1999) implies a productive tension that continuously encourages "conversational moves" (p. 30), "ways of talking that may variously position participants engaged in the process" (p. 31), and which, as she suggests, "can generate alternative ways of indexing actions, excite new forms of curiosity, and provoke catalytic questions" (p. 31). Such professional responsibility is not simply a question of multiple techniques but rather a constant exploration of ways of being in relation, each a "unique case" of its own, as are our ordinary daily conversations with others, family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, and strangers.

These are some of the kinds of tensions I might follow and sustain within the conference relationship. Tension need not imply anxiety or conflict or pressure. "Productive tension," particularly through dialogic practices, engages both teacher and students in creative energies which push thought and feeling beyond present boundaries, into not knowing.

Transcripts of Writing Conferences

I offer a few of my own conferences to portray the kinds of tensions that may arise in the student's struggle to write. I consider the struggle itself invaluable, and necessary; therefore, my work with the students endeavors to sustain the struggle without losing the student's impetus to continue. It is a delicate balance to sustain that tension, and admittedly my experience has been that I am not able to keep that balance for prolonged periods of time. It is one reason I prefer the short conferences.

The first three conferences were taped about fourteen years ago as a way of my studying more closely the effects of my responses on students and their writing. They took place in a writing workshop in my classroom in which students were free to

explore topics of their choice. Certain days were specified for writing conferences. For several years prior to that, I had walked around the room stopping at students' desks to confer, but with age and weak knees, I found my way to a comfortable chair and pulled another along side it. Some years I had a small wooden table at which we sat. Students would come to me if they were "stuck" or "done." Periodically I would call reticent students up to sit with me and talk about what they were doing. I found that some students would disappear for days at a time if I let them, sometimes living with unnecessary frustration or anxiety about their writing. The more often I could touch base with writers, the more comfortable, and more productive, they seemed to become. Usually I do not begin with individual conferences until there is writing underway, and I have found various ways to help them enter the writing. In a writing workshop that might mean giving writing exercises to loosen up or specific readings to discuss or mini-lessons. Writing classes engage us in lots of talk, reading, silent writing, and more talk, sharing, and more talk.

I've learned not to bring the expectations I once had for either the student-writer or myself to that space. It is a space in which we are free to pursue dialogue about any number of aspects of writing, including concerns, frustrations and feelings within the writer herself. For some teachers, these issues lie outside of the purposes of teaching writing, and yet I have found them to be critical to students' abilities to express in writing their own experiences (whether that be in the form of a personal narrative or the analysis of a reading).

The conference is a unique space. Its purpose is (usually) not to praise or to judge the quality of the writing, but rather to encourage students to pursue ideas, feelings or merely a sense of things which they may not yet have thought out or been able to express, but which may emerge into language between us. I want to assist them in eliciting those issues and help them sustain their venture into that space of not knowing, into "the uncertain and beckoning spaces of 'between'" in which "they can learn to

negotiate their way onto firmer ground. And once there, we must ensure that the dialogue continues as all of us, teachers and students, reexamine our positions" (Qualley, 1997, p. 22).

It is early in the year and this is one of the first individual conferences. Eric comes to the conference table: *I'm done! I like it. I don't want to change anything. We don't have to, do we?* Eric approaches the conference with a history of writing, knowing that teacher expectations may demand more than he wants to, or feels he can, write. His is a defensive posture. Many teachers *require* "revision" as necessary to every piece of writing, an automatic step in the series of steps that lead to good writing. As essential as revision is to developing writing, I have learned that it is not necessary for every piece, for every student. Not having yet talked with the writer or read what has been written, I cannot know if the writing is important enough to continue, if we are going to discover another topic or approach—I cannot presume what this student needs at this time. My student-writers learn how to revise in many ways, through whole class workshop, small group discussion, writing quickly by themselves, as well as in individual conferences. My experience with years of student conferences has taught me strategies for teaching writing to whole classes in a workshop approach. The one-on-one conference offered a liminal space in which I could learn about how students think through their writing, how they make decisions (or don't), and about how I could encourage them to enter into the realm of not knowing. My students taught me how to teach writing.

Eric announces that he is "done" and that revision is not necessary for him; like many students, he fears it will not successfully improve his writing. Better, most believe, to leave it as is, to stay with what seems to be working, with what they already know how to write. It is often an unconscious resistance to many factors: the fear we all have of not knowing whether we can do any better or any more; teachers' demands that students' writing become what they want it to be; pressures from grades; and, always,

something of the adolescent need to become independent, take a stand, even defy authority here. Of course most, like Eric, aren't conscious of the complexities of these factors. And it became evident to me how essential it is to my practice to be aware of all of these as I work with individuals and with classes. I hear all this in his opening statement.

Moher: *Well, let's look at the piece more closely, together. You like it.*

So I gently suggest that "together" we look at his writing in a different way, perhaps. This use of the plural "let's" effectively relieves students of the burden of having to figure it all out, having to produce alone what I tell them to do. Instead, I enter a process with them, tentatively inquiring into what it is "we" can observe, discover, talk about. It is a simple method of easing a young writer's anxiety. And I affirm what he has said: "*You like it.*" He responds only to the last, what is for him the more important, statement.

Eric: *Yeah. It's about my three motorcycles. They were sitting there last Sunday in the garage and I wanted so bad to go for a ride.*

Eric has begun talking about his piece, revealing an interest, even a passion, for his subject. Again I affirm his feelings, as a way into this process, hoping to elicit more from him:

Moher: *They mean a lot to you.*

Eric: *Yeah. I can't wait to get them out.*

This early affirming-listening is important to help reduce the student's expectations of the teacher: the judgment, criticism, demand for revision (as Eric assumes). What I look at critically or analytically or emotionally must arise, instead, out of something I encounter in the conference. I assume, too, that he doesn't yet *know* how to revise this particular writing. Neither do I. In this conference I begin "teaching not knowing" by being in relation to Eric and his writing, as he tells me about it, rather than my directly reading it. Were I to take the piece in hand, this process would shift the responsibility to me, rather than remain his, or ours. I would take on the task of finding a problem and solving it by telling him what it needs. I am searching for a way to have him see this writing in a different perspective—open to its possibilities. So I get more specific about "looking more closely." Again, I include myself in this endeavor.

Moher: *Let's look at this from a reader's point of view now. That's a little different.*

Eric: OK

Moher: *You know, I never understood what my husband meant by "What a rush dirt biking is!" until last year when I decided to ride one. Then I knew!*

I tell my own story, albeit a meager one, to show him that I do recognize, and acknowledge, something of his enthusiasm and his knowledge of his subject—and he responds, affirming my feelings now.

Eric: *Yeah!*

Moher: *Do you explain that to a reader who has never known motorcycles and what it is you love about them?*

Eric: *No, I didn't. Yeah, I see. OK I can do that.*

I ask a question about audience, phrasing it for his own reading of his text, ("Do you explain..."), rather than reading it for him and telling him he needs more details here or there. I believe that readers often too quickly take up the writing and ask for information that might be irrelevant to the writer's intent. A teacher's use of such a technique can send the student-writer in a direction that might not be sound for him. Only the writer himself can explore those spaces and gaps to discover meaningful details. A significant distinction between student group conferences and teacher conferences is this ability to allow more freedom for the writer's decisions. Students tend to make suggestions based on their interests (I'd like to hear more about this.) or what they *perceive* to be the interest of the writer. It is a kind of filling in of information that may not be essential to what the writer intends or needs. The subtleties of my conferences are usually more complex and sophisticated than students know how to manage.

My question helps shift Eric, temporarily, from a writer's reading to a reader's. I can presume that he *does* want to communicate his passion and knowledge and experience to others. This is a strange psychological leap for many student-writers—to read their writing from another's perspective. The idea of shifting serves as a catalyst for Eric. He addresses all the nuances of the question: "No..Yeah...OK..." I ask the next

question to confirm a mutual understanding, i.e., that Eric agrees that it is a significant enough point to write:

Moher: *Is it important that your reader understand why they're so important to you?*

Eric: *Yeah. OK. I'll do that.*

I insist students write immediately after a conference. The longer they wait to write, the greater the chance they will lose sight of it or negate the possibilities before even writing. I want Eric to sustain that enthusiasm now that he has seen so clearly what his writing might do. The resistance disappears early in this conference. Like most of us, Eric just wants to be acknowledged as being competent, at least about his subject. There has been no need yet for judgment or criticism, and Eric doesn't yet know that he is in the process of revision.

Amanda follows Eric to the conference table:

Amanda: *I don't know how much to keep in and what to take out. Look!* (She has 7 pages in hand.) *I'm just getting to...*(silence)

She has evidently entered into the writing and has become overwhelmed not by the seven pages but by the amount of writing she can anticipate and the decisions she has yet to make—a common problem for student writers. Many students become anxious about writing too much—they are more comfortable with too little—particularly not knowing how to organize large amounts of material. Amanda enters with a clearly defined problem.

Moher: *...What part?*

I ask her to finish her statement. Her phrasing, "just getting to" is one I identify as that place which the student writer believes to be the center of the piece, and I want her to go there. It holds her interest, her excitement, her energy. Instead she talks about two disparate stories: the part she has written and an earlier scene that she is trying to write in frustration.

Amanda: *The first part (6 pages) is about her that night, when she was found. Now I'm trying to go back a few years to when she first started taking drugs.*

Because she has split the writing into two components, I want her to make a decision about where the heart of the piece lies, and I refer to a strategy about decision-making I had taught earlier.

Moher: *Remember when we talked before about emphasis, compacting parts that are less important and expanding the focus?*

Amanda: *Yeah!*

Moher: *Which is more important: that night or the earlier history?*

Amanda: *That night!* This is the part that is already written.

Moher: *So what did you want to say about before?*

Amanda: *Well, she had run away several times, and she was pregnant, and it all affected her, but not the baby, so they sent her to Concord and took her baby away. She doesn't even know me now! She doesn't know anyone!*

These last two brief lines capture the emotion that lies beneath this writing.

Moher: *Tell it just like that, briefly, but tell the important things.*

Amanda: *Rather than a lot of detail?*

Moher: *Yes, we don't need to be there, as we are that night [in the other section], do we?*

Amanda: *No. Thanks*

I work tentatively, trying to stay close to their responses, periodically checking to be sure (to some degree) that I am not leading them astray, but asking them to consider what is true for them. It is an intriguing process, this "teaching not knowing." I am concerned about balance, that I am not persuading them about something they can't yet see and yet still encouraging them to enter the space of not knowing in search of personal vision. McNamee writes of the "process of relational responsibility" that it is

an exploration that is potentially without end, but each iteration of which may render new insights, positionings, and potential moves in interaction. It is to invite the ambient voices into the dialogue, but without drowning the essential identities necessary for the relationship. It is to explore the multiple voices inherent in the individual without denying the potential to be treated as a unified self. (1999, p. 41)

Bakhtin describes the process of this internalization of meaning in terms of

openness...its capacity for further creative life in the context of our ideological consciousness, its unfinishedness and the inexhaustibility of our further dialogic interaction with it. We have not yet learned from it all it might tell us; we can take it into new contexts, attach it to new material, put it in a new situation in order to wrest new answers from it, new insights into its meaning...(1981, p. 346)

This essential, unfinished nature of our conferences encourages the student writer to turn to an inner authority as she returns to the shaping (and reshaping) of language in the process of writing beyond our conference—often through quick writing. Her ability to do that depends upon my own competence in acknowledging her necessary place in this “process of relational responsibility” without her feeling she has to defer to or adapt my perceptions or knowledge. It requires negotiation, and a developing sense of agency is critical to the negotiation of meaning.

Vicki came to the conference and sat down quietly. She waits for me to initiate the conversation.

Moher: *What's this piece about?*

Vicki: *A painting I have.*

I'm not sure what to say, so I say the obvious.

Moher: *Did you describe the piece?*

Vicki: *Yeah, a little—here.*

I glance at the place she points to; it is short, unsubstantial, though she says that it is about the painting.

Moher: *Can you tell me more about it, describe it so I can picture it?*

Vicki: *Yeah.*

This is an obedient response, I'm afraid. If she leaves now, I'm not convinced she will, or even wants to, describe the picture. I'm not yet sure why she wants to be writing about it. I talk about the "so what" in various ways to students: So, what is important? So, what do you want your readers to know? So, what are you trying to say?

Moher: *Why are you writing about it?*

Vicki: *I like it. It's not great or anything but my sister did it. It was her first painting.*

The "so what."

Moher: *Have you talked at all about her?*

Vicki: *No.*

Moher: *Why don't you go to another piece of paper and just write about her and why she's important to you. See what comes.*

The simple notion of another piece of paper separates this attempt from the previous writing, and students are less apt to be concerned with how it will go together or that it will ruin the organization of the writing they've already done. "See what comes" gives her permission to be nonjudgmental about what she may write. It is not expected that the writing will necessarily be good writing. Our purpose is to explore its meaning.

Vicki seems reticent about my suggestion.

Vicki: *That's hard!*

Moher: *Yes, it is. Do you think your relationship with your sister is important to the meaning of that painting?*

Vicki: *Yeah. OK. I'll try.*

Perhaps she has found a reason to attempt something she might not successfully accomplish. Here the challenge, and the learning, begins, and it is as much about the enhancement of the student's sense of agency, as H. Anderson writes from the perspective of the therapist:

Agency refers not only to making choices but to participating in the creation of the expansion of possible choices. The concept of agency can be likened to having a voice and being free to use that voice or not to use it.

I believe that self-agency is inherent in all of us and is self-accessed. It is not given to us. As therapists we cannot give it to someone, just as we cannot empower someone else; we can only participate in a process that maximizes the opportunity for it to emerge. (1997, p. 231)

The efficacy of this writing relationship enhances the educative purpose; the student becomes more open to the potential, the possible, the actualizing tendencies within her for understanding and articulating her experience. In *Notebooks of the Mind*, a study of creative processes, Vera John-Steiner writes, "The nurturance and expansion of the talents of the gifted individual requires not only the mastery of his or her craft, but also a strong and enduring sense of self" (1985, p. 78). My experience with writing students at all levels has shown this to be true. Helping learners develop "a strong and enduring sense of self" differentiates a writing pedagogy concerned with processes of individuals from traditional methods of teaching writing.

Rogers, as therapist, addresses the individual's natural actualizing tendency "to become his potentialities," that is, "the urge to expand, extend, develop, mature—the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, or the self" (1961, p. 351). Rogers asserts that despite abnormalities which exist in various individuals, "the directional tendency in them can be trusted. The clue to understanding their behavior is that they are striving, *in the only ways that they perceive as available to them* [emphasis added], to move toward growth, toward becoming" (1961, p. 119). His is a profound statement for teaching: It implies, among other things, that I attend to my student's sense of agency, teaching her ways of "participating in the creation of the expansion of possible choices." It means my learning how to meet a student regardless of his stance, whether it be (what I may perceive as) defiant or resistant or obedient or false, with an attitude that is positive, cultivating in myself what Rogers calls "empathic understanding" (1961, p. 53). "When the teacher has the ability to understand the student's reactions from the inside, has a sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning seems to the student, then again the likelihood of significant learning is increased (1994, p. 159). Such an attitude may allow me to reinterpret the stance of my students,

as McNamee suggests in the term she adapts from Cooperrider (1990), developing “voices of appreciation,” a focusing on positive, rather than “deficit,” perceptions of the individual. McNamee suggests,

If we could but access these voices, we might find positive qualities that would open new avenues of conversation. We can see the rude as resolute, the hostile as forthright, the thief as rebel, and the deviant as creative or brave. Such awareness may also enable us to locate a broader range of voices within the other. If our knee-jerk reaction is not that of blaming, we open a space for the other to respond with something different from enmity or defense. (1999, p. 34)

I believe this understanding of dialogue describes our most profound work with adolescents, looking beyond their many purposes of defense, and, rather than confronting them with mutual defiance or donning authoritative voice, we might learn ways to acknowledge in them Rogers’ premise that the human propensity for self-actualizing is ever present. In attempting “listening beyond the text,” (Moher, 1990) I am learning to listen beneath the voices of my students.

These next conferences were recorded more recently during a fiction workshop over the course of a few days. The class had been actively engaged in writing exercises that would help them consider character development, narration, conflict, description and detail, among other things. They were also reading fiction of their choice, often voluntarily sharing or swapping them when they finished.

Allen avoided work; he admittedly felt “lazy” about schoolwork. He was sitting at his seat reading and re-reading, shuffling a few typed pages he had written, looking quite busy. I knew his habits pretty well at that point in the year. I called him over for a conference.

Moher: *What’s it about?*

Allen: *An alcoholic.*

I sensed resistant, if not defiance in his tone. He didn’t want to be confronted. I chose to be direct with him.

Moher: *What does it need?*

Allen: *It could use dialogue.*

I was aware of my own feelings of frustration with him, perhaps from previous interaction. I interpreted no commitment from him to this writing, and I wanted to remain encouraging and open.

Moher: *Why is he an alcoholic?*

I wanted to know what he knew about his character; he might explore the possibilities of dialogue that center around the issues of alcoholism, what his story is about.

Allen: *It's just inherited.*

He dismissed my question. I felt it was important, however, and rephrased it.

Moher: *Well, what in his life has led him to make these decisions?*

Allen began to argue that everyone who has the gene becomes an alcoholic. I decided to allow our digression and we had a brief discussion about alcoholism, talking about people we knew who were alcoholics.

Allen: *My friend's father is a good person! He's bringing my friend up well.*

Moher: *My friend is a good person, too. Not a good father, though. A friend of mine once told me he has a theory that people who are alcoholic are kind, sensitive people who somehow cannot deal with the issues of life.*

I sensed that Allen did not want to invest a lot of time in something that might not work in his story. I talked with him about how he didn't need to write it all into his story, but that the better he understood his character—the more complex ways in which he created him—the more interesting the story would become. And since it was “about an alcoholic,” as he'd put it, he needed to explore this aspect of his character. He grudgingly conceded and returned to his seat to write.

I recognize as a reality in some of my students what McNamee points out about the nature of resistance: “To pay heed to the opposition is to relinquish one's integrity” (1999, p. 13). As a teacher of adolescents I am always conscious of their need to defend what they believe or want to believe, and there is a fine line between pushing

against it to open their perspectives and creating unnecessary and unproductive tension that will inhibit their abilities to learn.

Many students show resistance to writing tangentially, exploring issues that touch upon, and often eventually influence or direct, the writing they do. It is difficult for student writers to break away from a fixed position of what they think it is about or should be about and to delve into questions that arise in the process of writing. They do feel more secure, however, if it is not mandatory that any writing they do become a part of their pieces. The decision is theirs, but the practice of writing is required.

Jeff comes up to have a conference. Anticipating questions, he insists that his story is up to the reader: *"Whatever the reader finds in it is his to have."* So I ask him to write out what is behind it, and I refer to a short story we had recently read, "Underwater," by Luis Arturo Ramos. An understanding of the story had required some intense discussion among members of the class into what was really going on. The author creates two simultaneous but incongruent worlds—a paradox which the students had to consider in order to make meaning of it. *"The author must know the story. So, write out what is behind it—as in 'Underwater.'"*

I explained that not everything the writer knows has to be incorporated into his writing.

Jeff saw the sense of the suggestion and left to write.

Nicky looked to me from her seat and announced, *"Mrs. Moher, I'm procrastinating!"*

I called her over to the seat beside me.

Moher: I laugh at her openness. *Why?*

Nicky: *Because I have to write about her friends, and I just can't get started.*

Moher: *So write about one. No, write a letter from one of her friends to you.*

Nicky: *Ok. Can I make it after her death?*

Moher: *Sure.*

Carla was struggling. She had not done well the first half of the year and was trying to turn around her habits of not working. She had had a brief conference with me

earlier. She had been reticent about writing and had few skills to help her deal with problems in developing her writing, including fiction. She sat down next to me and looked discouraged. I prepared to be gentle and encouraging. This conference would be difficult since as a writer she had often been self-defeating. I offer a quiet statement.

Moher: *So what is it—you don't like the story.*

Carla: *Umum.*

Moher: *Not at all?*

Carla: *Umum*

Moher: *What's one thing you liked about the possibilities of it?*

Carla: *I guess I liked the idea at the beginning, but then I just didn't, I just didn't... I liked the beginning. I liked what I was going to do.*

I try to help her express what she is having difficulty defining or identifying.

Moher: *Good. Which was what?*

Carla: *Well, (laughing) I don't know. It's like about like a kidnapping, and it's like two different perspectives of the story. And two different stories in one.*

This is a clear statement: two perspectives and two stories. I assume, wrongly, the two perspectives I thought I'd remembered from an earlier conference:

Moher: *One from the kidnapper and one... (she interrupts me)*

Carla: *One from the girl.*

I remember that she had earlier mentioned writing about someone looking for the kidnapped girl.

Moher: *The one who was looking for her*

Carla: *Yeah.*

Moher: *And one from the girl being kidnapped. Which perspective did you like?*

I am trying to involve her again in the initial enthusiasm of her story. The difficulties she has encountered have brought her thinking, and writing, to a halt.

Carla: *The girl who was looking for the girl who got kidnapped, was, um... That had more to it, and I think the girl who got kidnapped has kinda like a few lines, every now and then.*

Moher: *So she wasn't as interesting to you.*

Carla: (Laughs) *No.*

Her laughter is nervous, but she is smiling. She seems a little relieved that my response has expressed something about what she feels. I am helping her figure out what doesn't yet work, and she is clearly identifying information that she may have interpreted as bad, if not discouraging.

Moher: *Good.*

My "Good" is not a judgment of the quality of writing or of her ideas. It affirms that she is willingly thinking through the problems this piece poses, taking responsibility for her part in this endeavor. Unexpectedly, she begins to consider the possibility of writing again.

Carla: *Now I just need to change the perspective of this person. The person she was looking for, I'm just gonna change like who she was.*

This response is in answer to her recognition that she isn't interested in that character. I want to be sure I am getting the characters straight.

Moher: *You mean the kidnapped person?*

Carla: *Yeah.*

Moher: *What is it you want to change about her?*

Carla: *I'm gonna change like how she knows now, because I just say like* (her voice drops so low I can't hear her)

Moher: *Say that again.*

Carla: *The idea of like... I don't know how to say it.*

Moher: *You didn't know why they were friends?*

Carla: *Yeah, well they weren't friends, she just like saw her and then she just decided to look for her, and it was just...* (silence)

She is struggling for the language to describe the nature of an unusual relationship. I bring a story of my own to hers to try to make sense of it. Sometimes I resist the

temptation because it may throw us completely off, but this strikes me as an illustration of the relationship of her characters.

Moher: *You know I saw something like that on television. This woman was looking for her dog and this other woman saw her putting up this sign [a picture of the lost dog], and she decided to help her. And for months she became her best friend. And they found the dog.*

Carla: *Yeah.*

Moher: *So it's not unreal.*

This is as much an insight for me as it is for Carla, perhaps more so.

Carla: *Yeah.*

Moher: *People just sort of make connections with people. Is that what she was doing?*

Carla: *Yeah.*

So she and I have begun to understand one aspect of the writing with which she is struggling. I want to bring her to another step, a critical one for the credibility of the character—on her part as well as the reader's.

Moher: *You know the question "Why?" that we talked about [as a class] earlier this week?. This was just a way to get people thinking about why things happen the way they do, and that's where you're having just a little difficulty...*

Carla: *Yeah.*

Moher: *... trying to figure out why she would help someone she doesn't know, why she would search for her. Is that right?*

Carla: *Yeah.*

Moher: *I think sometimes, I think there's a real answer there. Sometimes people just make connections. They feel compassion for other people. So, what is it you don't like in this story?*

We've established possibilities for her story and I return to my first question. Perhaps it is a mistake. Prolonging this conference seems difficult for her.

Carla: *I don't know, it was really confusing. I think after I type it I can like edit more things...*

She is avoiding a difficult question. The characters' motivations were a confusing issue for her and she has begun to think through it, but it is difficult now for her to stay with the questions. Perhaps I shouldn't have returned to that question. But I continue.

Moher: *Where did it get confusing?*

Carla: *When I was trying to like put the two stories together.*

Moher: *Do you think you want to do the two stories, or do you think you'd have liked to stay with the original idea for a while?*

Carla: silence

Moher. I wait, and then try to clarify what I mean: *One perspective.*

Carla: *Well, (laughs) I don't know. I think after, like when it gets to the end of the story it's going to be one story. I just have to figure out how to put the two together.*

It is clear to her what she wants to do. I want to give her a strategy for doing that. If she leaves with no definite way to begin the writing, she might become too discouraged to attempt anything else. That's been her pattern. Being stuck in a problem with no strategies for a way out is a daunting place for students who believe they can't write well. I can begin helping by returning them to the writing that was working

Moher: *Did you write the end yet?*

Carla: *Well I started it.*

Moher: *OK, I just want you to take a new piece of paper, and I want you to go to your seat, and I want you to take 10 minutes, and I want you to write the end real fast. It doesn't have to be good, just write it.*

Silence.

Moher: *OK, go do that, and don't listen to them talking! I'm going to yell at them!*

Her friends are chatting, and she knows I am joking. I find it a way to keep the interaction with students lighthearted. Carla laughs and returns to her seat to write. I will check on her to be sure she hasn't become discouraged again. Many students don't need to return to a conference for quite a while, but some benefit from my stepping in until I am sure they are comfortable again in the writing.

Don Murray suggests that at times writing the ending can help pull the story toward it more quickly and easily. Carla, like many student writers, is overwhelmed by the work she imagines is going to have to be done in order to get to the ending. Since the ending is the locus of both her problem and her solution, I want her to be there working in that space.

In *How's It Going*, Carl Anderson writes,

I've noticed some teachers are hesitant about giving students explicit instructions. They use phrases such as, "I'd like for you to..." or "could you try..." Although these teachers do in fact want their students to follow through with what they taught them, these kinds of phrases can give students the impression they don't have to try the work discussed in the conferences. (2000, p. 66)

I believe the use of this language sometimes helps keep me from assuming I know clearly what my students need in order to learn. They know that I expect them to continue writing, but whether they follow my suggestion or find their own ways (as often as not) they are developing as conscious writers. In teaching not knowing, what I have come to believe is a practice of possibilities, keeping their knowledge (articulated or not) open to change or to discovery remains central to my purposes. And despite Carl Anderson's claim that "When we finish a conference, we should be able to name what it is we did to help that student become a better writer" (2000, p. 9). I haven't necessarily taught something in each conference. In fact, it may be an attitude or a tone, a personal comment or a reference to another text, a moment of silence or skillful listening that has allowed the student a way of thinking differently or of reconsidering an idea or a belief. The powers of listening, affirming, acknowledging and challenging (not in that order) constantly move the student in effective directions. Furthermore, although there are patterns that C. Anderson and Calkins believe are important to teachers, adhering strictly to those patterns may diminish an individual teacher's abilities to work with any individual student in effective ways. I'd prefer to believe that listening to and interacting with each as a "universe of one" offers more profound ways of teaching and learning.

I appreciate the way in which William Stafford writes about the notion of praise and his description of the writing relationship as that which might happen between friends:

I think approval of student writers is scary to them. I keep meeting teachers who say, "Oh yes, I'm very nice to the students. I always find something to praise." I don't like that. I would rather be neutral or the way I would be with a friend discussing something that neither of us has a fixed position on but which we are both exploring so that the friend or the student doesn't feel that they have to get that approval by doing something good again. That just extends the area of inhibition. (1986, p. 74)

The issue of approval is critical. Students believe they want me to read their work and tell them that it is good. I find as many ways as I can out of doing just that. Such a response does nothing for the writer; it might mean closure far too soon, and it doesn't offer him specific enough ways to think about what the writing accomplishes that he may be able to achieve again or continue in different ways. It merely offers a judgment about both him as a writer and that particular writing. Stafford's notion of "discussing something that neither of us has a fixed position on but which we are both exploring" offers a beautiful analogy for this work.

In similar terms, Lorraine Code has suggested the "empowering features" that relationships founded on friendship/alliance possess:

Friendship thrives on possibilities of reliance on one another; hence it requires knowing each other's character and competence well...Hence forming good friendships requires a discerning cognitive capacity: it is a matter as much epistemological as affective. Friendship makes possible a peculiarly attuned knowledge and emulation of another person's character and creates a space where a friend can safely present his character and conflicts for guidance and wisdom. (1991, p. 99)

Such relationships "maintain a balance between separateness and appropriate interdependence" (p. 96), engendering a foundation of trust and "symmetrical possibilities," initiating and sustaining "responsible mutual knowledge and trust" (p. 99). Coming to know students in these terms transforms the complex web of relations within the classroom. As educators we have all experienced the effects of such personal relationships in school. Most teachers recall one or two teachers in their academic lives

who influenced them in powerful ways as a result of personal relationships (engendered primarily in the classroom) and for whom strong feelings (about both the person and the subject) continue. And most of us have experienced those kinds of relationships with some of our own students. Yet, the description of the teacher-student relationship in terms of friendship is often professionally disdained, seen as diminishing the teacher's authority, a dangerous enterprise from a traditional perspective.

I hope to attend to the writer with more reverence and respect than to the writing. In the face to face interaction, much is revealed that I cannot describe explicitly, and knowing the student and writer, I can recognize signals of tension or confusion around the writing, of pride or discouragement in their attempts, of humor or sarcasm. Faces often expose their inner feelings.

Ricky has been ill throughout the past few months. The doctors had identified it as a serious ongoing issue for which he is in treatment. I had met with his parents earlier, and they had asked his teachers to be aware of his medical condition and its effects on his school work. Ricky is an avid student, enthusiastic and conscientious.

Moher: *Are you doing OK?*

Ricky: *Yeah, I'm a little tired.* He is excited about his writing and wants to get to it.

Um. It's about a guy who got framed by a mob in Chicago. It's back in the 1930's. He's supposed to do a job and something happened. He's out to get... like his best friend, they took him, that kind of stuff.

Because of the genre and the time period, I connect it to films--

Moher: *If you were to pick a movie star to play in this part, who would it be?*

Ricky: *Um, it kind of reminds me a lot of Road to Perdition. Cause I kinda got the idea from that, and then the movie The Sting, with Robert Redford.*

Moher: Yes. I wasn't surprised that his writing had been influenced by movies, but I was interested in his knowing what films influenced it.

Ricky: *So I kinda took that and my own imagination.*

Vygotsky states that "Imagination is a new psychological process for the child...we can say that imagination in adolescents and school children is play without action" (p. 93).

Though plagiarism is always a concern, Ricky is attempting to do more than copy a plot—it is an entire, complex genre with which he is playing. Ricky implies his interest in the psychological motivations and impulses of such characters: “He’s out to get...” The “gangster genre” as he calls it can easily become one-dimensional. I want him to pursue his own perceptions of his characters.

Moher: *So he’s a likeable character?*

Ricky: *Yes.*

Moher: *OK, so what’s he involved in the mob for?*

Ricky: *Um, he’s a hitman.*

Moher: *Oh! He’s a real likeable character! (laughing)*

I want to challenge him to create the complexities of real human beings.

Ricky: *Yeah.*

Moher: *Give me a break! How do you make a hit man likeable?*

Ricky: *Well, he’s, he doesn’t really work for the mob, but they...*

Moher: *Oh! He’s a free-lancer!*

I’m just having fun.

Ricky: *Free-lancer, yeah.*

Moher: *Free-lance killer!*

Ricky: *He ignores my teasing. Yeah, but he’s having second thoughts about it ‘cause he’s having all this trouble, ‘cause they’re like out to get him.*

Moher: *So how’d he get into this in the first place!
(Ssh, Patrick! The noise has risen in the classroom.)*

Ricky: *I’m not really sure. I tried writing...*

Here I interrupt him, probably moving too quickly. Perhaps it is because I have been distracted by loud chatting in the class.

Moher: *Do you see the how and why questions [in this piece]?*

Ricky: *Yeah.*

Moher: *It's something for you to think about this weekend.*

Ricky: *OK*

Moher: *Because he may have been just sort of lured in unwittingly, you know? Or he may...or it's because he loves killing. And I'm not so sure he's a likeable guy! I mean this as a challenge for his uncovering motivation of this character.*

Ricky: *He pulls out one of his pages of writing. I wrote this little thing like about like him as a child and his friend, he got kidnapped, and it showed how he was really nice and stuff, but then something happened and he just started like crumbling, I guess you could say. I most likely interrupted his reference to this writing.*

Moher: *And maybe a sense of vengeance?*

Ricky: *Yeah.*

Moher: *Because he couldn't do anything to help his friend? [I'd inferred this from his unfinished line earlier: "He's out to get...."]*

Ricky: *Yeah, something like that!*

Moher: *See, that's a great kind of "why"— why he is the way he is, does what he does; and then we can understand him as a real person who crumbled and sort of fell into this.*

Ricky: *Yeah.*

Moher: *That's great. How will you get that into the story? Glimpses of it?*

Ricky is a strong enough writer to address this next challenge of organization before he even continues the writing. He is immersed in this story and in the characters.

Ricky: *Well, maybe, like when he's coming away from this one scene, then I can have a flashback, like to his childhood. Something like that.*

Moher: *Have you written any of that?*

Ricky: *I've written the childhood kinda portion, so I could somehow put that in there.*

Moher: *Umhum. What haven't you written?*

Ricky: *I haven't written when he gets his vengeance, his final vengeance.*

Moher: *Alright. You want to write that scene.*

Ricky: *Yes!*

Moher: *Go write that in 15 minutes.*

Ricky: OK

Moher: *See you in 15 minutes.*

Ricky: *Gotcha.*

Ricky returns with writing:

Moher: *Alright!*

Ricky: *I wrote this, and this part shows like a more human side to him, because he's in like this elevator with this little elevator boy, so I'm trying to make it like a prelude to the fight scene coming up.*

Moher: *It's also a good time for a flashback.*

Ricky: *True.*

Moher: *"The elevator flashback." Great! Read me a line from that. I often ask students to read aloud only parts of their pieces for certain reasons. Some need to read, and I will qualify the question by asking them for the reason they want me to listen. Others have to make decisions about what to read when I ask where the problem lies, or an example of the writing they said doesn't work, or a place where their writing was going well.*

Ricky: *OK. Um,
"Thirty-second floor, please."
"Yes sir," said the small black boy who couldn't have been more than 8 years old. A young boy working long hours on the bad side of town. What a shame. I gave him what change I have in my pocket. All three dollars and sixty-three cents.*

Moher: *How did he know he had three dollars and sixty-three cents in his pocket? (I laugh.)*

Ricky: *Well, like about.*

Moher: *OK! Good. So here's a flashback right there. Go for it.*

Ricky: *Alright.*

The conference seemed to carry on too long; I did not feel I was able to get a good handle on what he really needed. It was Friday afternoon, and I was tired. Conferences take a certain kind of energy.

Karl is a quiet student and a pretty confident writer, though he never knows what to expect from me and often approaches a little nervously. He comes for what I call a check-in conference, just to appease me.

Karl: *Um, there really isn't anything that I really need help with, but I just have stuff to write about, like I've been writing a lot of key scenes, but I haven't wrote the parts connecting them together, like the little pieces of like dialogue and stuff, and that's all that I really need to work on this weekend, 'cause I have all the key scenes done, and I'm probably going to look it over this weekend for better detail.*

What more can I say? Karl obviously wants nothing at this time than to meet the requirement of a conference. He's saying all the right things to keep me from engaging with him. It's a beautifully crafted run-on sentence!

Moher: *So, you're looking for detail. That's fine!*

Karl: *Yeah*

Moher: *Alright!*

Karl: *OK.* He leaves quickly, obviously relieved to have been successful in his persuasion!

David, too, doesn't really want a conference. He is the cynic in the class and avoids criticism of any kind. He barely does enough work to meet minimum requirements. I am careful not to appear critical when he shows the willingness even to check in. But I do manage to elicit a bit of information from him.

Moher: *David?*

David: *Um, I'm not really stuck on anything. I just wanted you to see my progress.*

Moher: *Sure. You like it.*

David: *Yeah.*

Moher: *It's working. [...whatever that means]*

David: *Umhum.*

Silence. I wait...

David: *The beginning's kind of like weird, but has like a whole mix, sort of twists and turns and once you get into it, it relates back to the beginning.*

Moher: *Good! So it's hard.* (I might here have asked him to read an example of the "twists and turns.")

David: *Yeah.*

Moher: *So did you consider yet the why's—the reasons. Did they all work?*

He dismisses my question and addresses his own issue. He is taking responsibility here, a positive turn.

David: *Ah, well, you know how you told us we could start to write scenes that we wanted to get to?*

Moher: Yes.

David: *I've been, lately I've been writing those scenes that like relate back.*

Moher; *Great. So it's helping it come together?*

David is obviously pleased that I am enthusiastic about his confidence in the writing and that I can articulate statements that imply his success.

David: *Yuh! I've got like 10 or 12 pages that's written on this.*

Moher: *Great! So what do you need?*

David: *Ah, you said to have a conference.*

Moher: *OK! Bye!*

David laughs, relieved: *Bye!*

I respond as much to the mood of the student as I do to the writing. These conferences, in which I do not usually take their papers in hand, allow them to consider the issues and problems either one of us raises and to take on whatever authority they can to resolve them. Some students are far more confident at this, though their writing may not necessarily be better. I want to affirm their authority as much as I can. Each decision they make that proves successful in the writing is an experience that will influence their continued learning. Each exercise or quick-write or comment between us that helps them to turn back to the writing, through more conscious expansion of details or intensity or any of Murray's forms of surprise, offers promise of future successes in their writing. They are developing a repertoire of "process questions," strategies and knowledge of good writing.

Laurie: *Um, I put um a fight they had in the story, like you told me to?*

Her inflections indicate doubt, hesitation, unsureness. I am concerned when I hear a student phrase it that way, "like you told me to." It's often a sign that it didn't work for her and that she felt pressured into doing something a certain way—mine, not hers.

Moher: *Umhum.* I nod, leaning near as I often do, intent on her words.

Laurie: *I just had it be like they hadn't been hanging out that long. They haven't like gone to the movies or anything like for a real long time. Like they just got mad at each other for that. 'Cause I couldn't think of anything else to get in a fight about?*

Moher: *And it works?*

Laurie: *Yeah, it probably makes it better, like they're not friends anymore kind of thing.*

She's quite tentative about what her writing is doing.

Moher: *Umm.* *And it's those little things that come out...*

Laurie: *Yeah.*

Moher: *...in a stressful relationship.* *Hmm.* *So what now?*

Laurie: *I don't know. I thought, I think I might be done. Just 'cause if I, that weekend you said like do an hour, like I thought since everybody said that they only wrote like a couple pages in 15 minutes and I write like a page in 15 minutes at least so I did a lot of work.*

I often put emphasis, in reading as well as writing, on the time they put in rather than the number of pages they read or write. They work at different paces, and Laurie is calling me on this philosophy.

Moher: *That's great! So, what one thing do you wish you could have done a little better or a little differently?*

This piecemeal approach to possibility helps students who are overwhelmed by all the decisions they feel have to be made. I could take her piece now and read it, but I want to pursue her own evaluation of it.

Laurie: *Um. Well there was a part like, um I tried to make it better but I don't know if it's that much better. Like with the football, I was trying to say like how much he likes football, but I don't really know a lot about football. I'm like, I don't know. It's like I put like little highlight marks cause I don't say anything about that but I didn't really get good details for it?*

Though her inflection indicates doubt, and she's looking for support, she points to "highlight marks" on her paper—places where she knows there are gaps in which she should be able to fill in realistic details but recognizes she doesn't have the knowledge. I know there are at least five football players in the room.

Moher: *Who's a football player in here?*

Laurie: *Shawn.*

Moher: *Go see Shawn and ask him if he would help you with that part.*

Laurie: *OK*

Moher: *And then let me know.*

Laurie: *OK*

Moher: *Great!*

Laurie talks with Shawn and returns to her writing. She's hanging in there.

I have found that another way to have a conference is by looking at writing prepared by students even before we meet. Jackie filled in this format for me and I was able to read it prior to our conference, or I can look through them quickly during a conference:

The story is about...a girl who has a problem of not being able to express her feelings to her friends and family. When she finds out she has cancer she doesn't know what to do. Her name is Alisha, and by the end of the story she has to overcome her fear and tell everyone.

*Identify a passage which you particularly like:
I liked this passage because the character really expresses how she feels about whats going on inside her head. She asks herself all these questions but doesn't know the answer and in real life someone in her position would probably do that.*

*Identify something which you feel is not satisfactory...
I don't really like how she doesn't seem real in some parts. She says things in her head but doesn't seem real and she repeats it a lot too. You cant really tell how she feels while this is happening to her it would probably be harder for her to change this I would have to make the story probably longer or write it in 3rd person.*

*With what aspect of editing do you think you need the most help?
I have a problem with punctuation I never seem to know whether a comma or period should go without reading it over tons of times.*

The prepared questions allow some time for thought and some students can more easily identify and name the issues within their writing. At various times in the semester or year, the questions may focus on writing problems which either the class or teacher has identified. This kind of information can be used before reading the student's work or quickly referred to during a conference. I might ask Jackie to read me a passage that shows how her character doesn't seem real. We can begin by addressing the problem she poses. It is a question I might not have asked in the conference.

Moher: *Kelly, Want to come up?*

Kelly: *Alright. I have two stories, but one of them doesn't have an ending yet. Cause I couldn't, I don't know, I'm just not sure what I was gonna do. And then the other one was...boring.*

Moher: *Ok, let's forget the boring one for now and work with the one that you like.*

Kelly: *Well, I kinda like this one, but I don't know, it's kind of, I don't know.*

Moher: *Which one are you more interested in working on? I'm trying to follow her lead.*

Kelly: *I don't know! (frustrated laugh)*

Moher: *Let's talk about the boring one then.*

Kelly: *OK*

Moher: *What did you like about it?*

Kelly: *Um, that it was more like a story, it had like more...um...*

Moher: *Plot?*

Kelly: *Yeah. There was more things going on, it had a lot of like action kind of things?*

Moher: *Did you like the character?*

Kelly: *Um, Yeah, I like the character. It's like, I'm not sure, I think it's like a little boy*

Moher: *You're NOT SURE?! I tease her about her tentativeness.*

Kelly: *No, I know. (I laugh) But I was reading this and then I was thinking cause I never said if it was a boy or a girl?*

Moher: *Cool. So you never indicated.*

Kelly: *No.*

Moher: *Were you thinking...*

Kelly: *It's like a little kid.*

Moher: *And what happens to him?*

Kelly: *I don't know. I wasn't thinking anything, I was just thinking like a little kid or somebody, I don't know.*

Moher: *OK, How old?*

Kelly: *Um, I didn't write that either!*

Moher: *OK. This is what you're going to do. He's important, right?*

Kelly: *Yeah.*

Moher: *It's a boy?*

Kelly laughs: *Yeah! I want her to become comfortable making decisions.*

Moher: *Alright. Go back and spend 5 minutes and write all you can about this little boy: what he's like, anything about him you can set so you get to know him better. Then come back and we'll talk about this.*

She gets up and leaves.

Moher: *Don't forget to come back.*

Kelly: *No, I won't!*

She returns a little later:

Moher: *Alright!*

Kelly: *I gave him a name.*

Moher: *Ok Have a seat and tell me about him.*

Kelly: *OK, he's like 5 or 6 cause he goes to like kindergarten or something? Cause he's still little.*

Moher: *Or something? Again I'm teasing her about her reticence in giving definite information, that is, making decisions about the character she wants to develop.*

Kelly laughs: *Yeah....he goes to kindergarten!*

Moher: *YES!*

Kelly: *He loves his family and he lives with his parents and his sister.*

Moher: *How old is she?*

Kelly: *Uh, she's younger than him so she would be about... 4?*

Moher: *OK.*

Kelly: *And he has a lot of imagination and that's why he has like weird dreams and stuff like that? And he makes up a lot of stories. And his name is Brian.*

Moher: *Aww!*

Kelly: *Yeah.*

Moher: *How do you spell it?*

Kelly: *BRIAN.*

Moher: *Oh, the traditional way. Alright. You like him!*

Kelly: *Ah, yeah. I like him.*

Moher: *OK, good. So now... how does he fit in there?*

Kelly: *Um.....well he helps his sister out a lot... to get out of the fire. And... um he says how he feels about nobody coming to save him, none of his family helped...*

Moher: *Does he learn anything later about why?*

Kelly: *Well, it was a dream!*

Moher: *Oh, yeah. So why does he dream this?*

Kelly: *Because he has lots of imagination!*

Moher: *And he's going to wake up?*

Kelly: *Yeah, his sister wakes him up at the end.*

Moher: *(Pause). I've had my son wake up sobbing and come in, "You died!" He cries.*

Kelly: *Yeah.*

Moher: *It's awful.(We both laugh about how seriously we are taking this.) And, do you know what to do this weekend?*

Kelly: *Um, Yeah. Well, I'm gonna.... I don't know. Should I just pick on one story?*

Moher: *Yes, why don't you work on this one, since you're really focusing in on this kid.*

Kelly: *Alright. Ok*

Moher: *Choose one important scene in the whole story to write and write it well. And let's look at that on Monday.*

Kelly: *Alright.*

Moher: *Yup. I nod.*

Kelly: *Thank you.*

Moher: *Thank you!*

I haven't done much except engage her in conversation, and again, acknowledge that she is working her hardest, even in the frustration of being unable to write. The simple step by step questioning models for her a way to go about creating her character and plot.

Kathleen sits down uncomfortably on the edge of her seat: *It's not exciting*

Moher: *Ah, you're bored?*

Kathleen: *Yeah.*

Moher: *So what is the key conflict?*

Kathleen: *Well I don't really have one.*

Moher: *OK So it's just a nice story.*

Kathleen: *Yeah, I wanted to try to make it a mystery, but I couldn't really think of anything? I thought of something that I'd already read somewhere? But it's not really my idea.*

Moher: *OK, but you can still take ideas and create totally new..*

Kathleen: *Stories? (She is tearful.)*

Moher: *Are you disappointed?*

Kathleen: *Yeah.*

Moher: *So let's work on this for the next couple of weeks, that's all.*

She is a good writer who doesn't yet accept that she can write well. She is quite sensitive and reserved, the most silent member of the class. She starts to cry, and I

comfort her with a little humor. She's embarrassed to be crying in class, but we are in the back of the room and her back is to the others.

Moher: *OK, so who's the main character?*

Kathleen: *Rachel.*

Moher: *How old is she?*

Kathleen: *15*

Moher: *And she's going to solve this mystery?*

Kathleen: *No.*

Moher: *Who is the mystery about?*

Kathleen: *I don't have one yet.*

Moher: *OK, we're going to create one. You and I. So you want her to solve the mystery...*

Kathleen: *I tried different stories.*

Moher: *Tell me about the one you like best. The one that has the most potential.*

Kathleen: *Ok. She is quiet.*

Moher: *You've done a lot of work. That's why you're frustrated.*

Kathleen: *She is sent to boarding school. It takes place way in the past. The 70's.*

I laugh at her reference to "way in the past." I tell her about the novel *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles and about the relationship the two boys develop at the private school.

Moher: *So you want something to happen.*

Kathleen: *Yeah. I don't know how to keep it a short story.*

Moher: *It might be a novel.*

Kathleen: *That's what I thought.*

This was not about a student with no ideas. Kathleen had assumed the short story genre wouldn't work for *her* ideas and had become trapped in the prospect of having to write it all in a short story. It took this time for her to express the problem.

Moher: *So what chapters have you written or pieced together?*

She begins talking about the writing she has done and our conference begins to address some of the points she raises.

Moher: *It's great...So play with all the possibilities, and then let's talk about it.*

She returns to her writing, more confident, more comfortable, and ready to explore ideas further. Had I known that she was caught in what she thought was a rigid assignment, a short story, I could have prevented her anguish. Our dialogues are important.

Playfulness: A Metaphysical Attitude (Lugones, 1987)

These conferences attempt to initiate playfulness and possibility. Maria Lugones' notion of playfulness presents it as "a particular metaphysical attitude...that does not expect the world to be neatly packaged, ruly"; in which "uncertainty is open to surprise"; and for which, as she points out, "Rules may fail to explain what we are doing" (1987, p. 288). Adam Phillips offers a similar philosophical conceptualization in the notion of 'flirtation' as a way of coming to know:

Flirtation keeps things in play, and by doing so lets us get to know them in different ways. It allows us the fascination of what is unconvincing. By making a game of uncertainty, of the need to be convinced, it always plays with, or rather flirts with, the idea of surprise (1994, xii).

Teaching within this "metaphysical attitude," means that my students and I immerse ourselves in qualities of playfulness necessary to creativity and insight, that we engage in both dialogue and silence as a means to discover what we mean to say, in relation. When we live in this "metaphysical attitude," then, as Starratt suggests, "Knowledge comes to be seen not as a prepackaged byte of information, but as the improvisation of the human mind in its effort to engage us in the drama of the world" (1990, p. 94). When school "becomes a mindless set of unique routines [or techniques],-then it is not human" (p. 94). These conferences are about human improvisation as Barrett defines it, "a delicate paradox" (1998, p. 607), a moment of "existing on the edge of the unknown" (p. 606) within the spontaneous interaction among persons.

Becoming what McNamee calls “relationally sensitive” invites our students’ stories and offers “dialogic space” from which can emerge a stronger sense of self, of identity, perceptions of the world, as well as what writing is really about. McNamee distinguishes between “problem solving inquiry,” in which we identify a problem and talk about solutions and strategies from “appreciative inquiry,” in which we ask a different set of questions, when we ask positive, valuing questions which encourage relationships and allow for opportunities for engaging with others (1999, p. 33). The ways in which we respond to, and learn to be in relation with, our students and their learning will shape what and how they learn about themselves and the world.

The conference sustains an unfinishedness that compels the writer to retreat from that more public space to his writing, to an inner space, having internalized fragments of the dialogue we initiated together, probing language and ideas; and subsequently, returning, once again, seeking out from the more public dialogue those ideas that remain obscure or “not-yet-spoken” or that need to be tested out by an audience. The continuous movement of dialogue from public conference to private inner spaces propels the movement of the writing, in one or more directions. Seldom does closure occur in the conference. It isn’t my objective. The purpose, for me, is to encourage the writer to see promise, further possibilities, and to prolong her playfulness, exploration, and energy toward writing.

Empathic Inquiry

Herrington and Curtis encourage

‘sustained empathic inquiry’—more than either ‘non-interference’ or suppressive instruction...standing alongside [students] in their quest for coherence and ‘self-expression,’ tuning in more sharply to ‘how it feels to be the subject rather than the target’ of their communicative efforts... (2000, p. 31).

This form of inquiry becomes critical to a practice which professes to teach students how to enter and negotiate processes of their own development of thinking, to make decisions with consciousness and understanding, and, as Rogers states, to “come to

feel that this locus of evaluation lies within himself. Less and less does he look to others for approval or disapproval; for the standards to live by; for decisions and choices. He recognizes that it rests within himself..."(1961, p. 119). These are profound moments of learning.

My own writing has been ended by responses that unintentionally damaged my courage, by way of judgment, or the focus on a deficient part of the writing, rather than focusing on what possibilities lay in my attempts to express my ideas. I know, too, the painful discomfort of sitting in writing conferences and having someone read my work, silent, trying to professionally correct or improve what I have written, not aware that something of who I am lies on those pages. I wanted instead acknowledgment of the importance of my attempts to write; recognition of the ideas or emotions or language or experience—something—that was seen as uniquely mine in that writing. I wanted to hear a reader respond as a person to my attempts to reveal what I know, what I believe, what I've experienced. Even in the best of relations, I have found, attitudes can close down something that we might feel is hopeful, if not possible, in the writing. As Palmer writes,

Some questions close down the space and keep students from thinking....Of course, the skill of asking questions goes beyond asking the right kinds of questions to asking them in a manner neither threatening nor demeaning—and receiving responses in the same open and invitational way. (1998, pp. 133-134)

In my own teaching, the attitude, the manner, my philosophical stance, what H. Anderson calls our "expertise in creating a dialogical space and facilitating a dialogical process" (1997, p. xviii) is what will keep open my students' writing and their abilities to discover and create vision and purpose. My awareness of the effects of vulnerability and defensiveness and sense of threat that a reader poses to the writer has helped me to present myself as a companion in this admittedly difficult process, an empathic listener/reader who acknowledges who they are as well as what they say. (This is Holden's way of listening to Richard Kinsella.) It is not the stance operational in an

interrogation, on a witness stand, in an interview, a final review. At first, students wait for the teacher response: "But...Nice, but...OK, but what you really have to do is..." If I can refrain from the qualifiers and accept and acknowledge what she has done or is in the process of doing, we can begin there. I need to remind myself to be honest about my responses, even those thoughts which I think are not necessarily valid but which I can present in just that way, balancing my own inner responses and staying with the writer's, deciding perhaps together how to manage each step in this complex and complicated process of writing. Palmer calls this process "consensual inquiry," a process in which my students and I learn

...by listening and responding faithfully to each other and to the subject at hand...As we listen to each other, we hear various versions of that reality, and as those versions confirm and contradict each other we move toward a consensus with each other that is more faithful to the reality beyond us...Through consensus we transform the fragmentary knowledge of individuals into a knowledge more complete.... (1993, p. 94)

This process of consensus is not, however, about compromise nor is it conciliatory. In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, consensus, in its "original meaning, Holland reminds us, was 'feeling or sensing together,' implying not agreement, necessarily, but a 'crossing of the barrier between ego and ego,' bridging private and shared experience (291)" (1986, p. 223). A truly educative experience, I believe, generates a sense of agency in some form on the part of the learner.

Process Questions

Tobin has written about writing conferences expansively, and his work offers insights into the complex interaction between teacher and students:

Like writing itself, the writing conferences is a process—not static, not a noun, not a thing, but rather active, dynamic, organic. It changes with each student and each teacher and each second, and although there is value (even necessity, I think) in developing a logical theory and approach, we need to learn when our response should dictate the process and when the process should dictate the response. (1990, p. 98)

Tobin is describing a practice, and in it, he asserts, we must raise the issue of the nature of our questions. The questions I have considered in the past have been focused on the

student writer. Those questions, certainly, are critical to this process; however, I have come to understand Tobin's assertion that our questions must also address our own inner responses:

[T]raditionally we have considered the quality of the relationships in a writing classroom to be an effect of a student's success or failure as a writer; I think that it is often the other way around, that writing students succeed when teachers establish productive relationships with—and between—their students. It makes sense, then, for a writing teacher to focus as much on questions of authority and resistance as on invention heuristics and revision strategies, as much on competition and cooperation as on grammar and usage. (1993, p. 6)

The conference questions I once tried to list, questions I might ask of students to elicit responses to their writing, excluded the kinds of questions that have become critical for my practice—those that I would learn to ask of myself in relation to students. I turn to Carl Rogers (1961) once again and to Sallyann Roth (1999) for the kinds of questions they raise as significant to the therapist in relation to her client. These questions, I believe, offer us insight into the nature of questions that might enhance our work in writing conferences.

In *On Becoming a Person*, Rogers models the kinds of questions that both therapist and educator may ask of herself as a way of maintaining her responsibilities as this study has described them in a dialogic relation, the kinds of questions I continue to ask of myself as I teach my high school students, as I raise my adolescent sons, and as I engage in the myriad possibilities of relations with others day to day. The questions are as much about my capacity for openness and learning as they are about others':

"Can I let myself experience positive attitudes toward this other person—attitudes of warmth, caring, liking, interest, respect?"

"Can I let myself enter fully into the world of his feelings and personal meanings and *see these as he does*? Can I step into his private world so completely that I *lose all desire to evaluate or judge it*? Can I enter it so sensitively that I can move about in it freely, *without trampling on meanings which are precious to him*?"

"Can I free him from the threat of external evaluation?"

"Can I meet this other individual as a person who is in process of *becoming*, or will I be bound by his past and by my past? (1961, pp. 50-57)

In *Relational Responsibility*, SallyAnn Roth raises similar questions in "The Uncertain Path to Dialogue":

What makes it possible to wonder about, to be interested in, to ask about, how they came to believe what they believe or to "know" what they know when it is so different from what I believe and from what I know?"

What kinds of actions and contexts encourage me

To abandon assumptions that I know what others mean?

To turn my passion to inquiring about things I do not or cannot understand?

To reveal how much I do not understand?

To make space for differences in experience, in the meanings I give to that experience, and for every other kind of difference there may be?

What do I do

That calls forth from others that which is unusual for them to speak openly?

That brings forward responses of unusual complexity and richness?

That calls forward other people's reflections or their most passionate intentions?

That calls forward their readiness to speak of fragmentary thoughts, thoughts that are only on their way to being fully thought, or those that have been thought but never before spoken?

How can I remember to listen fully, openly, with genuine interest, without judgment, and without argument to another's challenging or different ideas, feelings, beliefs? (1999, pp. 94-97)

These are the kinds of questions we must ask of ourselves if we hope to enter into productive relations with our students. They demonstrate a kind of attitude which fosters learning on any level with any person. Rogers teaches that entering into a relationship with a learner "means that the facilitator is being herself, not denying herself... a vital person, with convictions, with feelings" (1961, p. 154). As facilitators of true dialogues, we enhance the quality of those interactions by attending to our own attitudes, more aware of our own forms of resistance, as well as those of our students. In my final chapter, I propose implications for teaching that suggest that we acknowledge these attitudes and knowledge of others as essential capacities in the processes of teaching.

CHAPTER 6

PERSONS, RELATIONS, AND INTUITION

But why assume that sensation and rationality are the only points of correspondence between the human self and the world. Why assume so, when the human self is rich with other capacities—intuition, empathy, emotion, and faith, to name but a few? (Palmer, 1983, p. 52)

Implications for Teaching

Were I to simplify what I believe this work of teaching young people requires, I would name essentially one commitment: that of acknowledging our students as persons and our relations with them as significant to their development. This study has revealed my own awakening to our struggle as teachers caught within conflicting epistemologies and our need for both epistemological and pedagogical theories that integrate persons and relationships into our conceptions of knowledge. The implications of this work suggest that we pursue ways to enhance our professional capacities for knowing and understanding persons: that we adopt a perception of learners as “persons in process” (Herrington & Curtis, 2000), develop habits of empathic listening, and acknowledge our “relational responsibility” (McNamee, 1999) to those whom we teach. These are not, however, discrete capacities. They might better be explored in light of one another.

Additionally, I would like to propose the concept of “trained intuition” (O’Reilly, 1998) as critical to our developing discourse in teaching. Although the formation of such professional qualities evolves over a lifetime of teaching, we might consider the importance of initiating these conceptualizations in teacher education programs. As I near the end of a career in education, colleague now with wonderful young teachers thirty years my junior, I can no longer ignore the claims of a school culture that does not value such critical capacities for our teaching and for our students’ learning and

development as people in society. I have watched the discouragement and sense of developing cynicism, if not defeat, in these young teachers who do value these capacities, and who feel those values and their professional ethics becoming compromised and diminished by administrative demands for “consistency” in every aspect of our teaching—not for the sake of fairness, but for the sake of accountability. Affirming those young teachers has become a personal and professional endeavor, and I believe we have a professional responsibility to continue to offer collegial support and encouragement to their efforts.

Again, I turn to a few theorists and their works, both within and outside our discipline. Barrett’s description of the practice of improvisation, as jazz musicians discuss it, portrays a process of “discovering the future that their action creates as it unfolds” (1998, p. 605). Process itself has come to mean for me the fundamental nature of teaching and its effects in the educative experience: living in a space of both present and future knowing. In our dialogic spaces I discover that my students know so much more than is yet intelligible, a knowing that is not yet able to be expressed or articulated. It is the process of attempting to bring words into existence and to validate them against the realities of others that is at the core of teaching writing—processes of revelation and discovery, of unfolding and confronting, ideas, yes, but also values, perceptions of self and of identity, emotions and intuition. Rather than “do” a book, as we English teachers are wont to say, we might discuss practices in which students come to experience various ways of reading; rather than merely “assign” an essay, explore and expand ways of thinking beyond one perspective or interpretation or meaning. The experiential processes of learning invite students into the practice of literacy. As Palmer explains,

[B]ecause conventional education neglects the inner reality of teacher and students for the sake of a reality ‘out there,’ the heart of the knowing self is never held up for inspection, never given a chance to be known... Conventional education strives not to locate and understand the self in the world, but to get it out of the way. (1993, p. 35)

Such processes involve living persons, not objects of knowledge, “fixed and static,” (Rogers) and so attention to the teaching of writing, fundamentally attending to persons, requires more of us than knowledge of, even passion for, our subject.

As I have claimed, the implications of this study lie in the premise that teaching writing, and literacy in general, happens most effectively in dialogic spaces in which persons interact with one another on multiple levels. Implicit in this premise are two critical concepts: the notion of persons and the processes of relations. I would propose that in teacher education programs, particularly in our field of English, both these concepts, and of course their interconnectedness, need to be fundamentally explored for far greater understanding than we have considered them in teaching. My own training has been primarily in literature, specifically in the study of critical analysis—study of texts. After almost three decades of teaching high school students, I have come to recognize and value the powerful and complex nature of acknowledging and understanding persons in this profession and my relational role in their education.

Knowledge of Persons

[I]nto every act of knowing there enters a passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known...a vital component of his knowledge. (Polanyi, 1962, viii)

Lorraine Code’s claim informs this proposal clearly: “*Educational theory and practice*, psychology, sociology, anthropology, law, some aspects of medicine and philosophy, politics, history, and economics all *depend for their credibility upon knowing people*. [emphasis added]” (1993, p. 35). In secondary education, the traditional demand for knowing subject matter precludes any knowledge of persons. Perhaps herein lies the true distinction, as Spohn (2000) presents it, between practices and techniques. While techniques focus on developing some aspect of competency in subject matter, practices focus also upon the changing nature of individuals and relations in the process of coming to know. As Spohn states, practices are “complex social activities that address certain

fundamental needs and human values" (2000, p. 338). A practice is a human endeavor, and the practice of teaching, a "journey" into "not knowing."

Knowing persons requires certain ways of being, ways of attending to others that, ironically, have not been addressed or taught to those of us whose professional work relies on relations with others. Methods courses tend to be about designing lesson plans and objectives, ways of testing and grading for subject matter. Evaluation, however, includes understanding of and relations with persons. To evaluate involves on-going, dialogic processes with others, not merely judging products. Evaluation, as a process, is a significant part of the learning which it engenders.

Knowing people, as Code explains, means much more than giving instructions and information in the form of assignments or material covered or tests of their memories.

Knowing other persons is more complex than knowledge of facts.

Knowing other people in relationships requires constant learning: how to be with them, respond to them, and act toward them. In this respect it contrasts markedly with the immediacy of common, sense-perceptual paradigms... The fact that it is acquired differently, interactively, and relationally differentiates it both as process and as product from standard propositional knowledge. (1993, pp. 33-34)

Knowing persons entails a process of "dialogic negotiation" (p. 39) which, as Bakhtin, McNamee and Gergen, H. Anderson and others imply, acknowledges a process of coming to know as involving relations between and among persons. Code points to the "ongoing, communicative, and interpretive" nature of this process of knowing persons, which "is never fixed or complete" (1993, p. 34). The significance of "dialogic negotiation" to processes of teaching and learning is profound. For a number of years, I taught without a working knowledge of epistemology— another irony in our profession. In fact, many of these ironies, like crevasses, are the results of shifting epistemological and pedagogical paradigms. Many of us as teachers have found ourselves negotiating unfamiliar terrain, with little understanding of the phenomena to which we are exposed. We find ourselves often in precarious positions, balanced between the assumptions and demands of a system built on traditional notions of epistemology and those

epistemological and pedagogical claims that challenge the very foundations of that order. As Starratt notes, "The language and perspectives by which schools are studied and governed belong much more to behavioristic, positivistic, empiricist epistemologies" (1990, p. 2). This description of schooling points to an interpretation of knowledge, and of reality, as static, certain, unchangeable, predictable and largely unknowable, properties that preclude an interest in or understanding of the knower. Ira Shor characterizes the notion of traditional authority as "fixed at an unchanging distance from the students" (1987, p. 91). The model emphasizes the passivity of the knowers, who stand "dispassionately (i.e., *unemotionally*) at a distance from the objects of their observation" (Code, 1991, p. 48).

A number of theorists offer perspectives on the emergence of students' integrity, intentionality and consciousness in their relationships to knowledge and to other knowers. The focal point in teaching has centered for too long on the discourse of the teacher, a standpoint which bequeaths power and authority only to those who have been acknowledged as the experts. Our essential task, I believe, is to find ways to legitimately acknowledge our students through relations which encourage and foster agency, the nexus of learning.

Bakhtin describes dialogic discourse as a complex process of mediation of meanings and intentions, belonging, of course, to persons; a struggle in the process of "an individual's coming to ideological consciousness" (1981, p. 348). Central to these theorists' positions is the notion of passivity as an insidious deterrent to knowing and to becoming. Passivity denies emotion and agency; active, responsive understanding, on the other hand, signifies a creative process. Freire presents passivity as a conscious use of deception on the part of oppressors to assure the continuation of their own dominance. Implicit in this context are the political positions to which we are responsible, consciously or not, in our own classrooms. The "banking method," which views students as "adaptable, manageable beings" (Freire, 1970, p. 60) essentially as objects,

inhibits the development of students' abilities to engage in active inquiry, without which they do not develop a "critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (p. 60).

As teachers I believe we must recognize the ways in which our epistemic beliefs influence our relations with our students and, in turn, their ability to develop agency and responsible relations with the world. Feminist epistemologies are one realm to which we might turn to gain insight into ways of developing such practices, a place to challenge the assumptions and notions of the traditional paradigm. Katharyn Pyn Addelson claims, "*The measure of any epistemology lies in how well it allows knowledge makers to be responsible*. It does not lie in how well it gives us certified knowledge or the route to the truth of the one reality" (1993, p. 288). She advocates an epistemology that focuses on knowledge makers, rather than on a theory about knowledge itself, and she poses a view of "knowledge as a dynamic social process, not as a product to be justified, as traditional epistemologies had done" (p. 269). This concept brings knowledge into the realm of our school world, and knowledge-making into our everyday relations.

As Lorraine Code points out, "Knowledge, as the tradition defines it, is of objects. Only when people can be assimilated to objects is it possible to know them." She makes the claim "that knowing other people is a paradigmatic knowing" (1993, p. 39). This issue lies at the heart of my own struggle with what I naively labeled the problems of 'the system' in my earlier years of teaching. My introduction to epistemology (with Barbara Houston) compelled a significant shift in my understanding of the problems inherent in education and how my interpretation of epistemology has been markedly influenced by my own experiences as a student and training as a teacher. This doctoral program has helped me to name and to articulate my frustrations, the history of this struggle and the strength of my beliefs. I have been able to reflect on the subjugation and deprecation of notions of subjectivity, of emotion, of relationships and of living persons that affected, even damaged, my own educational experiences and my creation of what I believe to be

an ethical teaching practice. I recognize in the evolution of my teaching and my philosophy a growing resistance to an epistemology that values only cognitive processes (i.e., “cold’ cognition” (Noddings) as essential to an adequate education.

Acknowledgement of my students as unique persons with potential to recognize and transform reality has meant that I recognize my own incompetencies and that I continue to discover ways to teach within the context of their own personal, meaningful, existing lives, not in their distant, future lives.

Freire’s (1970) description of the “banking” model of education is a pedagogical stance derived directly from the assumptions of traditional epistemology, with its emphasis on persons as objects and not on human relations. A conception of epistemologies that include the human qualities of our lives, our emotions, our values, our histories, our relationships is necessary to connecting the reality of our world and our lives and our understanding of both. Freire writes: “To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic” (p. 35). What he advocates is what many feminist epistemologists propose: “Subjectivity and objectivity in constant dialectical relationship” (p. 35).

Understanding Persons

In his chapter titled “Understanding Persons,” Zeno Vendler (2001) further complicates the notion of knowing persons as a means of offering insight into the kinds of relationships which enhance our abilities to work with people, to teach. Distinguishing between knowing and understanding as disparate processes, he points out that understanding requires attendance to “how” and “why,” whereas knowing requires attention to “who,” “what,” “when” and “where.” His premise: “The dimension of understanding opens up after the facts are known ... [U]nderstanding is not continuous with what can be perceived; it is a new dimension” (2001, p. 20). Processes of understanding go beyond what can be explained by information from the observable world, because, as Vendler explains, “a person’s actions are explained in terms of

reasons, motives, intentions, and the like, that is to say, in terms of factors belonging to his subjective consciousness rather than to the objective and observable features of his body, behavior, or physical surroundings" (p. 208). Furthermore, the more "complex sentiments, emotions, and feelings" of a person complicate the notion of understanding.

Vendler offers the concept of empathy as a means to understanding persons, "the reproduction, by means of imaginary transference, of the agent's consciousness in one's own mind so that his conduct may appear as a result of free, but rational, choice" (p. 209). Empathy requires an act of imagination, imagining "what it must be like to be that person in those conditions" (p. 211):

The understanding of a person I am talking about here is not an act that lies in the public domain. It is as private, subjective, and unobservable as the state of mind itself, which is evoked in the process. Thus, by itself, it is not a scientific datum, theory, or projection. Yet, if I am right, the feat of understanding people is intimately tied to the *practice* of the social sciences. (2001, p. 212)

It is a difficult and complex feat—a life-long process for some of us. Some people have an obvious "gift" with people, a "natural" or learned capacity for compassion for and understanding of others. But it is a quality that can be developed. Educating teachers, beginning in but not restricted to teacher education programs, would offer our profession invaluable experience that would enhance the quality of our teaching lives, as well as our students' learning.

The Contemplative Dimension of Listening

In his study of empathy in classrooms, David Aspy asserts the significant impact of empathy on learning:

This study supports the general hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between the levels of teacher-offered empathy and the cognitive growth of the students. It extends the generalization of the effect of empathy to all instances of interpersonal learning processes. In particular, it points up the need for assessing teachers on other than intellectual indices. (1972, p. 64)

Knowledge of, and even passion for, our own subjects is inadequate as a criterion for education in the 21st century. As Noddings asserts, "Subject matter cannot carry itself.

Relation, except in very rare cases, precedes any engagement with subject matter” (1992, p. 36). Noddings’ notion of caring has been criticized, particularly for “the language of ‘nurturing’ because of its self-effacing, self-sacrificing female associations” (Code, p. 95). What is significant for me in her work, however, is the potential for developing a capacity for empathy, our attempts to take in “the reality of the other.” “Caring,” she asserts, “is largely reactive and responsive” (1984, p. 19). Empathic listening becomes a way to assist others in expression and reflection. The concept of “caring” reflects Felman’s understanding of the “witnessing” of our students’ “testimony,” a process which assists their own movements toward “accessing reality.” Empathy requires our capacity as witnesses to remain receptive, “sufficiently engrossed to listen to him and take pleasure or pain in what he recounts” (Noddings, 1984, p. 19). To do otherwise, to treat a story, an idea, an opinion dispassionately, is to “deny the person.” (Pennebaker, 1997, p. 111).

Noddings’ work offers an understanding of empathy that proposes, “We do not begin by formulating or solving a problem but by sharing a feeling” (1984, p. 31). Our ability to enter into our students’ engagement in questions about and reflection of themselves, to listen empathically, particularly as writing teachers, can become as important to their educative experiences as cognitive reasoning and logic, and, ultimately, enhance their learning. If learning is to have, as Dewey proposes, an effect on the attitudes of learners such that their future learning is engendered in the present, our pedagogies should not discard caring—the “reception, recognition and responses” to another (Noddings, 1984, p. 2). That is, certainly, our task as educators. I am moved daily in small ways, with individual students, to remember that our relationships with these children—affirming them as thinking and feeling human beings, as persons capable of expressing valuable ideas, of having worth in our society, respecting the full range of their capacities and interests—these relations are critical to their lives and their learning.

Entering into a relational mode differs from what Noddings calls "an analytic-objective mode in which we impose structure on the world" (p. 34). Noddings proposes, instead,

...a receptive-intuitive mode which, by a process we do not understand well, allows us to receive the object, to put ourselves quietly into its presence. We enter a feeling mode, but it is not necessarily an emotional mode. In such a mode, we receive what-is-there as nearly as possible without evaluation or assessment. We are in the world of relation, having stepped out of the instrumental world; we have either not yet established goals or we have suspended striving for those already established. (1984, p. 34)

This kind of practice, attention to "mindfulness," is, as Mary Rose O'Reilley states, "the whole point of life: *this* geranium, *this* weather, *this* student. Each moment of attention a little Sabbath" (1998, p. 45). O'Reilley discusses empathic attention as "deep listening":

People are dying in spirit for lack of it. In academic culture most listening is critical listening. We tend to pay attention only long enough to develop a counterargument; we critique the student's or the colleague's ideas; we mentally grade and pigeonhole each other. In society at large, people often listen with an agenda, to sell or petition or seduce. Seldom is there a deep, openhearted, unjudging reception of the other. (1998, p. 19)

When that kind of attention is paid to someone, to our students, for instance, "the questing spirit grows bold enough to claim its path" (p. 20). Quoting Brenda Ueland, O'Reilley explains "the contemplative dimension of listening," that when we listen in this way, "suddenly, you begin to hear not only what people are saying, but what they are trying to say, and you sense the whole truth about them. And you sense existence, not piecemeal, not this object and that, but as a translucent whole (1992, 109)" (1998, p. 21). As O'Reilley affirms, "One can, I think, listen someone into existence, encourage stronger self to emerge or a new talent to flourish" (p. 21). What better purpose for a teacher of writing, for we have the potential to accomplish all three in our work with adolescents.

The emphasis on empathy for most of these theorists is best expressed, I believe, in Noddings definition of care: "the displacement of interest from my own reality to the reality of the other" (1984, p. 14). In similar terms, Salvio ["On Using the Cultural Literacy Portfolio"] defines "empathic identification" as "the capacity for attending to how another

person feels rather than merely imagining *ourselves* in their position.” And Palmer writes that “attentive listening...is made easier when I am holding back my own authoritative impulses...I open room within myself to receive the external conversation...” (1998, p. 135). In *Thoughts Without a Thinker*, Mark Epstein explores the possibilities of Buddhist meditative practices to assist therapists in their everyday interaction with patients. The concept of “bare attention,” a stance which he describes as “the state of simply listening, of impartiality” offers possibilities for our professional relations, as well as for those of therapists to clients:

This state of simply listening, of impartiality, is at once completely natural and enormously difficult. It is a challenge for therapists to put aside their desires for a patient’s cure, their immediate conclusions about the patient’s communications, and their “insights” into the causes of the patient’s suffering so that they may continue to hear from the patient what they do not yet understand. It is all the more challenging to turn this kind of attention on oneself, as is required in meditation practice, to separate oneself from one’s own reactions, to move from an identity based on likes and dislikes to one based on impartial, nonjudgmental awareness. Bare attention requires the meditator to...take whatever is given. (1995, p. 115)

In *The Power of Mindful Learning*, Ellen J. Langer makes a distinction between intelligence and mindfulness. Among the characteristics of “Intelligence” she lists the following: “Corresponds to reality by identifying the optimum fit between individual and environment,” “A linear process moving from problem to resolution as rapidly as possible,” and “Developed from an observing expert’s perspective, which focuses on stable categories” (1997, p. 110). On the contrary, she asserts, “Mindfulness” operates in a different mode and offers other epistemic possibilities:

When we are mindful, we implicitly or explicitly (1) view a situation from several perspectives, (2) see information presented in the situation as novel, (3) attend to the context in which we are perceiving the information, and eventually (4) create new categories through which this information may be understood. (1997, pp. 110-111)

These theories offer similar variations on a theme: Empathy is an integral part of education, affecting learning in multiple and complex ways, and it is a quality that we can train and develop as essential to our professional work with students.

Relations, Agency and Persons in Process

As for me, I can only state that I started my career with the firm view that individuals must be manipulated for their own good; I only came to the attitudes I have described and the trust in the individual that is implicit in them because I found that these attitudes were so much more potent in producing learning and constructive change. (Rogers & Freiberg, 1994, p. 160)

Rogers has emphasized that education is not about teaching but rather about the ways in which we can learn to facilitate "change and learning." In fact, a focus on teaching tends to inhibit what we are coming to understand about the nature of learning and about goals of education. "Changingness, a reliance on process rather than on static knowledge, is the only thing that makes any sense as a goal for education in the modern world" (p. 152). Rogers and Freiberg's description of the educative experience resonates with an understanding of teaching not knowing as I have attempted to portray it: "To free curiosity, to permit individuals to go charging off in new directions dictated by their own interests, to unleash the sense of inquiry, to open everything to questioning and exploration, to recognize that everything is in process of change..." (p. 152).

Rogers' work emphasizes the "attitudinal qualities that exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner..." (p. 153). The most significant criterion in the relationship requires the facilitator to be "a real person, being what she is, entering into a relationship with the learner...being herself, not denying herself" (p. 154). In this relational mode, the facilitator can recognize and accept her own emotions and responses, neither imposing them upon her students nor judging the student product or the student himself, "not disguising them as judgments or attributing them to other people" (p. 159).

Rogers and Freiberg view the person as in "a process of becoming" (p. 161), "a fluid process, not a fixed and static entity;...a continually changing constellation of potentialities, not a fixed quantity of traits..."(p. 122). And particularly relevant to teaching writing, Rogers speaks of the actualizing tendency as "basic to motivation" (1977, p. 237). "The mainspring of creativity appears to be the same tendency which we

discover so deeply as the curative force in psychotherapy—*man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities...*" (p. 350). Our educative purposes are started in relation—to help each student be more open to the potentialities, the possibilities, within him or her for creating and articulating experience.

In their work with student writers, Herrington and Curtis state conclusions that offer profound implications about the nature of writing and the experiences that we might recognize and offer our students:

[E]ach [student] sought a sense of agency through the writing, a sense of both speaking for and speaking to others whose thinking, if not behavior, they might in some way affect....But they all sought as well to make themselves subjects of change through writing, choosing and sometimes creating new ways to present themselves to others, new ways to represent themselves in the presence of others, new ways to be in the future without losing the thread of who they were and had been...not just writers but persons in process. (2000, p. 17)

Opening our classrooms, our conferences, our pedagogies and our relations to the possibilities of this kind of growth as persons defines our professional work in even more complex and delicate terms and calls for a discourse that includes these various notions of persons. Herrington and Curtis' work portrays what I, too, have seen in my students' experiences as they "actively use writing...for the ongoing development of their personal identities, including their sense of themselves in relation to others" (2000, p. 1). And these authors call for "the significant and inescapable role we teachers have in our students' ongoing self-definition" (p. 1). In our experiences, "writing becomes less a self-expressive performance than a self-constituting, relational act" (p. 5).

I, too, have come to value the profound impact that the processes of writing have upon students in terms of both cognitive and emotional development—both necessary to agency. And how do we encourage this personal growth in our teaching? Perhaps through kinds of relations that do not function to overwhelm or intimidate, to correct or silence, to judge or punish, but rather offer "a receptive and therefore 'constructive' audience that they could imaginatively carry with them long after their writing courses had ended" (Herrington & Curtis, 2000, p. 23). Such learning requires empathy, as they

define it, "the more complex, honest act of truly listening for the meanings behind our students' written and oral expressions in order to convey a sense of true understanding" (p. 31). Herrington, as a teacher of writing, states that "like not as" therapists, "I was searching for ways to be with my students in their learning that would help them exhibit greater coherence, agency, and understanding both of and for their subjects in their written expressions" (p. 25). And Herrington comments on the significance of this process:

Personal identity (motive, character, intention, action) is a byproduct of negotiations within relationships. Building on the argument that meaning arises in the emergent flow of actions and supplements, we understand that any way of identifying or describing the self is also dependent upon the interchange of participants. (Herrington and Curtis, 2000, pp. 33-34)

The shaping of our own beliefs and ideas begins in relation to others, within the context of social interaction and intent. Bakhtin and Starratt both point to aspects of the emotional life as the realm in which an ideology begins to consciously shape itself, in which a desire for intimacy with that which "touches us," that which matters, reveals itself:

When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way, what first occurs is a separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse, along with a rejection of those congeries of discourses that do not matter to us, that do not touch us. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345)

That intimate connection marks the break from the demands of authoritarian discourse to accept its meanings without critical reflection, dispassionately, and initiates the facility of an inner dialogue that proceeds on its own to continue to mediate discourse. This process of tension between the word of history and the word to be created acts as catalyst to the inner life of knowing.

In other language, Dewey discusses "intentionality" as the development of "reflective attention," which he defines as "the power to hold problems, questions, before the mind" (1976, p. 147). The transition from the learner's non-conscious intention to "reflective attention proper" is, for the child, a significant movement from acceptance of

received knowledge to engagement in inquiry and knowledge-making. Bakhtin describes this emergence of intention as the end to which the dialogic process leads the knower:

[L]anguage, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention... Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (1981, pp. 293-294)

Starratt's term "dramatic consciousness" has taken on a new and relevant dimension for me. Producer and director, Sydney Lamatt was interviewed on National Public Radio (1995) and I was taken with his statement, "When I work with actors, I don't want them to represent life onstage. I want them to create it." It is a description of how I would like to envision teaching. I don't want my students to represent and mirror knowledge as others possess it, particularly as I do; I want them to create their own relationships within and of the world through conscious, reflective inquiry as Starratt defines it: "

It implies being present to the drama, engaged in its passions, struggles and adventures, rather than being psychologically distant, removed from the action....[It requires] attention to complex relationships between variables in a constant state of flux...with subtleties of meaning" (1990, p. 81).

His perception of dramatic consciousness offers an epistemological position.

As Schon states, many of us have been caught in the dilemma of having experienced difficulty articulating the definitions and descriptions of what we have come to value in our teaching and those competencies we have attained through experience. "Writing process" has been one of those concepts. With the language of a new paradigm, one that includes in the definition of knowledge the subjective, passionate, personal, emotional, and relational views of persons whose own conscious engagement with reality is critical to their development of agency, we can begin to make sense of process—a far more important process of learning than merely how to write. These theorists offer a framework and a language with which to pose the questions that will

challenge and clarify our conceptualization of the ways in which epistemology and pedagogy can continue to inform our professional practices. And, one of our most difficult tasks in the dynamics of this inquiry will be learning how to include our own humanity in those practices.

"Relational Responsibility"

In terms of relational responsibility, the point is not to locate the truth so much as to sustain enough ambiguity that the door to meaning is never finally closed. (McNamee, 1999, p. 52)

Throughout this dissertation I have referenced and quoted extensively from McNamee and Gergen's work in their call for "new modes of dialogue" (p. 2) which acknowledge the integral nature of relations in constituting meaning. Essentially, response shapes meaning.

"[I]t is out of relationships that we develop meaning, rationalities, the sense of value, moral interest, motivation and so on. From such grounds we might succeed in developing discursive resources that shift attention away from individual sources of action to the sphere of relationship" (p. 15).

And the "emphasis on processes of relating rather than on objects in interaction" (p. 38) moves us toward the concept of a "reality of interdependence" (p. 36), constituting

... a process of relational responsibility, an exploration that is potentially without end, but each iteration of which may render new insights, positionings, and potential moves in interaction. It is to invite the ambient voices into the dialogue, without drowning the essential identities necessary for the relationship. (1999, p. 41)

As McNamee suggests, "To be responsible to relational processes is to favor the possibility of intelligibility itself" (p.19). These concepts can offer us insights into our work in education, and particularly, I believe, in the teaching of literacy. Teacher education programs might consider using this kind of work to engage young teachers in the realities of dialogic interdependence.

"Trained Intuition"

[Intuition] is a purveyor of possibilities, not an evaluating faculty... Your intuition can show you alternatives; it can give you a sense of what is possible for you... and will always take you beyond the boundaries of present conscious knowledge. (Vaughan, 1979, p. 177)

In English (not just literature but writing too), we may not be trained to attend to our feelings, but most of us learn that in trying to figure out how texts function, our feelings and intuition are as important as our analytical reason... (Elbow, 1990, p. 116)

The term intuition has not been part of our professional discourse. It implies something unsubstantial and anti-intellectual, in a sense. It has had a place, however, in my own sense of developing practice, a term I use when talking with other teachers about writing conferences. Teaching not knowing has an intuitive mode inherent in its dynamic, and intuition is a term we have yet to study within our own field. In *Awakening the Inner Eye: Intuition in Education*, Nel Noddings and Paul Shore assert that intuition "represents an area of pedagogical neglect and, perhaps, pedagogical helplessness":

We see in it something of the unteachable and turn away without considering what we might teach that would enhance it. We quite naturally turn to proof that is complete in itself and away from creating a picture that reveals our seeing; we rely on explanation and shy away from an obligation to induce understanding. (1984, p. 80)

Noddings and Shore state that attending to analytical or conceptual work requires that we impose structures; working intuitively, however, we exist in a different mode altogether:

We look, listen, touch; we allow ourselves to be moved, appeared to, grasped. If there is a structure that we are imposing on what we view, some sort of 'reality frame' or inherent structure for, say, language, we are unaware of it and have no control over it; indeed, we may be unable to explicate it even upon request. (1984, p. 69)

They distinguish analytical from intuitive processes primarily through this notion of "control." Intuitive understanding "requires a letting go of my attempts to control" (p. 74). The "passive phase" of the intuitive process requires that we *not* act but remain passive, watching, listening, feeling. Intuition is "a way of knowing" (p. 46). It is "a capacity that reveals" (p. 53). And it offers the "ability to initiate meaning" (p. 53).

In *Awakening Intuition*, Vaughan proposes that this kind of intelligence requires of us different ways of being: "Learning to observe the flow of your thoughts and inner imagery, listening to your internal dialogues, and being aware of feelings and sensations are all part of the process whereby you can expand the awareness of being in the moment" (1979, p. 183). Vaughan states that "a commitment to awakening intuition" has

everything to do with the stances we assume: "It means a willingness to know yourself as you are, dropping pretenses and disguises no matter how successful your particular act may be in terms of getting approval from others" (p. 176). The result is key to our educational purposes: "A significant shift from external to internal validation takes place as you open up more to an intuitive sense of what is meaningful for you" (p. 176).

Carl Rogers asserts that intuition is essential to "whole person learning":

The right hemisphere functions in quite a different way. It is intuitive. It grasps the essence before it understands the details. It takes in a whole gestalt, the total configuration. It operates in metaphors. It is aesthetic rather than logical. It makes creative leaps. It is the way of the artist, of the creative scientist. It is associated with the feeling qualities of life. (1994, p. 37)

The balance between intuitive and rational ways of knowing are critical to these theorists. Intuition relates to processes of understanding. Vaughan observes, "Understanding involves a fulfilled complementarity of intellect and intuition in an individual" (1979, p. 117).

Certainly there is a place in our discourse for such notions of intuition in our work in negotiating ambiguity, uncertainty and not knowing in the lives of our students. Noddings and Shore argue for intuition as an epistemic mode, one that resonates with the language and theories of process pedagogy:

The quest for understanding establishes a direction in the intuitive mode, but this direction is at once both sure-and-clear and continually open to change. We know where we are headed but must constantly tack to stay on a course we cannot chart beforehand. (1984, p. 81)

Perhaps we can initiate into education programs the means to develop the dialogic capacity to expand our knowledge of process, of persons, *and* of pedagogy. Particularly in the teaching of writing, in which the capacity for dialogue remains essential to our work with students, we can continue to inquire into modes of discourse through which we might sustain an on-going professional dialogue, and, perhaps, enhance our understanding of teaching writing as teaching not knowing.

END NOTES

¹Tom Newkirk made reference to J. D. Salinger's creation of digression in *The Catcher in the Rye* in a talk to teachers in 1982.

²Barbara Houston used this story in a class and modeled for me the value of working with moral dilemmas in my classes.

³I spoke with both Jess and her guidance counselor about this issue. The counselor was aware of it and Jess had been in therapy.

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APPENDIX A: IRB Approval Letter



UNIVERSITY of NEW HAMPSHIRE

May 13, 2004

Moher, Terry
Education, Morrill Hall
34 Watson Road
Durham, NH 03824

IRB #: 2996
Study: The Language of Process: Teaching 'not knowing' in a Secondary Classroom
Approval Date: 07/23/2003

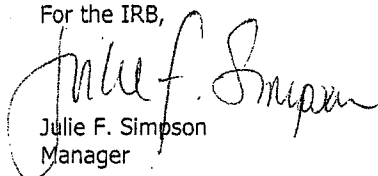
The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects*. (This document is also available at <http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/IRB.html>.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed pink Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,



Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Paula Salvio, Education

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research, Service Building,
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585 * Fax: 603-862-3564