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Breaking the rules: Teaching and learning writing in the high school

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Breaking the rules: Teaching and learning writing in the high school

Vibert, Ann Bruthwell, Ph.D.

University of New Hampshire, 1990

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**BREAKING THE RULES: TEACHING AND LEARNING WRITING
IN THE HIGH SCHOOL**

BY

**ANN VIBERT
B.A. Acadia University, 1974
B.Ed. Mount Saint Vincent University, 1978
M.Ed. Mount Saint Vincent University, 1984**

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**

December, 1990

This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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DEDICATION

For Isabel, with love and gratitude

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It is customary among writers of studies like this to begin by thanking "all those without whom this work would not be possible." In this case, that is quite literally true of many people.

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Among the students, whose kindness to a stranger deeply impressed me, I particularly want to thank "Patrick" and "Kathy" for their warmth, openness, and good humor. Admin-

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from generosity to students, offering the invaluable experience of a brilliant career as writer and teacher. He gives us the teacher's greatest gift: faith in our own voices.

What might have been a lonely and arduous task became an adventure through the companionship of friends. The students and staff in the Writing Lab at UNH are a rare group. Their camaraderie and creativity turns work into play. Sue Ducharmes troubleshooted the difficulties of coordinating long distance submissions and meetings and offered incisive advice on all manner of matters. Mary Comstock, Peg Murray, and Mary Ellen MacMillan, my fellow writers and sometime alter-egos, were always there to talk, walk, laugh, cry and comfort: their thinking informs these pages.

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ABSTRACT

BREAKING THE RULES: TEACHING AND LEARNING WRITING
IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

by

Ann Vibert

University of New Hampshire, December, 1990

This dissertation explores the development of student- and process-centered writing classrooms within the context of a traditionally structured, curriculum-centered high school. The focus of the study is on how teachers and students experience and address contradictions between assumptions implicit in writing process pedagogy and assumptions implicit in the structure and organization of the high school.

An eight-month ethnography of two high school English classrooms, the study is a descriptive narrative of classroom and school events punctuated by the reflective comments of teachers and students in intensive and extensive interviews. The classrooms are "placed" within the school, the teachers within their lives, the school within the community.

The research findings suggest that teachers interested in teaching processes and in developing student-centered

classrooms in the high school may be frustrated by institutional factors. These include time structures and curriculum fragmentation, authoritarian administrative models, attitudes toward work, and accountability and comparative evaluation measures, all of which assume transmission pedagogies. Students who have "learned school" appear not only to understand how school works, but also to be critically articulate about school success strategies and procedures that trivialize learning.

Teachers and students address these frustrations by bringing their own lives into the classroom, by talking about their intentions for their classrooms, by negotiating curriculum and evaluation. Thus they begin to change the institution. Finally, change itself - personal, professional, and organizational - is explored as an organic process, taking place from the inside out.

PROLOGUE

The Research Topic

It is very difficult for me to say when and where and how this research project began. In a sense, it began back in Nova Scotia. I was teaching high school English and growing increasingly interested in the really thorny problem of how to teach writing. What first twigged my interest was a realization that I had no idea how to do this, coupled with a depressing discovery that the textbooks, handbooks, worksheets, and grammar lessons were not going to do it for me. So I began to teach writing by making it up as I went along, "living off the land", as Don Graves might put it, basing my writing program on my students' papers and on my own experience with writing. It wasn't good enough.

In search of a better way, I enrolled a few years later in a graduate Education program at Mount Saint Vincent University. There I encountered the work of people like Janet Emig, Donald Murray, and Donald Graves, and first learned about "teaching the writing process". Newly armed with recent research, solid theory, and compelling descriptions of practice, I went back to the high school to teach writing properly, and nearly drove myself crazy with frustration. For one thing, I was trying to teach both the

standard writing program (literary analysis) and "writing process" at the same time and to the same students. We were all very confused.

It occurred to me that what we were then calling "writing process" was an approach developed out of research and practice in elementary schools and universities. Murray was a university teacher, Graves a researcher in the elementary school. Emig was a high school researcher, but she had stopped at diagnosing the problem and suggesting a direction for the rest of us to follow - which was task enough. There seemed to be a distinct shortage of research on writing and studies of innovative writing programs coming from within the high school. At the same time, I sensed that these new approaches to teaching writing were not quite as at home in the high school as they looked in the elementary and university classrooms of my friends and colleagues. I began to wonder about the effects of the high school itself on how the people within it conceived of teaching and learning writing.

One of the difficulties I first encountered in implementing a writing process program hinged on incompatibilities between the teaching of processes and the social purposes of the high school. The high school was originally and is again now essentially a preparatory school (Trow, 1977). In our high school, the preparation that counted was

preparation for university. This was partly because a relatively high percentage of our students were university bound, and partly in deference to the power group in the community, the parents of the university bound ("the 'A' parents", as a teacher at Oyster River put it.) The specter of The University haunted our staff meetings and curricula like a discontented ghost. And like a ghost, it was an illusory university: the university we teachers and the principal carried about in our heads, a particular university of two or five or twenty years ago, fogged by selective memory and distorted by time. Its influence was manifest, among other things, in some very bad writing advice (eg: never say "I" in an essay).

The preparatory role of the high school, perhaps especially in the form of preparation for university, was at odds in many ways with the principles of teaching writing processes. The latter assumed one began with students' writing, helping them over time to refine it toward something better; the former assumed one began with the form (the critical essay or research paper) and aimed at teaching mastery of it regardless of what students could presently do. The latter held that students should write in a variety of "real world" forms for real world purposes (review a book or movie, editorialize on a current event, explore an idea), usually on topics of their own choosing; the former, that

students might write in many forms as exercise or for fun, but what really counted were the academic forms on subjects of the teacher's choosing. The latter assumed one wrote for exploration and communication; the former assumed one wrote for evaluation. The latter was for the present; the former, for the future (Tchudi, 1986).

Trouble arose as I tried to keep one foot in each camp (with upwards of 150 students), looking for ways of reconciling some of the contradictions. More trouble arose as I discovered my students had learned school, believed writing was for a grade, believed learning was for the future. I congratulated a student named Nevin on a publishable sports editorial he'd written on the 1985 World Series; he told me he could do "that kind of thing", but was no good at "real writing", by which he meant literary themes. I told students I wouldn't be grading everything they wrote; they wanted to know why on earth they would write if not for a grade. It took time for them to see purposes for writing inherent in the task itself. Time was in very short supply.

But perhaps the most disheartening feature of the whole enterprise was the growing sense of loneliness I felt. On the surface of things, there was no reason to be lonely. My colleagues, especially in the English Department, were my friends, and I liked and respected them all. The loneliness came from my own inability to communicate, to say why, for

instance, an examination worth fifty percent of the final grade subverted most of what I was trying to do. It seemed that in order to explain I had either to speak volumes or to settle for "I look at it differently." The fundamental assumptions of the institution appeared unquestionable. The curriculum was given and stable, and the teacher's job was to transmit it and test students' mastery of it. The breakdown in communication I experienced in the face of a world-view so different from mine was not unique (see Egan, 1988 on the difficulties of communication across educational metaphors).

When I came to the University of New Hampshire a few years later, I studied in university classrooms and researched in elementary school classrooms that had clearly been profoundly affected by the work of people like Donald Graves, Donald Murray, and Janet Emig. They were the kinds of classrooms I had struggled to invent in the high school. At the same time, America's high schools were once again coming under heavy fire both in the popular media and in the educational academy. Depending on the complainant, they were variously decried as stagnant, unimaginative, and reactionary, or as fuzzy-headed, permissive, and lax - often, as all of these things at once (Ravitch, 1988; Powell et al, 1985). Friends at the university sometimes wondered aloud what was wrong with high school teachers that high schools

remained so depressingly the same. "It's not the people," I said. "It's the institution. Its structure is different, its purposes are different. The institution isn't congenial to student-centered or process-centered ways of thinking about learning." I was unable to explain further.

But the fact that there were and are high school teachers successfully implementing writing process and other student-centered philosophies in their classrooms (Romano, 1987 is a published example) signifies that it is not impossible to do so. High school structures may *encourage* teachers and students to think of learning as a sort of linear transmission of knowledge, through which the curriculum is passed directly from teacher to students. It doesn't follow, however, that high schools make it impossible to think of learning in any other way.

This is essentially the series of experiences and the line of reasoning that lead me to undertake an ethnography of a "writing process" classroom in an academically excellent, traditional high school. I wanted to know how such a classroom might operate. The question this study explores, then, is two-fold. When a teacher and students develop a process-centered writing program within the context of a traditional high school, what are the tensions and difficulties they encounter? How do they attempt to negotiate and resolve these tensions?

Review of the Literature

In 1971, Janet Emig wrote of high school writing instruction:

The teaching of composition at this level is essentially unimodal, with only extensive [transactional] writing given sanction in many schools...Too often [the only audience] is a teacher, interested chiefly in a product he can criticize rather than a process he can help initiate through empathy and support.(97)

Emig's study launched an educational movement of unprecedented influence in the history of composition studies in America, such that nearly twenty years later writing research, theory, and practice are still dominated by notions of "teaching the writing process". But ironically, while writing process pedagogy has had profound impact on the teaching of writing in elementary schools and colleges, the subject of Emig's dissertation - the high school writing program - has remained remarkably unchanged.

Applebee, Langer and Mullis, in The Writing Report Card (1986) note that while "a growing proportion of [high school] students is being asked to perform...process-oriented writing activities...process approaches have been superficial" (81, 82). They call for studies examining how these approaches might be modified to meet the needs of the "more highly structured, more curriculum-centered high school" (82). Similarly, Newkirk (in press) argues that "the

crisis in language development [in the high school] is not simply one of ineffectual teaching methods that can, without great disruption, be replaced by more efficient ones." Along with Sizer's *Horace* (1984), Newkirk maintains that any real change in high school language arts instruction must involve high school teachers themselves, must account for the unique circumstances of teaching in the high school.

These researchers strike a similar note. Underlying each analysis is concern that attempts to change high school language education without addressing the issue of the high school itself are doomed to superficiality and will amount to no change at all. The history of ineffective change in the high school supports this position.

Across the century since Charles Eliot and the NEA Committee of Ten (1893) defined the American high school, the institution has been remarkable for the extent to which it has, simultaneously, changed and remained the same. The shape the Committee gave high schools - the school day broken into periods of study in discrete disciplines, each discipline taught by a subject specialist - has not changed in a century. Similarly, the disciplinary structure and content Eliot and the Committee identified (English, sciences, classics, mathematics, social studies, modern languages) has, with appropriate adjustments to subject and methodology, remained in place.

Many of the forces that shape high school curriculum today figured in the deliberations of the 1890's Committee. English, for instance, was included as a subject partly because the university protested loudly the deplorable state of literacy - and particularly of writing skills - among entering students (Applebee, 1974; Connors, 1986). The history of English education in America makes bosh of the recurring romantic notion that in the good old days every citizen with a basic education could write "correct" prose. English education was *instituted* in response to a "literacy crisis" among America's youth, and since the beginning we have thrown up our hands in despair over declining literacy among students with predictable regularity (see Applebee, 1974). Likewise, the nineteenth century controversy over the inclusion of English Literature in the school curriculum sounds very familiar, given present debates over canonical diversity versus cultural literacy. Opponents to the study of English argued that a curriculum including mere English novels and plays (as a supplement to the classics, Greek and Latin) threatened students' understanding of our important cultural heritage as represented in the canon of great works and ideas (Applebee, 1974), essentially the argument of E.D. Hirsch (1987).

In the first half of this century, the Great Books Lists, works the universities considered essential prepara-

tion for the academy, largely determined the reading material in high school literature classrooms. Today preparation for university English is still the major justification for literary selections on the high school curriculum, and for many other instructional decisions as well. The lists linger in spirit if not in fact.

While the structures, purposes, and preoccupations of the high school have remained interestingly stable over the last hundred years, the institution has shown itself to be very efficient in accommodating the rapidly changing social and educational agenda of twentieth century America. Working from the same structure and organization (and, therefore, from the same epistemology implicit in that organization), the high school has nonetheless adapted to the changing social beliefs of each decade of this century and responded to the concerns of a bewildering array of interest groups. Powell et al (1985) argue persuasively that in the process the high school has lost all sense of direction, becoming a "shopping mall" of compromise programs that placate rather than educate. Through attempting to account for and "add on" so many often contradictory educational philosophies and innovations, the high school has implemented few with any depth. Too much change has amounted to little real change.

Applebee's (1974) history of reform in the teaching of English and Cremin's (1961) history of progressivism in

American education illustrate this point well.

Applebee documents how disagreement among educators as to the purpose of English education (and therefore, as to the content, methodology, and everything else) was built into the project of English teaching from the beginning. Early proponents of English education made claims for the subject from within three very different traditions. The ethical tradition, asserting moral development as the fundamental purpose of English education, grew out of notions of reading instruction as a means to inculcating proper religious and secular moralities (see McGuffey's Readers), as well as a very different Romantic tradition maintaining the essential morality of all art. The classical tradition asserted training of the mental "faculties" (especially memory and reason) and developing cultural literacy as the prime purposes of the subject, and emphasized the teaching of rhetoric and grammar. The appreciative tradition (a position not popular among educators until the progressives lent it social sanction in the early part of the century) held aesthetic and appreciative development as the central purposes of English education.

These three traditions gave English a stronger claim to curricular importance than any other subject: there were ethical, intellectual, and utilitarian reasons to teach it. But they also resulted in conflicts and confusions among

English educators as to their mission - conflicts and confusions that are by no means resolved today.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, these early traditions fanned out into a panoply of highly idealistic purposes and claims for both the teaching of English and the high school in general, as enrollments soared and educators considered ways to accommodate new high school populations. A flood of immigrants and working class students, who could no longer join the labor market until the age of sixteen, transformed the school from a university preparatory to a terminal institution (Trow, 1977), as industry saw in the schools an opportunity for cheap labor training. Vocational and general education, "domestic science" and "manual training" were established in response to a complex web of social changes and lobbies including progressives, agricultural interests, and industry.

Progressive educators linked vocational and general education to the utilitarian tradition of English, arguing that English should provide basic life skills for those whose "probable destinies" did not include college. Optimistic empiricists that they were, the progressives believed that these basic life skills could be identified by applying the rigors of scientific method to observation, and educational testing was born (Cremin, 1961).

In *The Irony of Early School Reform*, Michael Katz (1968)

examines how early reforms of public education intended to democratize the institution actually tyrannized the ordinary citizens they were meant to liberate. Recent critical research and theory (egs: Oakes, 1985; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Shannon, 1989) focusses on the role of tracking and standardized aptitude and mastery testing in maintaining structures of inequality in American schools and society. And yet these measures were enthusiastically urged upon the schools by progressive educators - in a sense, the forbearers of critical theory - in the interests of providing truly democratic education and "meeting the needs" of the disenfranchised. The ironies of school reform in this century appear to be in part an effect of reforms conceived and imposed without the participation of the people for whom the reforms are intended or by whom they are implemented. The act of "empowering" others is, ironically, also an act of exerting power over them.

Both the high school and the teaching of English in the high school continued throughout the thirties, forties, and fifties to try on new purposes and roles as the temper of the times changed. In the socially conscious thirties, high school teachers generally and English teachers particularly were "to prepare individuals to take part intelligently in the management of conditions under which they live, and to understand the forces that shape their lives" (Kilpatrick,

1925). The war exerted a pragmatic influence on English education and the high school, resulting in a reassertion of the importance of "basic skills" and the adoption of a "life adjustments" curriculum, through which students were to learn to deal with the exigencies of life (Cremin, 1961). Then in the fifties, Sputnik went into space.

As far as most of America was concerned, this event was directly attributable to the failure of the American high school. A rash of urgent studies critical of schools appeared, culminating in the careful Conant Report (1959), through which was established the modern comprehensive high school - the "Shopping Mall High School" of the 1985 Five Year Study (Powell et al).

The reaction to Sputnik in the 1950's demonstrated a deep association in American thinking between education and national productivity. By the 1980's, judging from the new rash of concerned media documentaries and books comparing American and Japanese educational systems, that association has become a widespread assumption that the primary purpose of schooling is to serve the gross national product. Leaving aside for a moment the issue of whether or not this *should* be the purpose of schools, there is room for considerable doubt that it *can* be. Certainly the assumption that strong economies are built on exemplary public schools is not borne out by history (Victorian England and modern New Zealand,

for example).

The march of change in the American high school throughout this century has amounted to what Paricia Albjerg Graham (1988) calls a "cacophony about practice, silence about purpose". High schools have tried on a variety of costumes as changing times and lobbies have dictated. But the form under the costume has never been altered, regardless of the fit of the new clothes. Innovations have all been aimed at surface features, at program content and methodology, without due consideration to how content, methodology, purpose, process, and structure inform and modify each other within institutions and organizations. Changes mandated from above and implemented as add-ons have had consequences at best unintentional, at worst ironic.

Perhaps this phenomenon is in large part due to the fact that most of the innovations in American high school programs have been conceived outside of the high school, imported, and imposed on teachers and students. The plans and programs I have referred to here were all hatched outside the school, by professors of Education, professional associations, school boards, psychologists, Harvard University presidents, industrialists, and textbook companies. Frequently, little more than lip-service has been paid to educating teachers about the new programs they have been asked to enact. Teaching becomes a strange profession indeed

when everyone else knows more about the teacher's work than the teacher.

This is not to suggest that contributions from other fields to educational thought and school organization are not welcome. Education is a fascinating field precisely because it is by nature inter-disciplinary, involving insights from philosophy, sociology, psychology, anthropology, linguistics, rhetoric, and literary theory. But when those insights are transmuted into educational programs and practices, they need to be worked out in collaboration with practitioners and in the context of the schools.

Cremin's history of progressivism was written in the spirit of reconsidering the enormous contributions of that movement to American educational thought, at a time when progressives had become the scapegoats for all that was supposedly wrong with the schools. Shallow and disappointing new programs in high schools in this century seem not so much a failure in educational theory and imagination as a failure in understanding change and how it occurs (Fullan, 1982). If the ideas of progressive educators failed the high school, it was in the sense that they were never really implemented. In *Education and Experience* (1938), Dewey himself disassociated his philosophy from the pale forms of progressivism in American schools.

The last fifteen years have seen a renewed interest in

Dewey's ideas, as research in cognitive psychology, language acquisition, reading, composition and educational sociology, and theories in literary criticism and rhetoric appear to provide support for Dewey's understanding of how learning happens. The writing process approach this study describes has roots in Dewey (Newkirk, 1989), particularly in its focus on the processes of learning, on the student, on learning by doing, and on the socially constructed nature of knowing.

It is surprising that this interest in learning processes, in how people learn, seems to have had as yet little influence on the new 1980's spate of studies devoted to redefining the high school. Hirsch's (1987) argument for cultural literacy seems to go awry on just this point. He assumes that if students don't know a body of knowledge, it is because they haven't been taught it. By failing to consider the relationship of personal and group experience to knowing, Hirsch relies on a transmission model of learning, in the process reducing culture from what one lives through to what one learns in the classroom.

Lightfoot (1983), in her detailed and fascinating account of six high schools that "work", examines characteristics of teaching, philosophy, and structure these schools share. But again, she does not address the issue of learning processes, and of whether the conditions for

learning processes are in place in the high school. Sizer (1984) describes the impossible job of the modern high school English teacher, and makes recommendations for profound changes in high school structure that would, in fact, encourage the kinds of connection-making we know are fundamental to learning. Yet he does this from the perspective of teaching rather than of learning. Powell et al (1985) capture the confusion that characterizes the modern high school as it is asked to do more and more for students. They suggest that the high school focus on teaching students to read critically, reason clearly, and write effectively, but they do not touch the issue of how students are to learn these things. One wonders especially about the increasing numbers of American high school students who are enraged, endangered, neglected, embattled, alienated, and underfed. These are the realities with which the classroom teacher must deal.

Linda McNeil (1986), in her thoughtful analysis of contradictions between high school organization and the processes of learning provides a theoretical framework for this research. In ethnographies of four largely middle-class American high schools, McNeil reveals her major finding: "when the school's organization becomes centered on managing and controlling, teachers and students take school less seriously" (xviii). McNeil's study examines contradictions

between management and organization purposes (including time structures, administrative control of teachers and students, accountability measures, uniformity requirements), and educational purposes (including active learning, self-initiative and self-discipline, independent thinking, connected knowing). When management purposes win out, McNeil demonstrates, teachers are de-skilled. Curriculum then becomes a peculiarly flat, official version of knowledge, devoid of controversy or interest. The air of unreality that characterizes such "school knowledge" makes it very different from the world knowledge by which students live.

That is, [schools] do more than transmit an official culture to students. They take culture and transform it into pieces of knowledge and units of courses and sequences of assignments that are compatible with the internal bureaucratic processes of the school. After being processed through worksheets, list-filled lectures and short-answer tests, the cultural content... comes to serve only the interests of institutional efficiencies... Its meaning is whatever meaning the assignments have in helping students meet the institutional requirements of credentialing.(13)

A small body of practical literature offers models for teaching writing processes specifically in the high school. Tom Romano's *Clearing the Way* (1987) and Newkirk's collection *To Compose* (1986) combine theory and practice to propose approaches to writing instruction consistent with research on writing and learning processes. Mayher et al

(1983) suggest strategies for using writing as a tool for thinking across the curriculum. And Mayher's thoughtful and timely *Uncommon Sense* (1989) challenges the "common sense" of language instruction (i.e. that we learn language by abstract study of it). But none of these works takes on the relationship between the philosophy of learning implicit in writing process pedagogy and the philosophy of learning implicit in the high school context in which it occurs.

This study takes the direction suggested by McNeil's observation that "there has been a dearth of empirical work on the actual dynamics of classroom learning and how they are affected by the broader organization of schools" (xix). It explores the hows of implementation of student- and process-centered programs in specific classrooms within a specific traditionally structured and subject-centered high school. The focus is on how teachers and students of writing processes experience and address contradictions between institution and classroom.

Design of the Study and Procedures

The study was an eight month ethnography carried out over one year primarily in two high school English classrooms. One classroom was a writing workshop run by an instructor - Dick Tappan - who has had ten years' experience in experimenting with a writing process approach. The other

classroom was a literature classroom run by an instructor - Emma Rous - who is beginning to explore the use of response journal writing in literature courses.

I chose these teachers on the basis of several criteria.

1) They were accessible, experienced teachers eager to participate in this study. 2) They were identified by their colleagues, their students, and/or the UNH educational community as teachers interested in innovation in reading/writing instruction. 3) They taught in the same department, allowing me to focus my study on the dynamics within one school and department.

I collected data to address a number of questions related to the impact of the high school on the teaching of writing processes. Who were these teachers and how did they become the teachers they were? What were their stated and demonstrated values in relation to the teaching of writing? How did they see the fit between their teaching values and the values of their department and school? What departmental and/or institutional constraints did they see as affecting their teaching? What constraints appeared to operate upon them without their awareness? How did they attempt to negotiate these constraints? What frustrations and desires about their teaching and their school did they express? What were some of the important factors that appeared to inform their instructional decisions? How did they see themselves

as fitting into this department and this school? How did their colleagues see them as fitting into same?

I also collected data on the impact of the school on the learning of writing processes. I recorded samples of each class' behavioral, spoken, and written responses to instructional activities through fieldnotes and interviews (whole class, small group, and individual) and through photocopied student writing samples. I focussed my study on two case study students (one girl and one boy, each from a different class), collecting more detailed and intensive data on these two students. I spent four days of the study following one or the other of the students through their daily schedule, in order to place the English classrooms in the full school context.

I carried on formal interviews and informal conversations about the school with at least twelve teachers and at least sixty students. I followed the vice-principal through her day to get a glimpse of the administrative perspective, annoying her whenever possible with questions about her job. I interviewed a guidance councillor. I talked to parents and listened to gossip. I attended two staff meetings, three department meetings, a department grading session, a Ropes Course outing, and missed a hike up Chocura Mountain. I laughed, discussed, argued, confessed, apologized, and one day even cried with my participating teachers.

Most of the data is in the form of copious fieldnotes and tapes recording class procedures and interviews. I collected twenty-two tapes of interviews with students and teachers. The tapes record teaching histories, life stories, student histories, conversations about response journals, about writing class, about writing strategies and particular papers, about instructional dilemmas, about what it is like to teach or learn in this school or classroom. Wherever possible, I corroborated interview data with observational data and/or student writing.

The methodology is clarified within the narrative. My bias is also clear; I have stated it in the Review of the Literature. One of the liberating things about ethnography is that it frees us from the pretense of objectivity in dealing with human beings and human issues. I believe, along with Richard Weaver (1970), that social science is always undertaken from a rhetorical position, however disguised, and that it is not properly a science at all, but a philosophy.

A Note on Language

In the interests of avoiding sexist language, I have chosen to use the pronoun "she" when the gender of the antecedent is unspecified. As an English teacher, I find it less awkward than "they" or "s/he", and as a woman, I find

it more natural. Also, by the term "American" I mean not necessarily pertaining only to the United States of America, but to the continent of North America.

CHAPTER 1

THE PLAYERS

Oyster River High School

I walked through the double doors into the main hall of Oyster River High School, waiting a minute for my eyes to adjust to the artificial light. A wide, blank hallway, flat yellow concrete walls, a nondescript floor, doors leading to the administration office on one side and the cafeteria on the other: I imagined a colorless bureaucrat somewhere who had long ago decreed that all high schools must look identically uninviting. But high schools, I reasoned with myself, are public institutions, planned for cost efficiency and not for inspiration. Nonetheless, I couldn't help feeling that a school at least unique in appearance might be a liberating thing.

A glance inside the administration office told me that no one there had time to reflect on the institutional atmosphere, caught up as they were in doing what needed to be done. Students lined the front counter to sign in, or waited to explain, cajole, or negotiate with the vice-principal about missed classes, while assistants cross-checked and dashed off attendance lists and phoned parents.

These days much administrative time and talent is taken up in keeping tabs. Many high schools have detailed and elaborate systems designed to insure staff and, if need be, parents, know where students are at all times - or at least insure they find out when students are not where they should be. This sometimes uneasy alliance between schools and parents is formed in the interests of educating youth whether or not they want to be. Or maybe attendance is nowadays pursued so efficiently in worried recognition of an adolescent world lurking with dangers far greater than missed opportunity. In any case, Oyster River's policy of granting freedom to passing juniors and seniors during "study" classes is relatively liberal, a reflection of the safety of this small-town community, the safety of a largely middle-class, academically serious student body, the safety of a comparatively small school.

I decided against interrupting the office staff, and set out to do what ethnographers do. "Making the familiar strange" was a tall order for me. I'd already spent three months piloting the study in this school the year before. I'd discovered that after six years as a high school teacher, the routines and rituals, the unspoken agreements and tacit communications - the logic of the institution and the culture - had an automaticity for me that could blind me to small and significant events, could keep me from

asking the obvious question. It felt right to begin with the concrete, to try to see the building and the routine with fresh eyes. I began to explore.

A showcase beside the cafeteria contained a display of student art work. There were five pencil or charcoal sketches of young faces, probably students', and they seemed to me remarkably good. I had already learned that this high school had a reputation for excellence in many areas. For a small school, its sports teams won an inordinate number of local and state championships; its music program was acclaimed; its upper level academic courses were popularly considered comparable to university courses. As well as the more standard basketball, status sports included soccer and crew: the influence, I thought, of a New England academic community.

The showcase next to the art work displayed pamphlets from universities around New England and the country, an emblem of the school's emphasis on the university-bound. Last year seventy-five per cent of Oyster River graduates attended colleges or universities (Accreditation Profile, 1989/90). The school has several traits characteristic of high schools geared to the academically inclined. Students tend to confer high status on certain elite courses, particularly in the maths and sciences, and to hold "tough" courses in high regard; teachers tend to use university

models in course and classroom design, and frequently give university preparation as a reason for curricular decisions; administrators tend to bring up high SAT scores in conversation about the school; and in general, there is a certain atmosphere of academic seriousness and competitive tension in many classrooms where juniors and seniors are in the majority.

Two halls formed an ell at the showcase, one leading the length of the school and flanked by classrooms, the other leading back to the staff room, nurse's office, and music and art rooms - which were typically removed from the academic mainstream. University community or not, we belong to a utilitarian society.

I chose to walk along the main hall, peeking in classes, watching students and teachers, listening to the sounds and senses of the place. They were familiar. A few students gazed out over workbooks in which they noted explanations about chemical processes no longer clear to me; others scratched their heads and wrinkled their brows over physics problems, or carried jars of frightening things across a biology lab; a staccato of typewriters rang out in time to one teacher's voice, and students scribbled shorthand along with another. In one class, a small group of older students and their teacher sat in a circle talking; because they looked so intent, I reminded myself that I wanted to visit

that room. Two "boys" who looked like men to me called to each other in the hall, their voices too robust for the principal, who happened along to cheerfully remind them of where they were. I listened to the sounds of student voices, of classrooms: muted, orderly. I walked the length of the hall again, watching students in the classrooms I passed.

At eight o'clock on a morning in early September, I had the odd impression that they were waiting.

The Students

It is commonplace among observers of the high school these days to remark upon the very different energy levels of students in classes and students in halls during change of class (Powell et al, 1985; Sizer, 1984). When the bell rang that morning, students burst forth from classrooms, filling the halls with laughter, shouted greetings, teasing jibes, quick chatter, shoves, dance steps, an occasional high-five, brief arguments, and the sounds of slamming lockers. Gone was the muted orderliness. It was as if, in the four minutes between classes, they were squeezing in all they had to say to each other.

High school is a waiting time of life (see also Sizer, 1984). Students wait for the end of class, the end of the day, the end of the week, the end of exams. They wait for drivers licenses, grades, SAT scores, diplomas, college

acceptances or rejections. They wait to have their say, to make their mark, to begin. And much of what students do in high schools, they do in a spirit of waiting: the justification we commonly give them for our curricular decisions is preparation for the future. It is not surprising that the high school has a sort of holding tank atmosphere, that it feels like a place where restless young people wait. That is what it is.

Sizer (1984) comments on adult tendencies to generalize about adolescents, to overlook the differences among them and see them as "as an undifferentiated blob of people, as a Client Group or an Age Cohort" (33). The adult world sees adolescence as energetic, rebellious, sensitive, sublimely self-centered, stormy, careless, romantic, and often frightening. While these generalizations work, as generalizations will, to pinpoint differences between "us and them", they make it far too tempting to overlook the diversity inside the group. Adolescents in all their variety do not conform to the easy massness educators and the public seem to assume when they talk about what kids believe, what kids think, what kids want. At Oyster River I didn't discover that students were in any greater agreement on these matters than the adults who were raising them. This one was a conservative, that one a radical; here was a traditionalist, there was a progressive; this one required order and

predictability, that one thrived on surprise and spontaneity. The diversity among them is unsurprisingly similar to the diversity among adults. Diversity is what makes teaching difficult, interesting, and possible.

But, as students, adolescents experience high school very differently from the adults who teach in it, study it, or remember it. To suggest these differences sometimes requires generalization.

For instance, each generation seems to have a sort of voiced ethic, a social perspective that is fashionable within it, a set of opinions that its members feel are more acceptable whether or not they are actually held by the majority. We are quite clear on what that voiced ethic was for the high school students of the now-romanticized sixties. It is not the same ethic for their children and students, the high school population of the eighties. As one teacher said, "This is the Reagan generation." I learned in literature classes that Thoreau is now more likely to be a silly romantic than a hero, a "save-the-whaler", perhaps a bit of a sucker, certainly devoid of the proper respect for important things like a prestigious career and material comfort. At least that was the voiced ethic; a good number of students were noticeably silent in the face of it.

Of course, the voiced ethic in any classroom might well depend on which clique predominated there. High school

students have a penchant for dividing themselves up into elaborate social groupings that tend, with frequent exceptions, to roughly mirror social classes. I learned from students at Oyster River that here there were the "preps" (professional class); the "rich kids"/"inner circle" (a mysterious group to which no one admitted belonging, executive class apparently, the "kids with money who run think they run the school"); the "jocks" (athletes); the "metal-heads" (working-class rebels); the "freaks", "art-sies", "hippies" (budding intellectuals), and so on. While membership in each group seemed to entail adopting certain details of dress, behavior, and attitude, the groups were remarkably fluid and indefinite; and while students recognized the categories, few could or would categorize themselves or other individual students.

As students stormed the halls between classes, I could distinguish only two extreme "cliques". There were a few older students, voices ringing with confidence and manners easy, whose presence seemed to fill the hall. They wore loose, cotton clothes, careful haircuts, and a casual, unconscious sense of ownership. Their faces shone vitality, reminding me of Chomsky's observation that in America health is bought (1989). An entirely different group gathered in tight circles around the doorways, waiting for the school bus back to working-class neighborhoods. They wore blacks

and denims and expressions more like caution or defence than ownership. They were kids I felt I knew from teaching days, the sort of kids who do not belong to schools and to whom schools do not belong. Most of the kids jostling about the halls belonged to neither group; yet the differences between these two groups served as a vivid reminder that performance in schools, and attendant attitude toward school, correlates strongly with class (Persell, 1974).

As the bell rang again for homeroom, I made my way upstairs to Mr. Tappan's room, where Dick Tappan reminded his students to listen to announcements, and few complied. It seemed they had announcements of their own to make.

The Teacher

A) Who He Is: Personal History

I had met Dick Tappan six months before, when I enlisted his writing workshop class in a preliminary study of a high school writing classroom. He had been recommended to me as an experienced teacher, very involved with student organizations and school life, who had for several years run a "writing process" classroom. I wanted to study the dynamics of implementing such a student-centered approach in the context of the very curriculum-centered high school. Dick welcomed me enthusiastically.

Dick is a small, dark-haired man in his early forties.

His appearance - slim figure, neat clothes, quick movements, clipped speech - gives an impression of order, precision, and decisiveness that is somewhat misleading. Actually, he lives in a swirl of student papers, meetings, articles-in-draft, students-dropping-in, school newspaper deadlines, exchange students, play rehearsals, church responsibilities, and teenage daughters that defies orderliness; he is the only person who can find what he's looking for on his desk. His speech mannerisms, the neutral accent and modulated tones that are evidence of dramatic training, and the very correct, almost old-fashioned grammar and syntax, contribute to an air of formality that is both revealing and concealing. It is in keeping with his reserve around acquaintances, but gives no hint of the empathetic, warmly personal relationships he cultivates with students and friends.

An apparently neat and orderly person in a creatively cluttered life, an apparently reserved man committed to a pedagogy that is all about expression: something of the tensions between discipline and freedom that run through Dick's teaching and thinking are suggested in these impressions. Much of who he has become as a teacher is foreshadowed in life experiences he unfolded in our conversations over the months in his classroom.

Dick had an extraordinary childhood. He grew up in poverty, first in the woods of northern New Hampshire, later

in Florida and a succession of seacoast New England towns, as his father, an itinerant automobile mechanic, chased success. The first home he remembers was a one room cabin with no running water, where he and his older brother were often awakened at night by pistol shots as his father shot through the floorboards at the porcupines that chewed the stilts. In 1948, the mortgage on the cabin was eleven dollars a month, and his father didn't have the money to pay it. Even then, he remembers, there were indications that life had not always been like this for his mother. "I remember, even in the cabin, my mother had a beautiful violin on which she sometimes played classical music, and that she had oil paints and often painted."

All Dick's early memories of school were painful. His family moved five times in his first year and a half, from the cabin down to Hampton, to Florida, back to two different New England towns.

My most vivid memory of those early years in school is of standing in the principal's office [of the school in Florida] crying at the pathetic sadness of the whole thing. I felt alone and very different: the kids talked funny, they thought I talked funny, the schools were segregated...they told me I had a reading problem and I couldn't seem to pay attention... I remember staring out the window all the time at a garden in the yard. My only pleasant memory of the first three years of school were the times when we were taken outside to play in that garden.

When the family moved back to New Hampshire and Dick was eight or nine years old, he and his brothers and sister were sent to Quincy, Massachusetts to meet his maternal grandmother for the first time.

And here we were staying in a nice house, you know, hardwood floors and a garage and everying. She had sterling silver, and she had china, and she had beautiful violins, and she took us to good restaurants and she taught us manners and speech...I remember once we went to see a production of *Elizabeth the Queen* and I was about to say something about the funny clothes of the man in front of us. And she said "Shh!" and greeted him, and this man was Noel Coward.

Dick's grandfather had been a successful vaudevillian, and it was during visits to see his grandmother, who had disowned her daughter when she married Dick's father, that Dick first developed an interest in theatre.

The incongruity between life at home and life at grandmother's represented a choice to young Dick. "There is nothing either ennobling or picturesque about poverty," he said, "and so I chose grandmother's lifestyle." Since that lifestyle entailed a good education, Dick became a serious student. It was a choice his father saw as a sort of betrayal, and when Dick graduated from high school as class president, his father stayed home that night to watch "Wagon Train".

The experiences of his childhood and youth were important in influencing who he became as a teacher, Dick believes.

I know what it is to be an outsider, and I have empathy for those kids. I remember losing friends once they saw where I lived...And because I was a poor reader and began to think I was stupid, I try very hard to show kids who are poor students that they're not stupid...But also because of my grandmother, I think I understand privileged kids, too...I grew up in two very different worlds, and I know that has a great deal to do with my beliefs and my teaching.

Dick has few fond memories of school or teachers. But the teachers that stand out in his memory as good have one thing in common: each had a warmly human and personal style, each was emotionally demonstrative and interested in students as people. In grade four, Mrs. Chisolm "read to us - I can still see her there in the sunlight..and people crying over the story"; in grade six, Mrs. Clark "took a personal interest in me, believed in me, and told me so"; in grade twelve, Mrs. Ridlon "loved Shakespeare and literature and wanted you to love it too, and so you did"; in university, "[history] professors held individual conferences in which they talked to me about my writing and my work, asked about my life and how I felt about things ...showed a personal interest." The sorts of qualities that Dick found attractive in his teachers are reflected in his

own instructional values, a phenomenon that Lortie (1975) found common among teachers. His conversations about the teaching of writing frequently turned to the theme of the teacher's view of the student as "whole person", and the relevance of students' personal and emotional experience to the writing classroom.

Two university experiences in particular were important in influencing the future directions Dick took as a teacher. It was while he was at university that Dick first became interested in writing, when his history professors - the first teachers to comment on his writing ability - told him that he wrote well. And also, it was the sixties.

At the very time when I was getting into this feeling that I had found a way out, the opposite was happening in the country...and here were all these middle-class kids who from my point of view were scorning all the things that had come so easily to them...these spoiled kids who had everything were turning their noses up at it. I was bitter, and I became a very ardent conservative, just rabid...

Dick remains a political and social conservative (if the term has not become too woolly to be useful) in many ways, though no longer "rabid". His respect for the conservative virtues, particularly order, discipline, and form, is an influence in his pedagogical belief system and practice. At the same time, his experience as a writing student, writer, and teacher of writing draws him toward a view of learning

as a complex personal and social process, and of teaching as a sort of intent listening and nurturing, that is far from educationally conservative.

These two strains carry on a dialogue in Dick's thinking about teaching. And that dialogue is further informed and complicated by corresponding dialogues between his educational theory and his classroom practice, between the ideal and the possible, between his vision of education and the vision represented by the high school in which he works. "You go from day to day changing this or that," he told me, "and you are never sure, you are always uncertain. You try to strike a balance, even though you're not always sure what it is you are trying to balance."

B) Who He Is: Teaching History

Dick Tappan's teaching is not what it was when he began his career twenty years ago; it is not what it was when he started experimenting with "writing process" twelve years ago; it is not what it was last year or last week. His teaching and his thinking about teaching are in the continuous state of evolution and revision that Schon (1983) calls "reflective practice".

Dick's first big discovery in his teaching career was that his academic credentials had very little to do with his proficiency as a teacher. The principal who gave him his

first job "believed a Phi Beta Kappa could teach anything - it was the stupidest thing! ... Smart though I thought I was, I had no idea how to help kids learn ...I could tell, but I could not elicit."

If teaching was "helping kids learn", Dick reasoned, then it followed that the kids should be doing the work rather than watching the teacher do it.

I wanted to get the kids more involved, more active... I tried a number of different approaches to do this and used role-playing and dramatic techniques...I organized a number of experiential, hands-on group activities, although the way evaluation is set up in high schools tends to discourage this...But I didn't have organizing principles...I didn't have a philosophy for what I was doing to tie it all together.

The organizing principle or philosophy Dick felt was missing from his early teaching arrived in the summer of 1978 in the person of James Moffett, who led the writing course Dick took at Breadloaf that year. Dick characterizes Breadloaf as an "intensely important, intensely personal experience that dramatically changed my teaching." For one thing, it started him writing and publishing on a regular basis; since Breadloaf, he has tried to keep to a goal of publishing one article per year, usually personal essay, feature, or short story, in one of the regional magazines like *New Hampshire Profiles* and *Seacoast Life*. The ex-

perience of writing regularly and publicly has, he believes, been the single most profound influence on his subsequent development as a writing teacher.

I'm sure you can teach writing if you don't write yourself, but I'm not at all convinced you can teach it well unless you do. It is quite difficult enough to teach well even when you do write...

I changed as a teacher after I began to write. I no longer focused primarily on the product. I did begin to think of the process and what I went through myself, and the emotional side I had quite literally not seen before... And very gradually, very slowly I started looking for ways of having a more hands-off policy, because any teacher who writes knows the dangers of taking over a kid's writing and making it their own...I still struggle with this.

The phenomenon Dick describes here is now a familiar one within the literature of writing process: the teacher who writes begins to see how his own experience of writing constitutes his best (or only) teaching guide, making him more open and sensitive to the experiences of his students, and more respectful of their individuality and autonomy (Elbow, 1973; Graves, 1984; Murray, 1968). But what is perhaps less studied about this sort of change - a change which teachers commonly characterize as "profound" or "fundamental" - is how it represents a shift in stance or point of view, and how it rearranges the teacher's pedagogical value structure. The centre of Dick's attention as a

teacher shifts away from the curriculum goal (produce better writing), through his own writing experience, and toward the student and the student's experience as a means to that goal. And that shift in attention is attended by a shift in pedagogical values and beliefs. The move toward student-centered (or perhaps more accurately, learning-centered) teaching appears to entail an attendant recognition of the tentativeness and precariousness of our knowing, the centrality to learning of the shared human experience of teachers and students, and the primacy of relationship in the classroom. "Listen to them," Murray tells us again and again, "listen very intently."

It is not a sort of change that happens frequently, quickly, or completely. Dick has understandably (and perhaps fortunately, for it sounds exhausting) been able only sporadically to recreate in the classroom the sort of intense involvement in writing, the atmosphere of discovery and excitement, he knew at Breadloaf. He later saw his early attempts to do this as somewhat misguided.

In September 1978, I started setting up this system for teaching writing as a process, much as I had experienced it at Breadloaf. I was obsessed with the system, you know, what is the system, what is the method?...I started the semester by giving them the Daly-Miller Attitude Survey; I felt I needed to know about them to teach writing. I had detailed evaluation forms which I attached to their writing...

Dick placed himself and his desk outside his grade eight classroom, with predictable results. The more he fiddled with the classroom system, the more he concentrated on finding the right structure, the right method for teaching writing, the more disappointed he grew as it became apparent that his students didn't want to write.

And I began to see that it wasn't a matter of the structure or method...there had to be something that gave them the hope or confidence that they had something worthy to say...and so the whole task kept getting more complicated. I knew from my own writing the kinds of things I needed to consider but I didn't know how to go about getting that into the classroom. Writing didn't just happen because I allowed it to, there were many, many more things involved...

What seems to have happened here is a shift in the focus of Dick's attention of the sort I referred to above. Gradually, over a period of time in which he'd been reflecting on his own writing experiences and attempting to infer from them his students' experiences, his attention turned away from the search for the universally successful structure or method. Dick began to focus on his students and their experience of the classroom, so that he saw "there had to be something that gave them hope or confidence...". His point of view changed, and he began to believe that the essence of the kind of writing classroom he wanted lay not in curriculum content, class and course structure, or

methodology (though these remained important), but in the nature of communication and relationship between teacher and students and among students. One might say that he began to see teaching as a humanity more than a science.

After a workshop he gave in Montreal, Dick summed up this change in his pedagogical values and what it has meant to him.

You know, there are jokes and jibes about the religiosity of these process, student-centered teachers, and I think a lot of people in and outside that movement or whatever are rightly concerned about elements of dogma and self righteousness. There's the "conversion experience" thing we make cracks about. But you know in a way that's an appropriate metaphor; it is a sort of secular conversion experience in that when you adopt a student-centered view, it changes the way you see everything in the classroom. It reorganizes all your priorities...

What I should have said and meant to say to those people [workshop members] is that you can try any of these things we talked about, you can do them all. But unless you genuinely believe that kids know something, that you can learn from them, unless you genuinely want to hear what they have to say, nothing will change.

And also I wanted to say that it's very difficult, and that you will probably fail more often than you succeed.

In the last comment, Dick acknowledges that the sort of empathetic attention to students on which his teaching philosophy centers is an ideal to work toward. Certainly in the high school, where Dick sees approximately ninety

students each day (a relatively small number by high school standards) in groups of twenty for forty-five minutes per day, it must remain ideal at least in terms of individual students. But quite likely for most of us under any circumstances, the sort of absorbed attention that allows us to enter into another's point of view (Nel Nodding's [1984] calls this "motivational displacement" and places it at the centre of her "ethic of care") is only imperfectly and occasionally achieved. Nonetheless, as far as Dick Tappan is concerned, the attempt to do this in his writing class has led him to reconsider what teaching and learning are all about. Dick's attention refocuses toward "not so much what students need to know as what they need to experience" (Dewey, 1938).

Discussion

Dick Tappan comes to the classroom from within a life. That life includes a personal and professional history, a disposition, sets of values and beliefs that I only touch upon here. He teaches, inevitably, from within a composite of experience that makes up who he is. The transactional view of learning holds that new experience "transacts" with past experience so that learning becomes a process of continuous modification of a world view unique, in some ways, to each of us (Dewey, 1963; Rosenblatt, 1978; Harste,

1983). That theory is equally appropriate to teaching, and holds interesting ramifications for how we become the teachers we are and how our teaching changes.

In Dick's case, certain life circumstances and experiences have influenced who he is as a teacher in ways he recognizes. The alienation he felt as a student gives him empathy for loners; the two worlds of his childhood and the bitterness he felt as a university student contribute to his conservatism; his appreciation of teachers who treated him as a person makes him want to treat his students as people. Undoubtedly, other experiences have influenced his teaching in ways he is not aware of.

Similarly, what Dick sees as the fundamental change in his teaching did not come as a result of someone telling him to change, or persuading him toward a better way; it did not come as a result of reading educational research and theory, though these may well have supported his changes. Dick changed his teaching as a result of certain experiences (Breadloaf, writing) that encouraged him to see teaching and learning in new ways. And he changed his teaching as he began to see his own experience of writing and learning, and reflection on that experience, as a legitimate source of knowledge.

I don't mean to imply by this line of reasoning that teachers don't change their teaching in light of research

findings and intellectual arguments. My own work with teachers suggests that these do contribute to change all the time; in any case, an ethnography has no power to make such a generalization. But if we apply transactional theories of learning to learning teaching and teacher change, we see that the process of change is likely to be a good deal more complex than a linear theory-to-research-to-practice model would suggest. For Dick Tappan, significant changes in teaching are not so much a matter of changes in what one does as of changes in who one is and how one sees.

Transactional theory also highlights the importance to outcomes of the context in which learning takes place (Harste, 1983). Dick practices his continuously changing craft within an institutional context (the high school) and a particular context (Oyster River High School). Oyster River, as both a high school and a particular high school within a particular community, is bound to operate as an influence and constraint on Dick's conception of teaching and learning.

Oyster River High School is not an arbitrary creation; it is the school it is because of a particular matrix of faculty, students, community, time, place, and purposes. It is located in an achievement-oriented community, that includes a high percentage of academic and professional families. It is in New England, a part of the world where

the work ethic remains strong. It is composed of a student body with high educational expectations, who come from families with strong views about education, and a staff with very strong academic backgrounds. A few blocks down the street there is a university that seems to loom large, in one way or another, in the thinking of the faculty and administration. All these factors go into making Oyster River High the academically serious, performance oriented, demanding, competitive, and somewhat "uptight" school it is.

Oyster River High is also the way it is because it is an American high school. The American high school as an institution is not an arbitrary creation, either; it is what it is because of a history all its own, a set of social purposes very different from the purposes of elementary schools or universities. The fundamental purpose of the high school has not substantially changed since it was articulated in the 1930's, in the context of introducing streaming into the curriculum: its purpose is to prepare students for their "probable destinies" (see Cremin, 1961). And since that preparation tacitly assumes that high schools will also sort students according to their probable destinies, comparative evaluation, grading, and ranking acquire in the high school an importance they may not have in other educational institutions.

The high school has other characteristics common to it.

High school teachers, it is commonly held, tend to be more "subject-centered" than their elementary school counterparts, a tendency in keeping with their preparatory school roles and encouraged by the time and space structures of the institution. In the high school, administrative and managerial considerations seem to collide with educational considerations even more frequently than in the elementary school: Dick has had a year of trouble initiating an interdisciplinary course because of difficulties in scheduling arrangements. And all these factors conspire in making the high school more anonymous, more bureaucratized and institutionalized, than the elementary school.

Dick Tappan teaches from a world view that is partly informed by the fact that he is a high school teacher in Oyster River High School. From a transactional perspective, the way one's teaching develops and changes is a complex process involving relationships among teachers' personal and professional histories and the contexts in which they work. Transactional theory, then, holds important implications for teacher and institutional change.

First of all, transactional theorists see learning as a sort of evolution of thinking, through which new learning builds upon and modifies what we already know. In order to contribute to this process, according to the theory, teachers must discover, recognize, and value what the

learner already knows. It follows, therefore, that educational researchers and theorists (teachers of teachers) must discover, recognize, and value what teachers already know. To paraphrase Dick, "unless you genuinely believe that they know something, that you can learn from them, nothing will change." Secondly, transactional theory would seem to suggest that educational innovation will not translate directly from one institutional setting to another. We may expect innovations hatched in elementary school or university classrooms, or deduced from theory in education departments, to be substantially modified by context when and if they are translated to high schools. In fact, the history of failed attempts at changing the high school is a history of attempts to impose changes on that institution from outside it (see Cremin, 1961 and Applebee, 1974).

Transactional theory applied to issues of teacher and institutional change in the high school argues our need to develop viable models for genuinely collaborative, classroom-based research and in-service programs in education.

CHAPTER II

THE GAME

Writing Workshop: First Days

At Oyster River, homeroom takes place between first and second periods to allow for late arrival of the older students who have first period free. The morning in early September that I stood awkwardly at the back of his classroom, Dick scrambled about taking head counts, identifying the missing, delivering messages, and answering inquiries. At 8:33, the change of class bell rang, and Dick walked over and hugged me.

"Good to have you back," he said. "You had a good summer I hope?"

I nodded, and started to say something.

"They're mostly sophomores this year. Quite mixed groups, I think, from what I've seen so far," Dick continued, ferreting deftly through an already muddled stack of papers on the back table. "They seem like very nice kids. You'll want these."

He handed me a collection of hand-outs to date - mostly schedules and course descriptions - and walked off to talk to some of the very nice kids now beginning to straggle in

the door.

Writers' Workshop ran from 8:37 to 9:27 each morning, two minutes of educational time assuming inordinate importance as administrators try to carve up the school day equitably. In the few minutes left before the second period bell, I shuffled through the papers Dick had given me. A course overview (Figure 1), a handout, written by Dick, on getting ideas for writing topics, a copy of the Daly Miller Writing Apprehension Survey (Figure 2), and an already revised schedule for the first weeks of the course: each document said something about the teacher and the course.

I could see from the overview and the schedule that Dick was using the same general format as last year. Generally, Mondays were devoted to introduction of a genre or assignment: students and teacher would spend the class discussing characteristics of (for instance) a reflective narrative, and reading and responding to both published and student examples. Tuesdays and Wednesdays were in-class writing times, during which students might write or "conference" with another student or the teacher. Thursday classes were usually reserved for language usage lessons, in which Dick addressed some writing convention or grammatical issue raised by student papers or an assignment and asked students to read and edit sample papers. Fridays were workshop days, when the class broke into two groups of approximately ten

students who read and responded to drafts.

As the week's revised schedule demonstrated, this general structure was quite flexible. Frequently the class would spend a few minutes on a Tuesday or Wednesday writing day dealing with, perhaps, a convention, a process or genre issue, or an SAT exercise. The routine was also amended to allow for visiting writers, discussions of school or community plays, and responses to school, community, or national events that might arise during the semester. Dick's approach to course organization and structure reflected his belief that a predictable routine helped students feel secure and aided the group process by minimizing confusion. At the same time, he attempted to build enough flexibility into the routine to allow the group to address spontaneously arising issues and the teacher to capitalize on "teachable moments" (Goodman et al, 1989).

The only inviolate elements in the weekly schedule were the writing workshops. They were held regularly on the day drafts of assignments were due, and Dick was noted for his sternness on the matter of deadlines. "Unless the papers are there to workshop, the course can't work," he told me. "On this, I put the 'do it for a grade' attitude to work for the course - I deduct for late papers."

The course outline detailed the writing assignments, beginning with a reflective narrative because "students are

Figure 1: Course Outline

WRITING WORKSHOP

About the Course

INDIVIDUALIZED EXPECTATIONS:

Writing workshop is an individualized course where expectations of your performance are largely based on abilities and experiences you bring with you. Students with more ease with words will be challenged to take on much more rigorous topics, themes, or methods of revision. Those who are trying to master basic skills will not be expected to move on to more sophisticated writing techniques until mastery of the basics is evident. Students may revise papers after they have received a grade on the final draft. After the second final draft, the new grade will be substituted for the original.

GRADING:

40% of the course grade each quarter is based on your working drafts assigned for that quarter. Another 20% is based on the three basic papers each quarter which you select from the working drafts to polish and submit for grading. Another 20% is class participation: discussions during workshops, effective use of class time, etc. 20% is made up of other assignments such as grammar and usage exercises, spelling quizzes, skills exercises.

LENGTH OF PAPERS:

Some papers are given an approximate length (such as the feature--5 typed pages double-spaced) while most have no set length. In a conference or workshop, it may be made clear to the author that the paper needs to be lengthened for the final draft in order to be effective.

WORKSHOPS are on FRIDAYS (groups 1 & 2 first, then 3 & 4)

Sharing your work is an important part of gaining self-confidence and making improvement as a writer. Papers will be shared without names on them (until near the end of the course) so that the writer will feel more comfortable. The rules for discussion require positive feedback and puts any criticism in the form of suggestions for future revision. A supportive and comfortable environment is very carefully developed.

You should type papers for your assigned workshop. Typed papers are to be single-spaced (please use a good ribbon!). The papers should be reasonably neat and well proofread, but need not be completely error-free.

Figure 1: Course Outline (continued)

Please type the class period, your group number and date in the upper right corner. Your name is to be written on the back in pencil so that I know whose name it is but the class does not. (If you wish to reveal your name, that is your business). Unless you wish otherwise, your paper will be discussed without the class knowing who the author is. Your paper will be dittoed and distributed to the whole class or to a smaller group for discussion. Papers for workshop must be submitted during first period and on the day before the workshop in order to receive full credit. (Put the papers in the workshop box on my desk whether I'm in the room or not.)

<i>Assigned Papers</i>	<i>Due Dates</i>
1. Reflective Narrative.....	Sept. 8 (W)
2. Profile.....	Sept. 15 (W)
3. Free Write.....	Sept. 22 (W)
4. First Polished Piece.....	Sept. 29 (P)
5. Quotation/Definition.....	Oct. 12 (W)
6. Persuasive Essay (including an oral).....	Oct. 23 (W)
7. Second polished piece.....	Nov. 3 (P)
8. First Literary Analysis.....	Nov. 17 (W)
9. Second Literary Analysis.....	Nov. 30 (W)
10. Third polished piece.....	Dec. 8 (P)
11. Test Essay 1.....	Dec. 13 (W)
12. Test Essay 2.....	Dec. 15 (W)
13. Free write.....	Dec. 22 (W)
14. Feature (polished pieces 4 & 5).....	Jan. 12 (P)
15. Free write.....	Jan. 19 (W)
16. Sixth polished piece.....	to be submitted during mid-terms

comfortable with personal narrative; it's a common form in elementary and middle school." While Dick left topic choices up to the student, except for the periodic "freewrites" he specified genres or forms for the assignments. When I asked about this decision, he said "it's important for students in the high school to try a variety of genres and tasks, to prepare them for college, but also because I think they need broad writing experience at this age." Students seemed to agree: though most said they preferred the freewrites, most also said that it was both important and appropriate ("this is high school") to try assigned tasks.

The selection of writing assignments was interesting. Dick's own writing interests appeared to figure in the journalistic bias: reflective narrative, feature story, quotation/definition paper, and profile all roughly conformed to magazine genres. The literary analysis and test essay pieces were included in the interests of helping students master very common high school writing tasks; about the latter Dick said, "You'd be surprised how many kids do poorly on essay tests for lack of a few quite simple strategies for writing them." He also said that he looked for short forms and genres because of the value he saw in variety, and because he wanted students to have a number of pieces to choose from for evaluation. The assignments grew out of a sort of amalgam of origins, including Dick's own

interests, appropriateness to his instructional aims, past teaching experiences, the influence of the high school, and Dick's perceptions of his students' strengths, interests, and needs.

The Daly Miller Writing Apprehension Survey (Figure 2) is a form Dick has used for many years, both at the beginning and end of the course, though the way in which he uses it has evolved over time. When, from time to time, I wondered aloud about what I saw as the artificiality of the survey or questioned its validity, he talked about how and why he used it.

I use it as one means of getting a sense of the group. This class fell largely in the middle range, with a few scores in high and low ranges. I find it useful for early conferences with students, particularly those whose scores indicate a high level of writing anxiety. It's a quick means of getting some indications of who might need more support.

I find it helpful in gathering some information about kids' feelings about writing, and how they change over the course.

During the early days of the course, Dick quickly got his students involved in writing. "I do this because, as Don Murray says, writing is the content and text of a writing course. It also gives me an opportunity to go around and ask the kids about themselves. I try very hard not to talk too much." But one of the things Dick did talk about frequently

Figure 2: Daly Miller Writing Apprehension Survey

name _____

The Daly Miller Writing Apprehension Survey

Below is a series of statements about writing. There are no right or wrong answers to these statements. Please indicate the degree to which the statement applies to you by circling the number that shows whether you strongly agree (1), agree (2), are uncertain (3), disagree (4), or strongly disagree (5) with the statement. While some of these state-ments may be repetitious, please respond to all of them; take your time and try to be as honest as possible.

- + 1 2 3 4 5 1. I avoid writing.
- 1 2 3 4 5 2. I have no fear of my writing's being evaluated.
- 1 2 3 4 5 3. I look forward to writing down my ideas.
- + 1 2 3 4 5 4. I am afraid of writing essays when I know they will be evaluated.
- + 1 2 3 4 5 5. Taking a composition course is a very frightening experience.
- 1 2 3 4 5 6. Handing in a composition makes me feel good.
- + 1 2 3 4 5 7. My mind seems to go blank when I start to work on a composition.
- + 1 2 3 4 5 8. Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time.
- 1 2 3 4 5 9. I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication.
- 1 2 3 4 5 10. I like to write down my ideas.
- 1 2 3 4 5 11. I feel confident in my ability to express my ideas clearly in writing.
- 1 2 3 4 5 12. I like to have my friends read what I have written.
- + 1 2 3 4 5 13. I'm nervous about writing.
- 1 2 3 4 5 14. People seem to enjoy what I write.
- 1 2 3 4 5 15. I enjoy writing.
- + 1 2 3 4 5 16. I never seem to be able to write down my ideas clearly.
- 1 2 3 4 5 17. Writing is a lot of fun.
- + 1 2 3 4 5 18. I expect to do poorly in composition classes even before I enter them.
- 1 2 3 4 5 19. I like seeing my thoughts on paper.
- 1 2 3 4 5 20. Discussing my writing with others is an enjoyable experience.

Figure 2 : Daly-Miller continued

- + 1 2 3 4 5 21. I have a terrible time organizing my ideas in a composition course.
- + 1 2 3 4 5 22. When I hand in a composition, I know I'm going to do poorly.
- 1 2 3 4 5 23. It's easy for me to write good compositions.
- + 1 2 3 4 5 24. I don't think I write as well as most other people.
- + 1 2 3 4 5 25. I don't like my compositions to be evaluated.
- 1 2 3 4 5 26. I'm not good at writing.

Grading:

78 - positive statements totals minus negative statements totals

My score is _____

during the opening days of the course was his own writing process, including his feelings about writing.

The handout entitled "Where do you get ideas for writing?" he had just given me was an example of Dick's tendency to bring his own writing experiences into the course. In it, he began by suggesting that ideas for writing occur to us "every waking and sleeping hour", and that the difference between a writer and a non-writer is that a writer seizes these transitory thoughts and ideas, fixates on them for a while, and "explores... to see where those thoughts lead." Then he drew an example from his own recent experience: in conversation, a friend had suggested that many conflicting viewpoints about the meaning and purpose of life each seemed to capture some shade of truth. Dick found himself mentally playing with the phrase "shades of truth", and how it also suggested shading the truth, and thought he could write an essay on "how we tend to latch on to partial truths and live by them." The example was a weighty one for the opening days of a high school writing course, but it was also very much Dick Tappan.

During the first week of classes, students were preparing for their first workshop, on drafts of reflective narratives, to be held on the first Friday. Dick told me that during the week several had come to him, concerned about reading their work to their peers. This puzzled me;

I wondered why they should be anxious about the workshop when most of them had had experience with workshops in middle and elementary school. "Oh, but this is high school," he said,

and they see it as very different here, very serious. It has to do with the competitive atmosphere, and the fact that kids don't know each other yet. There's a kind of expectation that we will sit in groups and speak objectively and coldly about the quality of the work, without taking people's feelings into consideration. Perhaps that's what the high school communicates to them somehow, that this is the way we are here. I spend a great deal of time at the beginning of each workshop course, and throughout the workshop as well, trying to allay anxieties, and trying to encourage a supportive, constructive workshop atmosphere... And I have had kids who were very strong students who were quite arrogant about their work, and dismissed the input of weaker students, dismissed their work. If you get two groups like that in one class - one group of really advanced writers and another of much weaker writers - and the strong writers separate themselves, it's a disaster. The weaker kids then can't afford to care, and the whole thing comes apart. So I try very hard right from the beginning to stress supportive response, focusing on what will help the writer, and I build helpful response right into the evaluative structure of the course.

Much of what went on the first few days of the course was in preparation for that opening workshop.

Initial workshops were much smaller than the half-class workshops later in the course. For the first workshop, students chose their own response groups, usually three or four students who knew each other. Students were not

required to read their papers, but might instead talk about them (which usually ended in their reading them).

The day before the workshop, Dick reminded the class of the informal format for the following day. Then he began to tell stories about a writing workshop course he'd taken in university.

And when the time came for the first workshop, I was frightened. I'd heard bits of people's writing and I had a horrible fear of putting my paper in with certain people's, they were great writers, and I was worried about how I'd feel about my dumb paper. I thought they would secretly snicker or wonder what I was doing there. That's not how it turned out, of course, because the whole point was to help each other's writing and people understood that. But I was scared, and that's why I think you'll want to start workshoping with people you feel comfortable with - though that doesn't necessarily mean friends.

Dick dramatized his stories with vocal and facial expressions and movement, as was his habit. A bit of the showman came out in him when he had the attention of the class. I watched students closely as he talked. Many wore expressions of bemused tolerance: here was Mr. Tappan going off again as Mr. Tappan will. It is not entirely "cool" in adolescent circles to reveal much of oneself among mere acquaintances. But there were no asides in word or look - they were listening. And at the end of class, four or five students hung back to talk to Mr. Tappan about the workshop.

After the business of tomorrow's workshop had been dealt with, Dick put an example of a reflective narrative on the overhead projector (Figure 3). He explained that this was a narrative written by a student in a past workshop, and that it was a working draft rather than a final draft, meaning that the student shared it knowing he wanted to improve it and looking to his peers for help in doing that. "As we read it, please consider how you might help the draft," Dick said, and asked for a volunteer to read it. In the brief workshop that followed, Dick quite tightly controlled the direction of the conversation.

"What do you think?" he asked. Silence. "Does it motivate you to read on?" (The overhead showed only the first page.) Silence again. "There aren't right or wrong answers to these questions; I'm just asking for your thoughts."

"Well," said a boy whose name I later learned was Fred, "it does for me. The writer said it was the most important day of their life, and I want to know why."

Fred had broken the reserve, and several students now chimed in. They wanted to know why the speaker "was sitting in the principal's office, sweating like a waterfall", "how the worst day of their life became so important", "what this has to do with Cindy and the smart boy". One student liked "the humorous tone" and funny details like Bubba F. Moron,

Figure 3: Reflective Narrative

I remember it like it was yesterday, there I was sitting in the principal's office. I was sweating like a waterfall, I had chewed my nails down to the skin, I was in fifth grade and already the worst day of my life. Looking back I see how much I learned about images that day. And how that was far from the worst day of my life.

The day started out terrible. As usual my mother packed my lunch. But when I looked inside my lunchbox there were no twinkies, no Italian subs, and worst of all no root beer. Instead there was junk like apples, ham sandwiches, yogurt. "Yuuuk", I thought. As I would soon find out the day would not improve. On the bus Bubba F. Moron stole my milk money (by the way the F stood for his average report card). Then the bus driver hollered at me for screwing around. Later that day my situation got much uglier.

When I got to school my situation did improve. I was assigned ten math problems. At first I thought this was terrible but then it happened.. I was assigned to a partner to help me. Cindy Snatch, the richest, the smartest, the prettiest girl in school. I thought I had died and gone to heaven, boy was I wrong. I learned why Cindy was so smart. It was because the smartest boy in the school had a crush on her. When he finished he gave us a copy of the answers.... I was infuriated, my whole image

"the way bad days go."

"Okay," said Dick, "then if you wanted to tell the writer what worked for you, you'd mention the details that create suspense or at least curiosity, the way the story holds back information at the beginning, and maybe the humor. Any comments from people it didn't work as well for?"

A tall red-haired boy with a confident voice spoke up. "The lunch description doesn't work," he said. "I'm not interested in what the writer had for lunch. And I think the opening is too stated, where it says it was the worst day of my life and then became the most important. The writer should show us that rather than tell us in the opening paragraph."

Dick glanced at me an instant before he responded. I thought the look said "I bet this fellow's a writer."

"Okay, Patrick," he said. "But you might want to tell the writer what you liked first, particularly if the group hasn't established a comfort level yet."

The class went on to talk briefly about some guidelines for helpful response, including beginning with the positive, allowing the writer to identify his or her concerns first, asking questions of the writer, and being specific about both effective and confusing elements in the paper. Dick emphasized that it was important for both writers and responders to remember that the object of constructive

criticism here was the writing and not the writer.

The first few days of Writing Workshop consisted largely of what Smith (1983) calls "demonstrations". There were demonstrations of writing (reflective narrative examples), demonstrations about writing processes (developing topics and writing anxiety), demonstrations about responding to writing and the importance of constructive, supportive response, and demonstrations of expectations. Most of these demonstrations continued periodically throughout the course.

Many of the demonstrations Dick arranged in the first week of the course were student-centered in that they grew out of his perceptions of his students' concerns, of "what students need to experience" (Dewey, 1938), and Dick was sensitive and alert to students, often picking up on subtleties that had escaped me. But the classroom and course during this week was quite teacher-centered in the sense that the teacher decided upon and controlled the issues dealt with. This was a phenomenon I commented upon in the first week's analytical memo.

Because Dick's concerned that the workshops run well, he addresses things that might interfere - sets up demonstrations of constructive workshops, talks about his own writing anxieties, suggests that it's quite usual to be daunted by sharing your writing, conducts discussions on responding to writing. Performance anxiety is high, and he tells me he believes it's essential to deal with this at the beginning of the semester.

I notice that Dick is the one dealing with it. He has made the decision to address it in class, he tries to organize and structure the course so that the workshop will work. He doesn't ask the kids for their suggestions, doesn't give them the responsibility for dealing with their anxiety, for helping to make the course work. He sees the issue of whether or not the course works as his responsibility.

That's the way I was as a high school teacher. It wasn't until I saw C & D [grade six teachers I had worked with the previous year] say to the class, "Okay, we've got a problem, what are we going to do about it?" that I knew you could do this with kids. I think in high school we see student input as potentially dangerous somehow.
(Analytical Memo, 09/09/89)

Dick thought about student responsibility in terms of the writing, reworking, and sharing of papers. But in the case of the organizational and structural features of the course, and of problems concerning the smooth running of the classroom, it had either not occurred to him or he had decided against sharing the responsibility with his students. Given his strong sense of order and structure, he may not have been comfortable negotiating curricular and organizational details of the classroom with his students as the course proceeded. In any case, in the high school there are few models for the sort of group processing of classroom concerns I had seen in the elementary school; the pressures of time, the pressure to cover the curriculum, to get the work done, tends to mitigate against such approaches. The notion of the high school curriculum as

received (determined in advance by requirements of the workplace and the university) also tends to place the negotiated classroom and curriculum outside the logic of the institution.

I don't mean to imply that Dick *necessarily should* be more student-centered in his approach to curricular and organizational decisions. This is not an argument that student-centered classrooms and negotiated curricula are in some absolute sense better than alternatives. It is an observation that a curriculum and classroom structure determined by the teacher is not entirely consistent with Dick's stated (and otherwise demonstrated) student-centered approach and with his aim of placing greater responsibility on students. And it is also an observation that the habits and routines of the high school encourage and even assume teacher control of curricular and organizational decisions, making the negotiated classroom not impossible but certainly less at home in this context.

Writing Workshop: Early Workshops

Dick's classroom was sparsely decorated. At the back of the room, in opposing corners, were Dick's desk which he rarely used during class, and a large round table stacked with papers, newspapers, magazines, and pens. Jack, the student intern, and I shared this table, piling our notes

on it and retreating to it to interview or conference with students. The back wall and shelves along it were taken up with layout, advertising, and copy materials for the student newspaper, for which Dick served as staff advisor. Students desks were variously arranged in clusters, circles, or rows, depending on the day's activities.

A few posters and a literary map of England adorned the walls. One of the posters, a sketch of Beowulf and Grendel stylized as comic book hero and villain, was the only ornament to English Literature, the other course Dick regularly taught. A cluster of signs above the front blackboard reminded students of the sequence and due dates for writing assignments.

Posters and computer printouts carried an interesting assortment of messages: "The ability to write is not a gift; it is a skill. - Don Murray"; "I hate to write. I love to have written. -Robert Burns"; "Good writing makes big points" (on a picture of a very large pencil); "Experience is what you get when you didn't get what you wanted"; "I never make the same mistake twice. Every day I make new ones"; and "Do not pray for an easy life. Pray to be a strong person." Perhaps because of their proximity to so many messages about writing, the aphorisms also seemed to be about writing. I noticed they had in common certain New England (or Protestant) values: the work ethic and adversity

squarely faced.

The morning of the first informal workshop, I pulled a chair up to a group of three eager looking girls and asked if I could join them. I was breaking into a conversation about Kim's visit last summer to see her father in Pennsylvania, and her difficult relationship with her step-mother, which had ended in her coming home a week early.

"But what is it about your step-mother?" Vicki was asking. "I mean I know you don't get along, but I'm not sure why."

"Well," Kim said, "she's a lot younger than my Mom, see, but she acts like she's my mother only way worse. She doesn't let me do anything. She's really strict. Most of the time I wasn't allowed to go out at night with my friends, and it's the only time I get to see them. I think she's jealous."

"So what did your father say?" Vicki asked.

"He doesn't say anything. I told him how I felt, and he just didn't say anything. He really didn't want me to leave, and when I got home I phoned him and talked to him about it again, and he listened, but I don't think he knows what to say."

We sat for a moment, uncertain where to go next. Then the two girls assured Kim that they "really liked" her paper and we moved on to Vicki.

Vicki's paper, "Terror of My Life" (Figure 4), turned out to be a narrative about the morning in August when her parents told her they were going to divorce. I could see that it had not been a good summer for this group. She had to be coaxed to read it, and twice during the reading we had to interrupt her to ask her to slow down. Vicki was nervous. Two pages into the story, she stopped, telling us she didn't like the ending she had now, and asking what we thought.

Vicki's friends were understandably reluctant to appear at all critical of her paper: either the subject was a difficult one for her or she was very anxious about reading her writing. But as often happened during workshop, a conversation about the writing grew out of the groups' queries about the experience and how Vicki had come to write about it.

Jean began by saying she liked the beginning of the story, particularly "the way a great day suddenly turns terrible". Kim liked the way the narrative "goes back and forth between your parents and your feelings". But Vicki was impatient to get to the heart of the matter and wanted to know if her friends had any idea how she might end the story. They didn't immediately, but they did want to know more about the day her parents told her they were getting a divorce and what happened afterwards.

"When did it happen?" Jean asked. "When did they tell

Figure 4: "Terror of My Life"

They told us to come downstairs, at first I thought they were going to tell us to clean our rooms or empty the dishwasher. But I never expected to hear what they told us. The something so terrible that I thought could only happen to other families but never ours. All of this pain from just one word that I knew would destroy my life forever.

That morning I was lying in my bed looking out the window, thinking about what a wonderful life I was living and how lucky I was to have the things I had. How could I possibly ask for more, I was watching a wonderful day come to a start, or so I thought would be a good day, and listening to the birds. But yet in the far off distance I could hear a low muffled sound coming from downstairs...

It was my mother and father sitting at the table having their cup of coffee. At first I thought they were just talking but they were yelling at each other again. They'd not been getting along lately [end p.1]

you?"

"It was last summer. In August."

"Did you know anything about it before that? Like sometimes people get hints that something's going to happen," Kim asked.

"Well, they sort of argued a lot before, and sometimes Dad would go away for a day or two. I kind of noticed they weren't getting along, and sometimes I wondered about it, but I just put it out of my mind, I just thought well, sometimes people argue. They didn't say anything about divorce to me, though, before that day."

"What happened? Did they get a divorce?" Kim asked.

"Not yet. But my father moved out the day after. He got an apartment of his own. At first I thought it was going to change everything, like my life was over, and I was really depressed. But then we were still living in the same house, and I still had all my friends, and I saw my father whenever I wanted to... it was like at first I thought the divorce would change everything forever, but it really didn't."

Jean spoke up. "Well maybe that's how you should end your story, saying something like that. Because it sounds like that's why you wrote it."

In many ways, this workshop was typical of workshop groups early in the course. The students didn't know each other yet, hadn't yet worked out patterns for response that

allowed them to grapple comfortably with problems they saw in each other's papers. The first workshops also tended to focus on global issues in the writing - what was the focus of the story, where was it going, how might it end satisfactorily - which was quite appropriate, as at this point students were frequently talking about papers in early stages of the process. Students had not yet worked out a language and set of conventions for talking about formal, editorial, or stylistic concerns.

Another characteristic of beginning workshops illustrated by this response group was the students' inclination toward talking about the experience or event upon which the paper was based. Kim and Jean's questions about what happened after Vicki's parents told talked to her concerned the event rather than the paper - at least until Jean suggested that Vicki's discovery that life wasn't over would make a good ending. Responding to the writing through asking about the event was common practice in early workshops, and continued throughout the course, though somewhat less pervasively as students began to move from responding to the story to responding to the writing. In early workshops, students seemed much more comfortable dealing with the event than dealing with the writing. As time went on, they dealt with both simultaneously, as the poetry workshop later in this chapter illustrates.

The very personal nature of the topics Vicki and Kim chose for their narratives did not surprise me. I had been in Writing Workshop the previous year, and I had learned that when writing topics are generated by the students themselves, they write on issues of concern or interest to them. Often, those issues are quite personal. As a result, I found myself in a number of interestingly layered, and sometimes quite poignant, conversations with students, as we talked about the paper, writing, reading, life issues, and relationships all at the same time.

I learned a great deal from these conversations. I learned how Billy's experience with a childhood bully had taught him first courage and then compassion. I learned that Mike was troubled by what he saw as the empty get-ahead mentality of his peers. Emily showed us that friendship sometimes comes from the most surprising people. I learned from Guy and Faisal what it was like to find yourself, at the age of sixteen, in a new country and barely able to speak the language. I learned, from no less than eight examples, that grandparents and relationships with grandparents preoccupy many teenagers, and I wondered if they first see their grandparents as human beings on the way to seeing their parents that way. I learned - or learned again, because I'd known this before - that high school students have informed, thoughtful, and committed perspectives on a

really impressive array of social and political issues. And I learned that when teachers are listening, high school students have much to say about themselves and their learning.

Dick often talked about the importance of "the personal", the human, in the writing classroom. He saw how students' lives outside of the classroom - their evolving sense of themselves, their relationships, the world around them - became the crux of a writing curriculum that asked them, in essence, to write about themselves. And he saw the human element in the writing classroom as the core of a cluster of values including connected knowing, experiential learning, socially constructed knowledge, and the importance of the learning processes as well as products. It was as though, once students began to reveal themselves in their drafts and their talk, the teacher was struck by a vivid impression of his students in a complex state of becoming. As students struggled together to make sense of their experience, to "speak themselves" more lucidly, traditional distinctions between form and content, product and process, public and private experience collapsed. Dick saw the human values, and the cluster of values he associated with them, as in eclipse in the high school, under-represented and under-recognized in light of values assumed in traditional administrative and bureaucratic structures. He saw his

classroom and other classrooms like it as in tension with the dominant institutional values.

If, under some ideal circumstances, I could erase the slate on time and the organization of time in high schools, I'd do that immediately. These fixed times built into the schedule bother me. Sometimes we need more time for writing, sometimes less. The inflexibility of time structures in the high school is inimical to how people actually learn...I'd also change the physical spaces, try to create a new ambience. High schools are built primarily with ease of administrative purposes as the chief goal. To move large and equal numbers of kids from one place to another by a bell schedule, with the administrative core in one location, and then organizing teachers by departments...all of it is for ease of administration, it has nothing to do with kids' actual learning needs... The idea that kids in school are perceived as merely students, and they are there to do their math, and when the bell rings they are now to do their history, and math hasn't got anything to do with history, and the teachers don't know or need to know what's going on in each other's classes. And we certainly don't need to know what's going on in the halls, in their lives, etc. We don't need to deal with the person. Well, all that's just not true for people in the area of writing, and you just find out... how artificial this chopping up of knowledge is.

You can't separate the personal and the academic in the writing classroom... In the first few days, I try to have some personal contact with each of the students as individuals, I talk to each, at eye level, asking about their writing. I make some observation about them, as a person, you know, about their volleyball game, or maybe with the rebellious types something like, "Good, lots of energy and an independent spirit." There are several kids in there I was told were "problems". I'm not having any problems with them, and I think the whole personal nature of the course accounts for that. This is a very task-oriented, impersonal sort of culture, learning is business, there's the whole sort of factory metaphor in the high school. It would be strange

if some kids weren't alienated by that.

Writing Workshop: Processes in the Workshop

By the end of September, the two workshop groups had established themselves and group members were beginning to work out patterns for responding to each other's drafts. The group I had chosen to follow included Patrick and Sharon, strong, dedicated writers who had for years written regularly on their own; Fred and Guy, two average writers whose interest in writing - and therefore, proficiency - seemed to be growing rapidly in this course; and Malcolm and Jean, reluctant writers who had trouble with clarity and confidence.

By this time, the class had established a tone, suggested by an event I happened upon one September morning. Patrick, Fred, David, and Mark were huddled together in diligent conversation before class and I wandered over to see what was happening. They were reading from a manuscript, or more precisely, from four manuscripts, as each had some portion. The manuscript was the beginning of a science fiction story, they told me, something they were working on together "on the side". They passed it about surreptitiously when they met in other classes, adding and revising in dull moments during the day, they said with a sort of collective

wink. Writing had gone underground, into their private student culture - a mark of full acceptance, I thought.

The growing enthusiasm for writing in the class was at least partly due to group dynamics. Patrick, who saw himself as a writer and who greatly admired an older brother who was studying writing at the university, had emerged as a leader among the boys. He was a confident, out-going young man, and he had a certain presence in a group. Delighted by the opportunity to write, work on, and read to others his writing, he exuded a no-nonsense enthusiasm for the work at hand, and that enthusiasm infected others. Among the girls, who were more reserved in this class than the boys, at least two wanted to be writers. And so, with a critical mass of class members interested in and serious about the subject, the course was, in Dick's words, "off to a better beginning than I can ever remember."

The workshops, in which students read each others' writing in progress, commenting on its strengths and weaknesses and offering suggestions for improvements, became the single most important component of the writing class. It was here that students had the opportunity to see their writing as readers might see it, here that they saw it in the context of their peer group, here that they learned new strategies from each other. It seemed to me that the greatest value of the workshop sessions lay not in their

potential to improve student papers, but in the opportunity they provided for students to watch each others' reading and writing processes, and by so doing, to gain greater awareness of and control over their own.

A workshop group I sat in on in October illustrates how these response sessions offered students insights into reading and writing processes. Typically, the groups did not spend a long time responding to any one paper; usually, they read aloud and commented on four papers in the space of an approximately forty-five minute workshop session. This set-up relieved the pressure to search for things to say, encouraging spontaneous and genuine responses, and discouraged pedantic or picayune arguments. The group had begun by reading aloud "Life" (Figure 5), an anonymous draft (most workshop papers were unnamed at this point in the course, though group members were growing adept at recognizing each other's work) of a reflective narrative. They took a few minutes to jot comments on their copies of the paper before discussing it. Jack, who was leading the workshop, asked members what they thought.

Guy spoke up. "I like the dialogue, all the dialogue the writer put in the story. It puts you in the action. It brings you right into the story."

"Yeah," Fred agreed, "I like the conversation between the speaker and the aunt at the first of the story

Figure 5: "Life"

"Thanks again Aunt Kathy for letting me borrow your encyclopedias. I will bring them back as soon as possible."

"No huury Lee. Take your time. Be careful going home it's getting late. Good night."

I walked to my car, fastened my seat belt, started the car and went home. I turned left at the end of the street. It is about 7 p.m. I will go home take a shower and then finish my homework before school tomorrow.

My car went out of control, my back end came round and was headed for the trees to my right. I tried to steer my car back on the road. The last thing I remember is the tree in front of me.

I need help. I took off my seat and flew open the door and ran about 1/2 a mile back to my aunt's house passing many houses on the way. Mom, mom. I ran and came to my aunts road. Okay Lee, slow down now it's okay her house is down the street you can see it from here. But I couldn't stop myself froming running. I ran till I got to the door, I swung it open my uncle was in the living room.

"I...I hit a treee."

"Oh Lee come here" I slumped in his arms, crying freely, scared but safe.

"Let me see your head, Kathy get some ice for her."

What was wrong with my head. My hand lifted, and all I could feel was this balloon full of liquid.

"Here lie down and keep this on your head.."

"...Donna your daughter has been in a car accident."

Mom, mom. My mom is she coming. I lay on the coach crying hysterically.

"Mommie.."

"Hey. I'm right here. It's okay you're going to be fine just be thankful you were wearing your seatbelt because it saved your life."

"Should we bring her to the hospital ourselves or call an ambulance." Someone said.

"I don't want to risk moving her without having her checked first call the ambulance." my stepdad said.

"We need an ambulance at 12 Cannon Street right away, we have a young girl who has just been in an automobile accident...okay."

"...seen the car if there had been a passenger he probably wouldn't have made it there was no room at that side. She is very lucky she was wearing her seat belt."

"How you feeling?" my mom asked.

"My head."

"Yeah, your head sure took a good bang."

especially. It kind of fills in a lot of information in an interesting way, instead of telling you, like saying 'I was on my way home from my aunt's when'; it sort of shows you in the conversation. And sets it up to... though I can't believe her aunt told her to be careful because it's late, at seven o'clock at night. At seven?"

Jean disagreed. "I found the dialogue confusing. The bottom of the first page, I can't figure out what's going on at all."

"Where her mother's talking and somebody's calling an ambulance?" Patrick asked. "But I thought that was a nice touch, because she's lying on the couch hurt while all this is going on around her. She's disoriented, and that's what the dialogue's meant to show. I like it."

"But maybe she needs to put in some more description about how she feels, some more details. To make it more vivid. Like 'the room was spinning'. Then you'd know why the dialogue is confusing like that," suggested Sharon.

"The only part I have a problem with is the shift from the walking to the car and the crash. She hasn't got herself in the car yet when she says 'My car went out of control.' It's too abrupt, there, there needs to be a transition. You need a lead up to the crash, like the tree jumping up or something," Patrick said.

Malcolm wondered about the seatbelt saving the speaker's

life. He thought a seatbelt could be of little help in a collision with a tree. His objections began a fairly protracted debate over the credibility of plot technicalities, an issue dear to the hearts of adolescents, as anyone who has ever taught *Romeo and Juliet* knows. Jack finally lost patience with this line of talk, and pointed out that it was hardly central to the paper and of little use to the writer.

"Yeah", Guy said. "Whether or not the seat-belt saved her life isn't as important in the story as how easily she could have been killed. It starts with her talking to her aunt, and it's like one minute she's having this normal conversation and the next minute she could have been dead. I think that's what the ending means."

"Awesome topic," Patrick added, "great first draft."

"But those tense shifts are confusing," Guy noted, reading a few examples. He was working on this problem in his own writing.

The experience of hearing one's writing read aloud in a group has a distancing effect: the writer, conscious of readers around her, breaks her writerly enmeshment with the text, and hears it from a more critical, readerly stance. This is a phenomenon several students commented on in discussing the workshop: Jane, the author of "Life", suggested in an interview after this workshop that she "knew

some of the changes I needed to make as soon as I heard it, before other people said them." Writers, and particularly young writers, often find it hard to see where and how their texts need clarification because they have difficulty breaking out of the egocentricism of the writer to reach a critical distance. The workshop supports the shift from writer to reader that enables revision.

The sort of feedback Jane got on this paper through the workshop session is very different from the feedback represented by a teacher's written comments. In the latter case, the writer doesn't hear the paper read to a group, doesn't watch as peers identify the parts that worked for them, work out their responses, and grapple with confusing elements. Because the workshop was more vivid and memorable for Jane, she got a much stronger impression of the paper's strengths and weaknesses, of not only how it might be revised but also why. Watching as Guy talked about the way the dialogue created a sense of immediacy, as Fred noticed how the mundanity of the opening scene strengthened her theme, as Patrick and Jean disagreed over whether the disjointed dialogue was effective, and as Guy stated a theme, Jane got a glimpse of her readers' processes and how her writing affected those processes.

Because we see other people much more clearly than we see ourselves and often come to self-awareness through

recognizing our similarities to and differences from others, the workshop offered students a valuable chance to gain control over their own writing by "practicing" on others'. It was much easier for Guy to see tense shifts in Jane's writing than in his own. It was much easier for students to identify the purposes of others' texts and to see where the writing accomplished or failed to accomplish those purposes than it was to see this in their own texts. The process of responding to others' writing and articulating how it worked helped students recognize their own writing processes.

The writer was not the only one in workshop sessions who had an opportunity to see into the twin processes of reading and writing. The group members, in the act of struggling to articulate and explain their responses, indirectly demonstrated to each other their various reading and writing processes and strategies. These demonstrations of "how I read" and "how I write" were most striking when, as frequently happened, group members disagreed with each other. A workshop session that took place the previous semester provides the best example of what I mean here.

Another group of students had just finished reading aloud "Last Rights" (Figure 6), a paper of Dick's that he had decided to workshop anonymously. (Dick included two or three of his own drafts in workshop papers each semester, believing it important for the writing teacher to practice

Figure 6: "Last Rights"

The chapel reeked of a mustiness that prompted thoughts of slow decay rather than eternal life. "The Old Rugged Cross" groaned from the reluctant pipes which had sat idle for prior ten months. The scent of daffodills, snapdragons and irises challenged the scents of the bygone and forelorn.

The last of the mourners had filed by the closed, flag-draped casket. Pall bearers sat in one pew, tensely awaiting instructions from a somber funeral director.

"I want to see him." Uncle George's raspy voice intruded on our private thoughts.

"Excuse me?" said the undertaker.

"I want to see him. I want to see Ed."

July 14, 1973--Edwin Elden Wilson, 64, of 162 Lafayette Rd., No. Hampton died yesterday after a long illness.

The son of George and Sadie Wilson, he was born April 9, 1909 in Wolfboro, N.H. Mr. Wilson operated Skip's Blue Seal Garage on Rte. 1 in Rye until his retirement due to health reasons.

Mr. Wilson served in the U.S. Navy during World War II. He is survived by his widow, Eunice DeWolfe Wilson, three children, William, 31, of Dover, Richard, 28, also of Dover, and Barbara Small of Hampton; his brother George and sister Evelyn Carter--

The deceased's sons and close friends turned to one another in discomfort, not knowing how to turn off their melancholy to react.

"Mr. Wilson, it is the widow's wish to have the casket closed. Your brother suffered a lot of disfigurement in the last couple of years and--"

"And I suppose she wanted to make it easier for you."

The funeral directors looked at each other and at the pall bearers. George Wilson stared at the floor. The minister went outside to explain the hold up to the hearse driver and to close the doors. The mourners waited outside in the stagnant air for the impasse to be resolved.

The eldest son got to his feet and took his feeble uncle by the arm. "Look George, we're not going to put up with a scene here," he said as he walked the thin but stubbornly strong old man closer to the casket.

Soon tears welled in Uncle George's eyes as he looked at the casket.

The cancer had spread from a welding injury near his left eye. After the removal of that eye, radium and cobalt treatments and chemotherapy failed to halt the advance of the disease. As a last result, liquid nitrogen was injected into the bone marrow to prevent the cancer from once had been [sic]. The mouth hung on the left side due to dead

Figure 6: "Last Rights" (cont'd)

nerves. Radiation had killed off most of the hair above the place where the eye had been. Half his face had been erased by cancer and the treatments to stop it.

"All right," said the eldest son. "Why don't you open it just for a minute before we go." The flag was removed unceremoniously and the lid raised. The black patch was the first feature visible in the dim light. Remick's Home had done their best. George stared at his brother. Only in death would he be dressed in a suit and tie and lie with hands crossed over his stomach. The man lying in ivory satin looked like an imposter or a product of Mme. Tousaud's. When the lid descended, it was not Ed who was being enclosed in that airtight box, only a replica.

George looked upon the corpse until the lid was fully closed and sealed. "I just wanted to see him, that's all."

Outside the sun was bright. Crickets chirruped. Leaves rustled in a sudden and unexpected wind. The mourners murmured as the casket slid into the hearse. The sons helped their uncle into the car as others looked on.

what he preached). There was a hushed silence.

"Wow", Jack began, "this is good. Who wrote it?"

There followed some suggestions of possible authors, all denied, until one student settled on Mr. Tappan. Once the word was out that this was their teacher's paper, students seemed to decide it called for a certain high seriousness in response not always accorded their peers. They stuck strictly to the task at hand.

Randy said he liked the way the paper "has the feeling of a funeral...without coming out and saying how people felt."

"Can you be specific?" Dick asked. "How does it do that? Where?"

"You can almost feel the details, the images are really good," Randy said. He read "reeked with a mustiness that prompted thoughts of slow decay" and "leaves rustled in a sudden and unexpected wind".

Liz agreed that the funeral details in the beginning were good, "setting the scene...I like the mustiness and the flowers together".

"The way it sets up this contrast between life outside and death inside is great," Valerie added. "The sudden bright light and activity at the end of the dark and quiet inside. Sort of like coming out of a tomb. That's what it's like to come out of a church."

Rose spoke up. "I'm confused. Why did George want to see him? The writer should say something about that."

"He just did want to see him," Valerie explained. "That's the point. He wanted to see him for his own reason, and the others don't know why and we don't know. And it's like he finds out it's not really his brother anyway."

Students went on to suggest that the description of the cancer was confusing and needed to be placed after the opening of the coffin; to work out that "the part where the story jumps in the middle" was an obituary, arguing about whether it needed to be deleted or set off with margins; to comment on the irony of the title in its reference to the brother and not the dead man.

In the disagreement between Rose and Valerie over whether George's reasons for wanting to see the body should be explicated and among the students over whether the obituary should be deleted, students were simultaneously talking about the text and their own reading and writing processes. Valerie, quite a sophisticated author herself, recognized the power of the unsaid, of ambiguity. The students who argued for keeping the obituary found it an effective and appropriate means of supplying "a lot of important background information about the man, to give you more feeling for him."

We don't know whether Rose learned from Valerie in this

instance or whether students learned from each other. We do know that all this talk, repeated over time, about choices writers and readers make and strategies they use opens up the processes for students, encouraging them to see alternatives and to recognize their own choices. Given all the reading and writing we ask students to do in schools, it is striking how rarely we engage them in these kinds of conversations about how they read and write.

As the course progressed, conversations about writing processes became more explicit. Dick's intern Jack somewhat inadvertently contributed to this trend when he attempted to improve the quality of "polished" papers. Both Jack and Dick were unhappy with the unfinished look of some of the polished papers submitted for evaluation at the end of September. Dick handled this by talking to the students once again about his expectations for polished papers - typos and spelling errors fixed, wording, sentencng and paragraphing edited, and coherence established. He put a couple of polished papers on the overhead for discussion, and he responded to unfinished papers submitted as polished as though they were drafts, suggesting changes prior to grading. Jack, eager to contribute, found a film that coached students on the writing process, and especially on the issue of developing a paper that had a clear focus and main point.

The film, not a new one, was a cartoon of two high school characters, Gus and Sol, and how they went about writing papers for school. Gus began by writing. Sol began by worrying, and in the act of worrying, worked out what his paper was to be about, who his audience was, what his purpose and main point were, and what his role or tone would be. As he organized all this, he made notes and an outline, and then sat down to write. Gus, in the meantime, was writing and getting confused. Sol was rewarded by a good grade, while Gus did poorly.

During the film, Dick leaned over to me and said, "Notice Gus is a fool because he's a global sort of thinker, and Sol is wise because he's very linear. Everyone should think like an accountant." When the film ended, Dick, sensing a certain restiveness, commented that while it offered some organizational suggestions, the film might not be true to everyone's process.

Patrick spoke first. "It's how to write a generic paper, like to get a B+. That's what I do when I want to write an okay paper, just like a lot of other people's, and get a respectable grade. But to write something really good, when I'm writing for myself, I have to play. More like Gus than Sol."

"But don't you always need a purpose?" Dick asked.

"Sure," Patrick said, "but not always consciously, ahead

of time."

"And lots of times your purpose changes when you write", someone said. "I started off my reflective narrative meaning to say one thing, and when I wrote it and read it to other people, it changed."

"I don't write outlines, but I do get ideas and jot down ideas," Vicki told us.

"But I agree with the film about starting with a general topic or idea, and needing to narrow it, to cut things out," David said. "I always start way too big and have to focus it."

Fred thought the film was accurate on the issue of thinking about the writing at different times all day, and said he worked it out as he did other things. Someone else said ideas for stories "just come into my head, I don't have to decide on them". And the conversation continued for ten or fifteen minutes, everyone talking at once about their writing processes.

The spontaneous appearance of a few poems among the papers in workshops seemed also to support exploration of processes. Poetry began to appear in the workshop after Patrick brought in his poem "The Mower" (Figure 7) and shared it with Dick and one or two friends, though not in the workshop. But that Friday, two more poems surfaced among papers in the workshop, and as group members responded to

Figure 7: "Mower"

The mower engine coughs to life.
Steady tone leads to rhythm.
The leaves scattered in the grass,
To them I am connected.

Mower turns
I can see:
The leaves, the grass, the squirrels, the air,
I can see
Them all tied to the mower.

Mower stalls.
I grasp the ancient grass stained snake
wrapped around the red apple cawling and pull.
It starts.

I am tempted to cut

The mower slices deep, destroying leaves
I am tired.
The grass is thicker here.

them, they began to talk about the writing of poetry.

I sat beside Patrick, watching him write a long, detailed, and careful response to "A Boy", the first poem to come up that morning (the poem and Patrick's response are Figure 8). Sharon began by asking what the poem was about.

"It's about this guy who falsely patents a product and gets caught," Fred said.

"Yeah, and the writer is asking if it's really all the guy's fault," Jean added. "He's young, he's a boy, and he's human. It makes me wonder where the writer got this idea for a poem."

"It's a good topic," Patrick said. "And I really like parts of it. The last two lines cut to the chase. But the story, what happened is not very clear. It's like in parts the writer is being deliberately obscure. Sometimes poetry seems obscure because when you write it you don't say any more than you absolutely have to. But there's a difference between that and being obscure."

"The line 'steel around two of flesh' is like that," Guy agreed. I get the idea of him being handcuffed and I know the steel and flesh images are part of what the writer wants to say about being human. But it's like there's no good reason for not just saying it. You wonder why they didn't just say "handcuffs" and "wrists".

"The line breaks are like that, too," someone said. "I

Figure 8: "A Boy" and Patrick's Response (Italics)

A BOY

And his dream
Only, the dream wasn't his *(Maybe a better title)*

There he was
 with a pattern
Signing his name
 in place
Of another's.

The money exchanged
 Hands. The deal
Went down -
 The product *(Do you know what you want
Purchased. to say ?)*

Only the dream wasn't his
 to dream.

The Flashing Blue Lights
 caught up to him;
Steel around two
 of flesh. *(handcuffs?)*

Because it isn't Legal
 To Be Human in Congress.

Commenting on poetry is difficult for most people. The organization of words into paragraphs etc is good but something you might want to think about is how the order affects meaning and content. Do these breaks lend rhythm to the piece, because in some places they appear arbitrary, not lending meaning; they shouldn't just be neat to look at. Poetry is hard isn't it? but JUST SAY IT. Don't play footsie with complicated structure, the best just says it. don't make the reader de-encode it.

My favorite line is the last one. It really cuts through the images and just says it. All in all, it really was a well written poem. (Try to better explain the story, I've got the gist, it needs more detail. More explanation of what it's about.)

fool around with line breaks when I write a poem to see where the best breaks for the meaning are."

"I think some line breaks are good," Jack said. "Like 'the product/purchased'."

"So are the breaks in the last two lines," Jane added. "But did this guy do this in congress or what? Why 'human in congress'?"

Fred explained that he thought "they mean congress because congress makes the laws that don't allow people to be human." And Patrick, who seemed to be assuming some authority in the group, signalled it was time to move on by saying he thought it a strong first draft.

"Poetry is hard," he observed, quite accurately I thought.

The other poem that came up that morning was Patrick's "Refinishing" (Figure 9). This time observations about the writing of poetry came out of discussion of the event that instigated the poem - Patrick's refinishing a trunk. Although the paper was unnamed, the group knew this was Patrick's poem (they didn't seem to know who had written "A Boy"), and suggestions for improvement were few. Patrick was quite openly regarded as one of the best writers in the class, and other students didn't always feel up to offering him suggestions. He noticed this, and complained about it to me with unconvincing, if understandable, modesty. Patrick

Figure 9: "Refinishing"

Refinishing

I am refinishing an old trunk
Deep, thick finish of many coats
Changed from clean blue to darkest brown and
 some places black
Touched and scarred by many tools
Blocks my view of wood

Sanding deeply into layers of finish trying not
 to cut too deep
Not knowing where the original wood starts
The electric sander falters against finish
 stronger than engine
I sand now by myself grinding the rasp with my
 flesh and bone
Some point in time, perhaps now, then again, I
 strike wood
Many sheets of sand paper are torn

I have worn a deep whole into the wood
Grinding layer through layer, sometimes pausing
 at the beauty of one.

didn't realize that approbation was very useful response, and that because of it he worked all the harder at his writing.

"You do a lot of refinishing?" Fred asked.

"Yes," Patrick said. "It calms me. I like to watch the layers peel away down to the bare wood."

"Me too," Fred said. "When you finish you have a piece of furniture that's clean and new. So, is this poem sort of a metaphor about writing poetry?"

Patrick looked a little surprised and quite delighted. "Yes," he said, "I was stripping the trunk, scraping my knuckles against it to get through the paint layers to the wood, and I thought it was like writing poetry."

"That's how I get writing ideas - when I'm doing something else. Usually something simple like that," Fred said.

I was surprised by how much these students knew about writing, including the writing of poetry. I was also struck by all the opportunities for learning they created by exchanging with each others stories and insights about their processes. Even students like Patrick, who tended to rely more on the teacher for advice, benefitted from responding to others; the workshop required all students to think about and articulate their own writing strategies in order to respond to others. It gave them the sort self-awareness they

needed in order to become better writers.

In interviews toward the end of the course, several students expressed something of this growing sense of themselves as writers. I asked them to comment on what they had learned about writing in the course and on their writing processes.

Guy: I like writing in this course, especially the freewrites. It's easier and more interesting to write on your own topic ...I'm not good at poetry, and I'm not intellectual like Fred, but I think I do humor pretty well. Writing can be getting back at somebody, like "French Fry" [a story about all the indignities suffered by a French boy moving to an English school]. I also like to write about the funny little things in life that most people don't notice. That's not easy because you have to know what to leave out.

Jean: At the school I came from, we didn't write very much, and when this course started I felt like everybody knew more about writing than I did. I didn't have any idea what to write about or how to find a topic. I sort of learned that from reading other people's stories. I write about things that stick in my mind, important memories, and people. When we had to write the literary criticism on "Dry September", I had the same problem, I didn't know what to write about. Then, conferencing with Mr. Tappan, I realized I could do the same thing, write about something that stuck in my mind.

David: I'm not very good at writing in class. I need quiet and time. Patrick can just sit and write anywhere, but I can't do that...That's probably why I don't do so well on essays and essay tests. When we were talking about the shot-gun approach, where you just write it, hand it in and hope, I thought, "That's me." I've learned I have to get my ideas down first and work out the organization and fix up the grammar later. Sometimes I get lucky and the first draft is the last but not very often... One of my main

problems is that I try to put everything in. Mr. Tappan told me the first draft of that story was more like a novel. Now I find a focus later, and take out the unnecessary stuff ... Chemistry used to be my favorite course. This year I like English, I like writing. Chemistry is like history. You can't change it, so what's the point?

Patrick: I like writing what I want. I hate assigned writing. It's too easy to just figure out what the teacher wants and give it to them. That's what I do when I'm just going for the grade, and I don't really learn anything from it. When I write what I want I have to work harder... As for myself, right now I'm working on dialogue. I wrote the last story as an exercise in dialogue, I need practice in writing convincing dialogue.

Sharon: At first I had a hard time sharing papers. I think I had a problem with criticism. It's a problem in all my classes, differentiating between doing bad and being bad. But there's so much emphasis in writing class on criticism as helping, and I've started to see it that way. Anyway, I'm much more comfortable sharing papers now... If I know what I'm trying to say, I forget that people don't read my mind. I tend to assume people will understand what I mean. When things happen in the paper that I don't mean to happen, that's when the workshop helps.

The most important learning I saw taking place in Writing Workshop - this heightened understanding of writing processes and of oneself as a writer - was of a sort not at all easily demonstrated, observed, or accounted for. It took place slowly, over time, as students came to understand how their writing affected their readers. Such changes were themselves a process not necessarily translated immediately into observable improvements on a student's next paper or

test. This kind of learning, a sort of communal working things through, is not easy for teachers or students to record and report in terms of scores or grades. And yet it seems precisely the sort of learning students need to engage in in order to improve as writers.

Did students' writing improve in tangible, observable ways? Well, yes: Guy did master tense consistency, most of the time; David transferred his commitment in personal writing to the writing of essays, and wrote a tight, solid literary criticism of Pink Floyd's "The Wall"; Malcolm, who learned early that he had a flair for titles, came up with "The Fine Art of Dodging Lures" and "Jousting on a Bike", and in the latter finally wrote a paper that told only one story; Patrick's dialogue improved; Jean found compelling topics for her literary analyses and wrote with conviction; Sharon's style grew simpler and clearer. But many of these advances might well have been made in a traditional writing course by means of teacher comments on papers. The difference was that in the writing workshop students entered into and participated in the evaluation of writing in ways that demonstrated powerfully not only what they needed to do to become better writers, but also how and why to do it. Because they participated in the development and implementation of classroom standards, because they had a hand in determining the course curriculum, both standards and

curriculum made sense to them; they were invested in writing. It was no longer a matter, as Patrick might have put it, of figuring out the teacher and giving him what he wanted.

I asked Dick what he thought his colleagues thought of this "process" approach. They were receptive and interested, he thought, and many were exploring it in their own classrooms. "But for the most part, I think they mean by it encouraging kids to revise their papers," he said.

To some it may mean workshopping as well, but ... some don't think it's practical for the high school ... For one thing, if they're teaching literature, [workshopping] takes a great deal of their time. I think they think it will overload their teaching, dealing with all this writing, and I think some believe it allows for too much input on evaluation on the part of kids. In general [in high school], there's a lack of belief that input from kids is beneficial.

Actually, since Dick made these comments, at least three teachers in his department are implementing more workshops in their classrooms. But the time constraints for those teaching literature courses were very real. As one teacher said, "learning to read literature is a process too". Dick and his intern Jack spent many class hours setting up and modelling workshops, sitting in on student groups and intervening (often with the question "How does this help the writer?"), and talking about their own writing experiences

and strategies in order to demonstrate and encourage viable workshops. Literature teachers, like teachers in all content areas, had difficulty taking away from their central curricular concerns the kind of time it took to teach writing this way.

The issue of whether "input from students is beneficial" is also related to the use of time and priorities. Since Dick went on here to talk about students as "quite capable of giving each other bad advice or overlooking a paper's glaring problems", it appears he meant teachers had some reservations about students' facility at helping each other with their papers, a concern other teachers in the department did express.

That concern suggests an important if subtle difference in emphasis between Dick's and his colleagues' understandings of the purposes of peer workshops. For many in the English Department, the primary purpose of the workshop was to improve the quality of student papers; the emphasis, as it so often is in the high school, was on the performance, the demonstration of what the student has learned. For Dick, the quality of students' papers remained important, of course, and played an acknowledged role in his evaluation of their work; but the workshop served an equally important function as a process through which students learned to evaluate their own and other students' writing. Dick saw the

fact that students were not always good at helping each other as precisely the reason for asking them to do this, for through helping each other they learned to help themselves.

Too much concentration on the desired ends (write good papers, solve the equations, know American history) can interfere with the very means (make mistakes, work them through) by which we learn to accomplish our ends independently. The urgency of ends in the crammed high school curriculum diverts teachers' and students' attention from the means. It's unlikely that the "culturally illiterate" students who concern E.D. Hirsch (1987) don't know about the Civil War because they've never been taught it in schools. The problem is that they didn't learn it.

In many interviews, Dick talked about the ways the workshop didn't fit the high school. Sometimes the mismatch reflected differences in priorities: group dynamics and group processes, so critical to the workshop, were "things we just don't think or talk about". Sometimes it reflected apparently opposed assumptions: unlike the elementary school, where classes are groups that remain quite stable over years, "in the high school classes are groups of students who probably don't know each other and may well have no other teachers or classes in common." Such arrangements, Dick maintained, "assume both students and teachers

work individually" since they are not conducive to group-building or to "cooperation between teachers and connections among courses... by the time the course ends, the group has just begun to work together well." Finally, short periods (approximately fifty minutes) and high teacher-student ratios assume an impersonal, business-like, teacher-to-students teaching style and a testing-based approach to evaluation, since they neither recognize the time it predictably takes groups to gel nor foster evaluation schemes based on careful teacher observations of individual students' progress.

Whether or not Dick's colleagues believed that "input from students is beneficial", high schools generally do not invite students to play participatory roles in their own schooling. Curricula are set by universities, teachers, parents, the public, and the market-place, and it is still unusual for students to be consulted even about the realization of curriculum in individual classrooms. Rules governing students' behavior, decisions concerning their futures, and evaluations of their innermost cognitive and affective processes are regularly made without so much as asking them what they think. In such an institutional milieu, it would be surprising if classrooms where students were asked to evaluate their own and each others' learning were natural and common.

Writing Workshop: Evaluation

In Dick's classroom, it was difficult to separate evaluation from instruction. Teacher and students engaged in evaluating texts and writing strategies all the time; this was instruction in Writing Workshop. Also, Dick's evaluation of his students' progress was in itself partly a process of watching them closely and gauging their growth over time. His statement in the course outline that evaluation would be "individualized", taking into account the different abilities of students as they enter the course, clarifies his position.

Dick's evaluation procedures, which were quite simple, are summarized in the course outline. Essentially, the grade was arrived at through consideration of three criteria: effort and commitment, in the form of assignments completed regularly and on time for workshops, and performance on exercises; quality of writing, as judged on student selected polished pieces, and here progress toward better writing also counted; and responsibility, in the form of helpful participation in workshops and class. Students were asked at the middle and end of the semester to fill out self evaluation forms (Figure 10). Dick also evaluated them, and where there were discrepancies, student and teacher met for negotiation. He would have preferred to meet with each

Figure 10: Self Evaluation Form

WRITING WORKSHOP name _____ per _____

Self Evaluation Quarter 1 1989 Oct 31, 89

In each category, give yourself up to 100 points.

A. Class Participation

1. Do I have workshop papers in on time, properly labeled, and do I share papers I have carefully chosen, seriously seeking input? _____

2. Am I a constructive participant, contributing written and/or spoken comments which are detailed, thoughtful, beneficial, kind, and sincere? _____

TOTAL A _____

B. Working Drafts

Are my working drafts done to completion with evidence of some hours of reflection on coming up with a good lead, developing the point, and working on an effective conclusion? _____

Am I fussy about my work, not settling for just any topic or just any approach, but reworking, reconsidering, redrafting? _____

Do I meet deadlines? Do I work on the topic early in the process, or do I ignore the paper until the last minute and put it together hastily? _____ (times 4)

TOTAL B _____

C. Polished Drafts

Do I take pride in my work to make it the best in content (imagination, detail, clarity) I can? _____

Do I proof my papers and have others help to edit out errors? Do I have high standards of quality, or do I choose a paper thin on content? _____

TOTAL C _____

D. Quizzes (spelling) and other skills exercises

Am I making a serious effort to improve? _____ (times 2)

TOTAL D _____

TOTAL POINTS _____ (move decimal one to left) _____

student, but there simply wasn't time.

Dick arrived at this evaluation scheme over a period of ten years, and there is no reason to believe that he has finished tinkering with it yet. He changed it between the two semesters I was in his classroom to allow for more student responsibility. His progress through the years of teaching the workshop has been gradually away from teacher control and toward increased student participation and responsibility, as he has learned that his students can and should take a more active role.

And very gradually, very slowly I started looking for ways of having a more hands-off policy, because any teacher who writes knows the danger of taking over a kid's writing and making it their own... Even in recent years I have to admit I'm doing that to a degree, intruding, and not letting it be less than super good... Biting my tongue, seeing revision more in terms of alternatives [is what I'm working on].

In the early years, I felt I had to control and plan everything in the writing classroom... I had detailed evaluation forms I filled out on each kid's writing, rating them on effectiveness, and coherence, and mechanics, and every conceivable element... until it began to dawn on me that I was doing what they should be doing... and in order to help them, I needed to find out what they already knew, and how they saw their writing... But this doesn't mean that they don't need my evaluation. I have more experience, and of course I believe they need the benefit of that experience... but if they are going to become better writers, they also need to learn to evaluate their own writing.

...You never finally get it right. You decide one day that you've backed off too far, that you've exerted too little control, so you come

in the next day tough, and so on... It's a balancing act, you're always adjusting...

One of the balances Dick struggled with was teacher direction in the student-centered classroom. Dick believed firmly in the authority of socially sanctioned knowledge: if the larger society believed that students should be taught to write in sentences, then it was the teacher's business to teach this. But at the same time he believed that students would not learn, in any permanent or deep sense, processes, skills, or concepts that didn't in some way connect to their present purposes and understandings. Therefore, he assigned certain written forms he believed important for students to practice, but left topics open to choice; he advised revisions for their papers, but tried first to hear their intentions for their writing; he evaluated their progress and performance, but considered their evaluations as well.

Dick was somewhat uncomfortable with grades and grading as a means of embodying evaluations, largely because a grade was so singular while one's evaluation of a student's work and progress was so multi-faceted. He rejected as impractical in the high school a pass/fail system with anecdotal evaluations.

The pass/fail scheme didn't work because of values built into the system, values the students themselves operate on and thereby support.

Some of the teachers in this school firmly believe that the measure of a good course is how rigorous it is, how much one has to suffer in it, how difficult it is to get an "A". And many students believe that too, you can hear it in the way they talk about courses... In such a system a pass/fail course won't work. Students decide before they walk through the door that this isn't serious... In a sense, teachers compete here too, for the attention students pay to their courses. In such a system, how seriously are you going to take a course with a pass/fail evaluation, when you know it will be difficult to fail and you are taking this very demanding, very competitive Physics course?

Part of the reason Dick opted for negotiated evaluations was because students understood, worked within, and supported "the system". Under such conditions it could be difficult to convince them to do and say what they believed right if it contradicted the teacher; it was too tempting to get a good grade by following the teacher's advice, whether or not one understood or agreed with that advice. When students had a hand in their own evaluation, they felt some control and were more likely to take responsibility for their writing. The only difficulty Dick mentioned was occasional very grade conscious students who argued for an "A" even though they had not met all the criteria. In such cases the evaluation form, which spelled out those criteria, was useful.

One of the ambiguities of grades and grading came into play in a dispute between Patrick and Jack (final page with

Jack's evaluation is Figure 11). Patrick had chosen to write a literary analysis of his favorite poem, Dylan Thomas' "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower" - a challenging text for a high school sophomore. The paper was an ingenious, mathematical analysis of structure and line patterns. Patrick took the paper to a workshop which also included David's analysis of Pink Floyd's "The Wall". During that workshop, students pointed out that Patrick's paper was a very intellectual analysis, while David's was more personal, including a reasoned argument but also "tell[ing] the reader why this song means so much to him". Group members thought both sorts of analysis viable, but did suggest to Patrick that his paper would be more interesting if he also told us "why you like the poem".

Jack agreed. In his evaluation, he wondered about the significance of the argument, criticized the lack of polish, and rated the effort a "B". Patrick, aware that by comparison to the rest of the class his paper was superior, was angry. He argued that the topic was very difficult, that he had done a solid job on it, and that few of his classmates would have taken it on. Jack conceded Patrick's argument, but said that for Patrick, this was not an "A" paper. Patrick's discontent focused on differing interpretations of what grades mean.

Jack said I could have done better with more

Figure 11: Patrick's Paper and Jack's Response (Italics)

This clever combination of shroud which is both the covering for the dead and the ropes on the sailing vessels, he combines these images to show that this same force that "ropes the blowing wind" is towing him toward death by the shroud sail. [*Read this p. aloud*].

He then replaces a natural thing in line eighteen with a hanging man because he has established that man and the natural thing are equivalent. He then states in the pattern before that he is dumb that from him comes something related to the hanging man. [*This sentence is confusing*](Hangman's line is spread over dead bodies to control odor.)

The last stanza seems to almost totally depart [*from*] the pattern of parallelism, dealing with cosmic thoughts and ideas, [*It gives*] giving a ray of hope about their fate in line eighteen.

	Line #
The lips of time leach to the fountain head	16
Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood	17
Shall calm her sores	18
And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind	19
How time has ticked a heaven round the stars	20

He states that time takes away the force like lips to a fountainhead. [*Death is its departure?*] The love gathers and time passes on, it was shown in the 3rd stanza, then unlike any of the third lines of any of the first three stanzas he gives positive hope that the sores from this process of both humans and nature represented by "her" will be comforted. [*Patrick, is this one sentence?*]

He resolves the greater conflict of the parallel structure by making the final admission that dumb to explain to nature the most important fact, perhaps expressing his feeling that all of humanity is dumb to tell - [*something in there is awkward*]

How time has ticked a heaven round the stars

In the last verses he brings the life cycle of himself to a conclusion through death, in his tomb and the lovers that - [?]

And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.

He repeats again that the principle force is given and taken from all people and nature but because they were lovers they were comforted, and the pain of the crooked worm, given to all that lives under the stars can be calmed

Figure 11: Patrick's Paper & Jack's Response (continued)

by love.

Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood
Shall calm her sores.

What is the significance? Why should I read this besides to
admire his (Dylan Thomas') intelligence?

B Patrick, this is disappointing. The hardest part of
writing a superior piece is the polishing. A true writer
finds a true esoteric joy in finding the right word and
cleaning up his/her piece so that the reader knows exactly
what is being said. You need to be more specific. Do not let
the words get in the way of what you are trying to say.

careful editing. But to compare our papers against our own papers is not fair, it won't work. We're all in competition for grades for colleges, and college admissions don't recognize individual grading systems. To them a grade means where you stand in comparison to the rest of the group, not in comparison to yourself.

Patrick's argument exaggerated the seriousness of the situation, since this paper didn't affect his course grade let alone his career as a student, but his point was valid. The argument was resolved by a visiting writer who happened to talk to the class about the rigors of editors, convincing Patrick (who wanted to be a writer) that he'd been dealt with equitably and professionally. Nonetheless, the situation illustrates a thorny problem for teachers: grades are interpreted differently by different agencies.

Dick had his own creative resolution for the tensions between "values built into the system" and values he wanted to enact in his classroom. It was a resolution that attempted to embrace the contradictions.

Writing has its own standards, I try to get this across, standards that go beyond the merely personal, beyond our own personal whims. That's where the rigor comes in. It's commitment, the person has to care enough to communicate. The standards, the rigor is in the caring, in the personal, in a way, they are not in opposition ... I try to get that across ... There are two value systems competing here and the system favors the competitive. But the writing classroom stresses the cooperative, the collaborative, the human, and if you buy into the competitive system you might not respect that. So I try to show that the personal and the cooperative doesn't

mean anything goes, doesn't mean lacking standards. The standards are inherent to communication.

In order to teach those "inherent standards", Dick found it necessary to engage students in recognizing, articulating, and applying standards of good writing. He found it necessary to ask them to participate in evaluation of their own writing and learning.

CHAPTER III

THE PLAYING FIELD

The Context of the School

The Writing Workshop took place within the larger context of Oyster River High School. That context included the school building itself, the temporal and spatial organization of the place, the policies and procedures that governed its operation, the structures of authority and power within it, and the often conflicting values, beliefs, and concerns of various teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

School entails a complex web of rules and rituals (explicit and tacit) and ways of doing things (administrative and instructional) that in themselves represent usually unstated assumptions about learning and teaching: scheduling is one example. Different teachers and students buy into or reject these assumptions to varying degrees and with varying degrees of awareness. But certainly none escape the influences of the context in which they work and learn on their thinking about their work and their learning. Goodlad (1984), Gracey (1972), Henry (1963) and others have demonstrated how children internalize the routines, rituals,

power and time structures of schools, and Goodlad has called this potent, often unconscious kind of learning "learning school". Yet none of these writers explores the implications of the likelihood that teachers also "learn school".

Because I wanted a look at the school context in which the Writing Workshop operated, I travelled out from Dick's classroom in a number of directions. I followed two case study students through their school days: Patrick, an academically strong student from Writer's Workshop, took me into a sampling of courses and classrooms mostly designed for academic students; Kathy, an academically average student I met in Literature and the Land, took me into more typical (at least at most schools) classrooms. Along the way, I interviewed several students and teachers about their perceptions of the school and their courses, and about their beliefs about learning and teaching. I sat in on and recorded staff and English department meetings in order to get a sense of the staff and their concerns. And, I followed Emma, a teacher interested in implementing more personal and exploratory writing in her courses, to get a literature teacher's perspective on the teaching of writing.

These journeys across the curriculum gave me a sense of the school as a complex, dynamic institution in which there is a continuous interplay among competing sets of interests. Students, teachers, parents, administrators, and univer-

sities often have different interests in and hold different priorities for high school education. Powell et al (1985) use a "shopping mall" metaphor to suggest a confusion of purposes which they see resulting from demands on the high school "to meet the needs" of various constituents, particularly since these needs may well conflict. For the school to satisfy all the interests of its constituents is probably impossible.

Unsurprisingly, then, it seemed to me as I travelled across the school that certain sets of interests, certain ways of doing things, a certain set of values, were privileged in the high school above others. And that privilege appeared built into the organizational and ritual logic of the place. Something of this assumptive bias was implied in the comments of one teacher who told me that teachers who chose not to test their students regularly were dismissed by many students and teachers as "easy" -and an easy teacher seemed automatically to mean a poor teacher. The "values built into the system" exerted a subtle pressure on teachers and students to at least partly buy into them, to "learn school", or else to risk being misunderstood and ineffective.

Across the Curriculum with Patrick and Kathy

Patrick, who had quite a solid sense of who he was, also

knew which courses he liked and why. He was a "humanist", he told me, interested in and good at writing, literature, and history - "at least when the course takes a history of ideas or social philosophy approach." Maths were not his strength; he thought this was largely due to the fact that "I'm not very interested in them. I don't see why we're learning geometry, I don't see the point at all". This year his favorite course was Global Studies, "a sort of overview of important historical topics, B.C. and A.D." He liked it because "you have to think, we have great discussions, and the essay assignments are really interesting and thought-provoking." After high school, Patrick knew he would go to university, thought he would probably study philosophy, and guessed he might be a pediatrician because he had worked as a nanny in the summer and loved being with children. I didn't ask why he apparently wasn't considering teaching.

Patrick described his schedule as "moderately demanding - not super-student stuff, but hard. I spend a lot of time on writing, because I like it. I do a lot of reading for Global Studies. My math and Spanish courses are sort of average. Chemistry is the hardest." His day began at 7:30 a.m. with geometry.

7:35. There were twenty-one students in Patrick's geometry class. The teacher, Mrs. T., immediately enlisted five to do proofs of last night's homework on the board. As

they were doing this, she walked about the room, apparently checking to see if everyone had completed their homework. Then she snapped on the overhead projector, asking those who weren't doing proofs what they thought about the SAT problem the projector showed. The problem asked how many vertical boards were required for a 42.5 foot fence if the boards were half a foot wide and three feet apart. After a few minutes, as students began to answer, Mrs. T. asked each "Why?" The boy who got the right answer knew "there has to be a board at the end". Mrs. T. commented that this was grade seven math, but a problem that required thinking.

The class continued with students working problem proofs on the board, and then explaining their proofs to the class. Mrs. T. asked for divergent proofs for each problem, found some acceptable, and pointed out errors in others. When the class was about two-thirds finished, the teacher introduced the topic "special parallelograms", and explained two new theorems for the next homework exercises. The bell interrupted a student's question, and teacher and student squeezed in their conversation as classes changed.

8:29-8:33. I lost Patrick in the hall crunch between first class and homeroom, and caught up with him again in second period class, Writer's Workshop. He was complaining to a friend about geometry. "Of all the possible things in the world to study, why do we have to study geometry?"

Parallelograms - so what??" His friend tried to point out that geometry was useful in surprising ways, including in design. Patrick didn't appear mollified. I asked why he'd chosen to take it. He told me it was one math he could do, and that math was "one of those things you don't have to take, but you really do if you're thinking about university." He took it because he felt he had no choice.

8:37. Dick Tappan called the class to order, saying that today we'd be talking about and looking at literary analyses. I felt irrationally annoyed and wanted to ask him to give us a minute. But we marched onward, though it took some of us a while to engage. Dick began by asking what the purpose of a literary analysis was and a few students offered cursory responses. Later, as we started to look at examples, we warmed to the task and the group came alive. But I learned for the first time why at the beginning of so many of the high school classes I taught I had felt like I was pulling teeth: the people in them were disoriented.

Since I've described Writing Workshop in some detail, it is enough to say here that we went on to write and confer about drafts in progress. In fact, I was in the middle of an interesting conversation with Jean about her opinion of McClendon in Faulkner's "Dry September", when the bell rang for third period at 9:27.

9:27-9:31. "Follow me," Patrick said on the way out the

door. We bumped across a steady stream of traffic to the far side of the upper hall. Into the jostling line swarming down the stairs, quick hellos to passers-by, slam-open the locker, in books, out books, slam-close the locker, three conversations at once, a dash down the hallway and through the library, up the back staircase two steps at a time, and we were in Global Studies.

This classroom looked different. For one thing, the back landing leading to it was decorated with students' murals depicting historical events, like the colorful myth murals in Emma's classroom. I liked these partly because they gave color and warmth to the otherwise sterile walls and partly because they signified active students. They were vivid representations of student interpretations, student involvement.

The room had an informal atmosphere, perhaps partly because it was off the beaten track, partly because of the clutter of books and papers. Desks, including the teacher's, lined the walls in a semi-circle, and students also sat at tables in the middle. The walls were covered with prints, newspaper clippings, quotations: under a print of Picasso's "Guernica" someone had posted "Beware of Fascism" in green marker. The class seemed small (fifteen students that day) and they had the undefinable look of a rather intellectual group.

9:31-10:21. The teacher, Mr. H., rose to remind everyone of their impending trip to Harvard Museum to see the Oriental and Greek art show. He had a relaxed manner, and I noticed that he didn't trouble himself over a couple of students who continued to chat during his announcement. He suggested "it's a wonderful experience, if you've never done it, to walk around a museum and talk to different people about what they see."

Patrick had wanted me to come to this class because he was giving a presentation comparing eastern and western philosophies, and he was excited about it. He was nicely started when a loud speaker announcement, beginning "Excuse this announcement", called a homeroom class to the auditorium for cap and gown measurements. Two students got up and left class. These announcements continued every fifteen to twenty minutes for the rest of the day, to the obvious delight of some students and annoyance of others. Teachers seemed philosophically resigned.

I watched the students as Patrick spoke. Some listened intently, took a few notes, and clearly wanted to interrupt. Others doodled and seemed to drift or daydream. Patrick told us he thought it "neat to compare east and west philosophy on the nature of truth, belief, and reality", and spoke of western dualism and eastern notions of truth as unifying apparent paradoxes of subjectivity and objectivity: dif-

difficult ideas for high school students, I thought. To illustrate the ambiguous or paradoxical nature of things, he asked us if rhythm in music was created by the sounds or the silence in between the sounds. Eventually, the conversation turned to personal beliefs, a lively debate ensuing when Ted and Lesley took on Patrick about his attitude to religion, saying that religion was the excuse for, not the cause of, all sorts of tyrannies. Then the bell rang.

10:21-10:25. Off to the locker jostle. Since Patrick seemed reluctant for me to follow him into gym, I took the opportunity to talk to Mr. H. and Mrs. T. First lunch people were supposed to be ready to eat lunch at this hour.

Mr. H. described Global Studies as "a global history of human heritage", a course designed for better than average students, since it required a B or better in previous history courses to get in. The course and text were unusual in that they "deal with the world's regions themselves, rather than what the West does with them." The text, which he characterized as more like a college text, inspired him because "it respects the intelligence of students. Too much in school is given to them, made easy for them. This book asks them to think for themselves."

He thought "the nice thing about this school is that you can do this sort of course because many students are well-traveled, well-read, and much less parochial than typical

high school students." He gave the World Cultures course, which replaces traditional Civics, as an example of different directions possible in the school; he felt World Cultures had "done remarkable things to bring students out of their American ethnocentricity".

Because of the nature of the course, Mr. H. didn't give traditional tests. "I want to know their thinking about these issues, so I usually ask rather subjective essay questions, asking them to make some kind of judgement vis-a-vis a topic like primitive versus civilized societies." Occasionally, he did give essay tests, usually of a sort that made a statement and asked students to defend or refute it or asked them to pose and respond to their own question. He also assigned an extended essay, on a topic of their choice, and said that he encouraged students to think of the assignment as "creative writing - not the formal foot-noted research paper, but a more thoughtful and personal kind of essay." He found many students did research papers anyway, "perhaps because they [were] more comfortable with them, perhaps because they [didn't] require a great deal of thought and risk-taking."

Many of my colleagues believe that the careful, footnoted research paper is a necessary preparation for university. Well, so is learning to think for oneself, and the traditional research paper is so restrictive it doesn't encourage that... they will have lots of opportunity to do footnoted research papers. I want them to have a

wider opportunity than that.

In order to provide that "wider opportunity", Mr. H. asked students to do some "exploratory writing", sometimes in class. He asked to students to "pose questions about history... I want them to look at particular techniques for developing historical ideas." He wanted his students to think not only about history, but also about thinking and learning in history. "How do you know you know? They find that question intimidating."

This teacher thought Oyster River "a schizophrenic school", "not clear about directions it wants to take". There were faculty factions made up of traditionalists who believed in extensive teacher control and structure and tough courses, and others who opted for greater student freedom and participation. "It's a good example of the cursed part of the autonomy of teaching. Because nobody tells us what to do, we're not required to cooperate or communicate."

I'm probably seen as different. I have a reputation as easier, partly for not requiring scads of written homework. I'm very much opposed to busywork, and on that I suppose I'm diametrically opposed to much of the Social Studies Department. On the other hand, I do give reading quizzes. I don't like this bribery - is it any way to learn? - but the system requires it - kids have learned not to read without the quiz.

Mrs. T. and I had a short conversation because she had a class coming up. She told me that writing in geometry class consisted of note-taking, and that she believed math was a good place to learn note-taking skills. I asked if she'd ever used learning logs for students to write about their problem-solving processes. She hadn't, but said that much of the course was talk about problem-solving. "Most classes like this problem-solving approach; that's what we always go back to. Kids are more comfortable with predictability." I told her I had noticed she consistently asked them to explain their thinking, and wondered if they worked in groups, explaining their thinking to each other. They usually worked alone, she told me, though in some "hands-on activities, measuring, figuring out theorems by drawing and measuring, they sometimes work together."

11:53-12:43. I met Patrick again in Spanish class. This was a larger group, of about twenty-five students, mostly sophomores. Ms. S., a lively, cheerful person, came into the room speaking Spanish, which I did not understand. She directed a few comments to students who answered, smiling and chuckling. We broke into groups of three or four, Patrick explaining to me that we were going to read poems to each other. He translated for me a poem about a woman on a balcony with a white flower and a passing caballero who takes the image with him.

"Yuck," said Patrick, "so romantic." I told him I found it charming, and wanted to suggest he lighten up.

The class continued in this way, students carrying on conversations with each other from a conversational Spanish text, teacher and students engaged in quick, amused exchanges. It was a lively tempo, and we had fun. I was amazed that this teacher, who had probably already taught several classes that day, still had so much energy and enthusiasm for the job. By the end of the class, she had talked to everyone, including me. When she saw the look of incomprehension on my face, she quickly switched to French. As the class ended, Ms. S. assigned homework exercises, and spoke briefly to me.

Most of the writing students did in Spanish, she said, was in the form of "guided compositions", short writing on easy and familiar topics in response to questions mostly posed by text exercises. Grading was largely based on exercises and quiz scores, and students were able to make up any three quizzes.

12:43-12:47. In the hall, I told Patrick I thought Ms. S. was an interesting teacher. He agreed, but said he personally didn't like Spanish, "because it's mostly exercises and we have to read these very, very silly stories."

12:47-1:37. Patrick went off to a study hall. I took the

opportunity to eat lunch and collect my wits.

1:41-2:31. Chemistry class: a class I was predisposed by past experience not to find interesting. We spent the class going over problems students had on a recent test, the teacher showing on the blackboard how to convert chemical solutions from grams to moles, heroically explaining and re-explaining the process. In my notes, I wondered if people could "problem solve" all day long without getting a little punchy. There was a last-class-of-the-day atmosphere in the room: quiet, tired, waiting.

When the bell rang to end the school day, I decided it was fortunate high school students were young. I was not at all sure adults would put up with this jolting, fragmented, grinding daily schedule. I heartily wished upon the gods of educational planning, whoever they were, at least a month of days like this.

Patrick had shown me a high school population that seemed not quite right to me: something was missing. Travelling with him, I'd seen some dulled, dazed expressions, the body language of apathy and indifference, as well as some very interested, absorbed students. All that seemed normal enough. But throughout the day, there hadn't been a single word of open challenge or rebellion. None of Patrick's classes conformed to what we high school teachers

called, in the careful educational euphemisms of the day, "difficult classes" or even "mixed groups" - with the exception of Writer's Workshop, which was only a mixed group.

I felt more at home in Kathy's high school.

At the time I met her, Kathy's central concern in life was Jason, the young fiance she believed would take her away from the pressures of a tyrannical step-mother. (Since that time, step-mother has become her main ally in the fight to free herself from a tyrannical ex-fiance). She was a solid student who cared about the quality of her work, but school was certainly not the center of her life, and many of her teachers believed she consistently under-rated her academic abilities. Kathy liked people, had a large group of friends that crossed the clique barriers, and acted courageously and compassionately in tolerating no adolescent cruelties toward the social underdog. She was out-spoken, impatient, mischievous, and thoroughly likeable.

Kathy's day began in Emma Rous' Literature and the Land course. It was a course she very much enjoyed, "except for Thoreau", and even he had inspired a piece of writing on what she wanted from life of which she was very proud. She liked Lit and Land, she told me, because she liked the subject matter, liked the chance to do independent readings (students chose some of the books they read), and was very

fond of Ms. Rous, from whom she had taken a course the previous year as well.

"Ms. Rous listens to us. She's interested in us. She treats us like people, you know," she said, echoing a common comment about Emma Rous. "I also think she's funny, I like to tease her a little. She's so kind, and sort of serious, or... serious isn't the right word."

"Earnest?" I suggested, leading the witness.

I noticed that Kathy, unlike Patrick, often judged the quality of a course on how she felt about the teacher, particularly the sort of relationship the teacher had with students. Most important was whether she thought the teacher was "a real person", whether she saw the teacher as caring about students as people. She did not appreciate courses that were too task-centered for occasional conversation, where "the atmosphere is so tense, and everybody's on edge, competing for every little point."

In fifty-two interviews and countless conversations with Oyster River students over the eleven months I spent in the school, observations about the threatening competitiveness, grade fervor, and overly demanding work expectations were common. The majority of students seemed at least reasonably satisfied with the school, citing as positive points its smallness and community spirit, its philosophy of "individualization" and interesting electives, the commitment and

excellence of the teaching staff. But too many students were unhappy with the pressure to perform. Even among those who liked the school, there was a pervasive discontent over their feeling that, here, just being good wasn't good enough. And I heard a smoldering resentment that the school was not listening to these or other student concerns.

"It's like they don't believe us when we tell them when they give us another assignment on top of the big paper due tomorrow, they don't believe us when we say we have too much work," Andrea said.

The perception among students that the school didn't listen tended to focus on symbolic events, like the hall issue. Recently policy had changed so that students were no longer permitted to linger at their lockers or in the halls during free periods. They reacted strongly to the new rule, a reaction best summed up by Valerie's statement that "there is no place in this school for the students." Students began to complain about "rules for the sake of rules", about being over-regulated and under-considered. Tom and Andrew spoke tellingly about the issue.

They're treating us like we need to be babysat. And in treating us like that, it's making people act like they do need to be babysat. Like people lighting fires in the garbage cans in the bathroom... it's because now they feel like no one trusts them... If they get you into the idea that school is your enemy you're going to care less about school. Then educational standards go out the window.

The mindset that meant the school did not listen to students and did not consult them was something Dick Tappan often talked about.

I'm asking students to say what they think, but it's hardly surprising if they don't believe me, given the systematic tuning out of their concerns ... These events [above] are symptomatic. Look, I'm all in favor of order, as everyone knows, but I've argued all along, and I continue to argue, that we need to start talking with students about the decisions we make that affect them. We need to consult them, and we need to listen to them. It doesn't mean giving away your authority. But no, it's too time-consuming, too inefficient, it's opening a can of worms... They don't believe we care about them, and it doesn't matter if we do, if they don't believe it.

Kathy preferred classes where she felt she was listened to, where she felt a participant in a more cooperative and relaxed milieu. For her, this meant especially classes in the business department, where "it's a little more laid back, and you sometimes talk about things. I mean you work, but it doesn't mean you never just chat. And people help each other out, we kind of all do that, because we're in it together."

Kathy's business classes included accounting, typing, shorthand, and Communication Skills taught by two teachers, Mrs. B. and Mrs. S. As a sample, we'll look at a shorthand class with Mrs. B. and the Communication Skills class with Mrs. S.

The second period shorthand class was quite small: six students, all girls, the day I visited. Under such circumstances, an easy camaraderie is likely to develop, and I noticed students laughed and teased as they helped each other decipher the strange language of shorthand. They talked about the purposes and uses of shorthand, and openly commented on whether or not one should actually follow all the procedures the teacher suggested for learning it. Mrs. B. and her students seemed to have developed an honest, easy relationship.

The class began with dictation practice, Mrs. B. advising they practice them several times at home. There were 54 dictated words in the practice exercise; the teacher reminded students they would have to be able to write these very quickly, would "lose one letter grade on a test for each one wrong, and if you get five wrong, it's all over. In shorthand, speed and accuracy really count." When the students had finished, they did the exercise all over again.

After dictation practice was over and corrected, Mrs. B. asked students to translate a business letter exercise in their texts, each students taking a turn at reading. The teacher asked each, after they had deciphered a sentence, to "go back now and read the whole thing to see if it makes sense - this will help you figure it out and points up mistakes." It was very like a beginning reading class.

Mrs. B. said, "Now write these out twice at home for practice," and the girl beside me turned to tell me "she knows we only do 'em once." Another girl asked how often shorthand was used, compared to dictaphones, etc., starting a conversation from which I learned a little about the purposes and limitations of shorthand.

Mrs. B. told me after class that most of the writing in shorthand and in business classes in general was constrained by forms (egs: letter, memo, report) and allowed very little "personal in-put". I was interested in the fact that students cheerfully submitted in this and other business classes to the sort of drill and practice exercise that often caused revolts in English class, and I asked both Mrs. B. and Kathy about this. The teacher told me it was because "they can see the point and purpose of what they're doing immediately, it's very concrete." Kathy confirmed this, saying, "but here it's so practical. I mean it's real obvious you need to learn it for work, and how else are you going to learn it?"

Mrs. S's Communication Skills group was one of those "difficult classes." Part of the problem, as the teacher herself explained, was that the course filled an English as well as business credit; it was seen as an easy English credit, without much academic reading and writing, and therefore attracted "kids who have just had a lot of trouble

getting through high school - some of them, pretty angry kids."

"There are a lot of kids in this class with some serious school problems and personal problems and home problems. Because I'm used to teaching business kids, who are pretty clear about where they're going, I'm just not used to dealing with this," she said. On top of that, Mrs. S. had a very mild personal manner.

It was a relatively large class, of about 25. At the beginning of class, the teacher reminded everyone who wasn't working on a computer that they had a letter to compose. They were writing, as the manager of a business, to another business to break the news that services would no longer be required, and Mrs. S. advised the letter "be courteous and positive". Only most of the students weren't doing this.

Two or three were drumming out the rhythm section of some popular song on their desks. Another group of three were laughing and gesturing at a group in the hall, and one boy kept dodging in and out to chat with them. While Mrs. S. rounded him up and attempted to set him to work, one student passed out lollipops. In deference to the "no food in classrooms" rule, Ms. S. lightly suggested he'd "obviously had enough sugar today."

"Yeah, we're going to put you to bed without your milk," somebody sneered.

I felt I knew classes like this.

Ms S. asked Todd, an older student wearing a tee-shirt that read "I love my attitude problem", why he hadn't started to work.

"Well, what if you don't agree with this?" he said. "Cause if there's anything that really bothers me, it's like when somebody says - big smile, all sunny - 'You're fired.' It's phony."

"But that's not what I suggested, Todd," Mrs. S. said. "I said try to be courteous and positive. You're in business, you know."

I asked Todd and Mike, one of the drummers, if I might interview them.

Todd began by telling me he liked Mrs. S., but was just sometimes "bothered by the way she does things. She's a pattern person, she sticks to patterns, and I don't." Both these students were 19 years old, and, quite naturally found regulations at the school ("we're treated like children") insulting. When I pointed out that some students, at 13, were children, Todd answered it didn't matter how old people are, "you treat them with respect or you get no respect. It's like schools think of kids like a different species."

What was a good teacher? They named several, all of whom "listen and regard us as people. They don't put themselves above you as a person." What was a good school? A school

where students were taken seriously, where what they said counted too. Did that happen in this school? In some classrooms, not in the school. How could you do that school-wide, give students more of a voice? That was for people like me to figure out. Grin. But how would you do it? Probably through the classrooms, through teachers. Where do teachers get the time, given all the other things they're supposed to do? But this is important, too.

We moved on to Todd's and Mike's academic performance. Both were below average students, "mostly because we don't do all the work."

"Why not?" I asked.

"Because some of it's stupid. It's like it's just busywork. If you want to be an "A" student, you have to do all this work whether or not it makes any sense to do it, and don't ask any questions... Sometimes attitude problems are created by authorities," Todd said.

The bell rang. Leaving, I thought that it's too easy for teachers like me to become armchair critics in someone else's classroom. Too often I found myself thinking about what I would do, and sometimes itching to do it. Like snapping out the answers at a television quiz show, you tend to forget that there's a big difference between watching and acting under pressure. This time, while I still thought about the things I might try, I was also relieved that this

class was not my problem.

Discussion

After visits to classrooms and staff meetings and talks with teachers, it was clear to me that the Oyster River High School teaching staff was extraordinary. By comparison to high schools I was familiar with, there seemed to be a striking number of very good, even gifted, teachers. They were highly educated (the 1989-90 Profile notes that 69% have Master's degrees), informed and articulate about an impressive variety of current issues in education, committed to students, and eager to talk about teaching. It was one of those rare schools where, in department and staff meetings, teachers consistently brought up issues of educational philosophy, learning, and teaching. Potential arguments about school directions, policy, and philosophy were in the air all the time, although tensions between different viewpoints didn't always erupt into discussion. I think this was partly because teachers had so little opportunity to talk together, either as a department or a staff, and partly because they shared a deep-seated belief in personal autonomy, individual rights, and the value of differences.

Students appreciated the quality of the teaching and excellence of academic standards in the school. Still, they

had concerns that came through loud and clear in conversations with them, and many of these were shared by teachers. It seemed to me that their concerns grew out of the effects on the high school of a number of systematic and cultural factors.

The research literature on the American high school is rife with observations about the passivity and apathy of high school students (egs: Mayher, 1989; Grant, 1988; Applebee and Langer, 1988; Powell et al, 1985; Sizer, 1984; Boyer, 1983; Kozol, 1967). The structuring of time (in this case, the division of the school day into seven approximately 50 minute periods) cannot help but contribute to that passivity.

The scheduling of time into short, precisely measured periods in the high school is artificial, mechanical, and rigid. It violates the inner sense of time human beings actually use when we are learning: we take whatever time it requires to read a text, write a paper, think through a problem, have a discussion. Neither do we march woodenly through a pre-determined series of unconnected tasks, unconnected subjects as the clock dictates. Sometimes, we spend hours, days, weeks, and even years (in graduate schools) on one subject, one topic; sometimes, we spend ten minutes.

Time structures in the high school have a sort of

distancing effect, not unlike watching television. The controls are external: the fact that the students and teachers involved don't have the opportunity to take their time encourages the attitude, as Dick put it, that "school is not something you do, but something that is done to you".

Short periods, combined with a cramped curriculum, and high student numbers per teacher also assume and encourage a certain kind of teaching, a certain set of educational values. Those values include individualistic work habits, teacher- and subject-centered classrooms, and "objective" testing based heavily on student performances rather than processes.

The amount of information the typical academic high school student is now asked to absorb has grown - in every discipline - to proportions that make the high school curriculum of twenty years ago look like a playground. Given that growth alone, it's little wonder that there isn't a great deal of talk in high school classrooms about how and why we do this, how we learn, and how we think: such conversations take time. Similarly, the short classes, the fact that students follow individual schedules and that no two teachers ever teach the same students places group work, team teaching approaches, and cooperation among teachers somewhat outside the institutional imperative. Finally, the numbers of students per teacher combines with short classes

to make student-centered teaching and observational, anecdotal evaluation (or even evaluations based on extensive writing) much more difficult and much less likely than in the elementary school. Two English teachers commented on these issues.

I'm not sure thinking is highly valued, neither in school nor the culture. We can do plot, but not theme. We don't take or allow the time to think... it has to do with bells ringing and the way the school is set up. Knowledge is compartmentalized - chopped up thoughts, we skim the surface of ideas. Little in depth thinking.

Fifty minutes controls my content - not enough time to do more than one poem in any depth...If you want kids to take responsibility, to "process" (to use that awful word), it simply takes longer. It's difficult to find time to experience and then reflect.

Systematic factors support certain notions that float in the air in high schools. Some of these notions seem to originate in the accountability and effective schools movements, though they are sometimes applied with a sort of "if one is good, two is better" mentality. For instance, homework is by definition good, and more of it is better. (Someone somewhere once declared that high school students should have two or three hours of homework per night, and administrators all over America have taken to this, apparently without much consideration given to the issue of purpose.) But student comments suggest there may be un-

foreseen, deleterious effects on attitudes toward work and learning accruing from this emphasis on tasks and performances. The following are excerpts from responses to questions I asked students about their reading journals in Emma's classrooms.

I like keeping the reading journal. But I have so many things to do every night, it gets to be just another chore.

If you have this enormous Physics assignment due the next day, you're going to fudge on the journal.

I'd probably like the journal a lot better if I wasn't keeping three others for other courses...

Ms. Rous doesn't pile on the work. She wants us to think. But it's easier, you have all this stuff, not to get too involved, just do your work and get it done.

I usually don't have time to do a good job on it, even if I want to, and since she gives credit for getting it done, I spend more time on things that count more.

The effect of overloading students with homework - particularly work that doesn't have clear purpose for them - may well be to encourage them to take perfunctory, disengaged attitudes toward all their work, including even tasks they enjoy. The point becomes getting the work done.

Those notions that float in the air in high schools also include enshrinements of certain cultural values. Dick commented on a belief among some teachers and students that,

unless courses were rigorously demanding, "unless you suffer", they weren't "top" courses. This seems to reflect American middle-class values concerning work. Work is good, again by definition, and again, more of it is better. Work is also unpleasant; it is suffering, and suffering builds character. Work is not play. It's not uncommon to hear students say things like, "We had a great class; we didn't do any work. We just had a discussion." The discussion, of course, might have been on essential differences between eastern and western philosophical systems, but if it was enthralling, it couldn't have been work. Todd and Mike come from working class homes; it's possible that working class kids are also at a disadvantage in schools because they don't share middle class attitudes toward work.

Life can be difficult for those teachers and students who choose to operate on values other than those built into the system. Students who act "unsystematically" invite the obvious consequences. But teachers, too, run into resistance from students (especially successful ones) who know the game and don't like having the rules changed. Students can also change the meaning of teachers' classrooms to conform to the institution: some of Emma's students saw her exploratory reading journals as reading quizzes or short essays. And some rules (eg: read for the quiz, write for the grade) are entrenched.

Finally, there is much in the high school that goes unsaid. Management doctrine seems to encourage a sort of "keep the lid on" avoidance of dialogue between students and authorities about the processes of education, including especially questions of worthwhile knowledge, learning procedures, and school policies. It is as though we believe students have no serious interest in their own education and, if we listen to them, will only try to trick us into easing their way. We learn to avoid perhaps the most important conversations we can have with each other. This is a striking difference between high schools and a growing number of elementary schools, where teachers are seeing that negotiations with students about how and why we might accomplish a given end are an integral part of young children's learning. It seems likely that such negotiations are an integral part of older children's learning as well.

The Literature Classroom

High school literature teachers are in an interesting position these days. On the one hand, they have an enormous body of knowledge to convey to students, including literature (eg: *Huck Finn* and Mark Twain) and knowledge about literature (eg: romanticism). It is a body of knowledge sanctioned by tremendous cultural authority - to know it is to be cultured, in popular idiom - and it is widely con-

sidered both educationally essential and impractical. On a national news special in the winter of 1989, Barbara Walters was appalled to discover that SAT's suggested 62% of American high school seniors couldn't identify the author of *The Great Gatsby*. (One wondered what percentage of American adults knew who Scott Fitzgerald was.)

On the other hand, literature teachers are also confronted with a growing body of reading research and literary theory emphasizing the highly personal, constructive nature of reading. Oversimplified, these schools of thought maintain that reading is the act of making sense of print through drawing on one's experience, so that you and I can never read the same book, though we may come to a communal understanding through talk. But then again, a book is never the same book to different communities, since each community will reconstruct the book in a different ways. Literature becomes a much more uncertain, dynamic, and unstable body of knowledge than it once seemed.

The literature teacher's situation is interesting because it parallels so closely Dewey's (1956) description of the whole project of education: the meeting of individual experience (the child) with cultural experience (the curriculum), so that both are changed. And, as Dewey himself said, this demanding definition of education raises some very difficult questions for teaching.

It was those kinds of questions Emma Rous was asking herself when I met her, questions like how much (and what) do I "teach"? She was interested in changing her Literature and the Land and American Literature classrooms to include more "independent reading" (students choose their own books), more exploratory and personal writing about literature, in the form of response journals, and more small group work in responding to literature.

A number of influences moved Emma to change her teaching of literature. For one thing, though she didn't say this, it was very clear to me that she was keenly interested in reading - not only in literature, but also in reading. She taught courses in which there were a wide range of students, including mature, reflective readers and poor readers who had trouble going beyond plot summaries. She frequently thought, talked, and asked about differences between strong and poor readers, about the approaches different readers took to the act, and different strategies. She was very observant of her students' reading and responses to reading, and she had learned a great deal over the years by careful and sensitive observation. She could (and in an interview one day, did) talk at length about the reading processes of individual students. This interest in reading somewhat modified the more usual English teacher's preoccupation with literature and literary ideas, so that it became important

to her to provide accessible reading material for poorer readers, and to find ways of watching and assisting her students' reading processes.

Also, like Dick Tappan, Emma changed her teaching after reflection on her own experience of the processes she was teaching.

I've been bothered by aspects of reading assignments for some time, the idea that all kids should always read the same book by the same time. Some read much more slowly than others. And their interests are varied; I hate some books, even though I know they're "good". Constant required reading worries me - I wonder what it's doing to their enjoyment of reading - an important consideration at their age, I think.

I took the summer institute in 19th Century Women's Literature. I also did a heavy reading program as part of the NEH Independent study grant, and enjoyed most of the readings, but some were really painful to get through. I kept putting them off. It made me think about what the kids might go through. ...In the institute, we kept response journals, connecting our reading to ourselves, other readings, experiences. It helped me personalize my reading - it was an exciting vehicle for me. It occurred to me to try this with the kids; I also thought it would be a good way to take the pulse.

Another influence on Emma's decision were the students themselves. Now used to considerable choice in reading and writing in the middle school, they put pressure on the high school teachers to offer more choice. Emma had seen her own daughter's progress in such a classroom, an experience which

supported her decision.

The changes Emma instituted were not radical; she had been moving in these directions over recent years, and she was familiar with student-centered and alternative classrooms from early teaching experiences in the late sixties. Her concerns about the new program included anxiety that students, given extensive choice of reading materials, might not choose to read works that provided "completely new, profound reading experiences", and that students reading different books "did not have the common base from which to see how others read the book." She decided that there was a place for both independent and required reading in the curriculum.

She was also afraid that, without reliable accountability measures, "kids won't read; but lots of times when I assigned things, they didn't read, so I figured what the heck." She also felt the Literature and the Land course was more amenable to independent readings than the American Literature course, and included more in that course. "It's harder in American Lit because the course presumes a certain body of literature and a certain chronology - but it may be less important there because the students are often readers anyway."

Emma began the year asking for nightly journal entries of no specified length ("half a page, anyway"), but later

amended this to three entries per week as students complained they didn't always have much to say about their night's reading. Also, the original arrangement had Emma responding to fifteen student journals every night, because "when I don't respond to them at least weekly, kids complain; they like regular, weekly response from me." In addition to this, Emma periodically asked students to respond to each other's journals ("many don't seem to know what to say"), and frequently began small group and class discussions by inviting students to read from them. This pleased both Emma and the students.

The values Emma held for her literature course are best revealed in the story of an American Literature class Emma felt had gone especially well; in fact, after the class, she said to me, "This was the kind of class that reminds you of why you love teaching." The class was a discussion, begun with students reading from journals, of "Hilda Silfvering", a Scandinavian "Rip Van Winkle" story with a female heroine. The story is about the difficult relationship between Hilda, an innocent, ideal character, who awakens into the world after a two generation sleep, and Aleric, her rather self-centered practical-joking lover. It's high fantasy, containing strange talking animals, reincarnated souls, and sleeping potions.

"I thought it was a musical story", Emily began. "Like

children had pictured it. It reminded me of a fairy tale - anything can happen. I liked it. The descriptions of the earth revolving round its axes - the whole story seemed sort of musical, that's what I wrote in my journal about."

Steve also liked the fantasy. "I like stories where it's possible to do unrealistic things, I like all sorts of fantasy and science fiction. It reminded me of Jules Verne."

Jane and Anne said they had been a little confused, "because the author forgot to tell us Hilda was pregnant." Tom and Heidi pointed out "there were hints that she is", citing a few. Emma took the opportunity to explain a little about Victorian attitudes and prohibitions; someone brought up Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* as a further example, saying, "You're wondering where this baby came from."

Students compared this story to "Rip Van Winkle", deciding the latter was more about "external, political changes", while this was more "interior, more about feelings." They argued over whether Hilda had been stupid to marry Aleric, deciding that she was not stupid but "simple-minded, an ideal woman of the time, completely dependent upon this man" - an observation that seemed to rankle some of the girls and move the boys to teasing. Then the discussion turned to the character of Aleric, the trickster, and as Steve got more involved, very interesting things began to happen.

Steve had evolved as the class clown, a bit of a buffoon, and he variously amused, irritated, or was merely tolerated by his classmates. Early in the course he had taken to saying, "It's about death" in response to every poem or story we read. When this got a little tired and Ms. Rous asked him to stop, he stopped up his mouth and hung a sign reading "It's about death" on his desk. Actually, in a later interview, he told me, "People thought that was funny, so I played it up, but I was really serious. I do think most literature is about death, in a way." And when he explained himself I could see what he meant.

"Aleric was so immature," Tom complained. "He really bothered me. He was just a prankster. He refused to be serious ever, and then she married the jerk."

Andrew, admitting he'd read only the first half of the story, said he thought Aleric was funny.

"But always at other people's expense," said Emma.

"Yeah, but not at mine," quipped Andrew, to chuckles.

"Aleric is a complete jerk!" Jack insisted.

Libby and Andrea dissented. "Aleric says things in a funny way, lightly, but sometimes they have a serious meaning. It's like he's afraid or insecure, he can't say things seriously."

"But he could let up once in a while, say at least something he meant," Tom continued. "It gets tiresome. And

most of the things he says are too intangible to be serious."

Steve joined in. "It seems to me he's expected to be this silly guy playing tricks on people all the time. Even when he is serious nobody takes him seriously."

The class was silent for a minute. Heidi asked, "What do you mean, Steve?"

"Well, when people think you're a certain way, they make you into that. And it's really hard to get out of, even when you try, cause that's the way they see you."

"I think I see what you mean," said Heidi. "It's like it's hard to change when somebody wants you to be that way, because they like it, even when they're irritated."

"I really thought Aleric was a jerk," Jack said. "Real shallow. He gave himself a personality. But he might have been almost too deep - couldn't show his emotions, so he covered them up. Either that or he had none."

"He had lots of emotions," Steve said. "But nobody accepted them. They wanted him to be fun."

"What emotions, Steve?" one of the girls asked.

"Love?" Mike grinned. "He cared. He's like the little Scandinavian guy who played all the tricks - what's his name? Loki. It's kind of like the exact same thing. Somebody always gets hurt because he has a wierd sense of humor."

"But Loki was evil," Emma pointed out.

"I don't think so," said Steve. "He hurt people by mistake."

And the conversation went off in another direction.

These students were talking about the story, their readings of it, and themselves all at the same time. The tone of the conversation and the body language revealed that they were quite consciously talking about Steve, too, when they discussed Aleric -or at least after Steve jumped in as Aleric's apologist. Emma was moved by the class, because in it she saw her aims as a literature teacher realized. Students were making connections between their lives and their reading; they were using their worlds to understand the story, and the story to understand their worlds. And they learned something about both.

Helping students to connect reading with their world was not the only aim Emma had for her classes. She had a variety of other aims that sometimes seemed to conflict with this; or, if the aims did not conflict, the teaching practices suggested by them did. Emma described herself as torn on a number of issues.

One of her other aims was to help students in "understanding literature - which is a process, too". In American Lit, this aim was partly reflected in the overriding course issues: repeatedly throughout the course, students reconsidered what they were reading in light of the questions

"What is literature?" and "What is American literature?" They were interesting questions around which to build the course, resulting in heartfelt arguments as students debated whether some of the texts were "literature" or documents of historical significance ("Gettysburg Address"), historical curiosities ("Barnaby the Scrivener"), or politically chosen texts intended to create a more inclusive, equitable culture (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*). (The English Department was committed to a policy of diversity in selection of literature.) Definitions of "literature" foundered and were rethought as the criteria of timelessness, universality, and social significance appeared not to hold. Some students began to see how a decision as to whether a text was "literature" might in itself be a political act. While, by the end of the course, most students could not define literature to their own satisfaction, most also felt they could identify it when they came across it -if somewhat less assuredly than they once had.

Emma felt torn between the teaching of reading and the teaching of literature. How could one explore in any depth what literature was without requiring students to read substantial examples of it? And without some understanding of literature how could students construe their own cultural history - however distorted that history might be? Wasn't literature of, say, *The Scarlett Letter* variety more

conducive both to understanding one's culture and to developing ways of thinking critically about it than, say, Stephen King? These were all arguments for required literature, and a more structured, directed study of it. Her aim to promote reading, particularly among poorer readers, and to help students recreate texts from their own perspectives drew toward more independent reading and more exploratory, open-ended responses to it. She was not comfortable that she had yet learned to balance these apparently competing claims.

In a letter to me, she rejected what she saw as the "process" solution. It was the story of a workshop she had recently attended.

...He [the speaker] was full of good ideas for using writing in the classroom - writing short responses after seeing a film, or before a discussion, so that everyone has an idea to add... He described teaching Walt Whitman and his assignment to have students write their own "Song of Myself". Now I thought that was a marvelous writing assignment. Then he passed out sample essay questions - the kind I often ask - and belittled them because they were questions that asked for information the teacher had in mind a priori.

Now, I thought his ideas were fine writing tasks, and I was excited by them. But if I wanted to know what kids knew about Whitman, I'd want them to be able discuss his use of sounds and rhythms, for example - how form reinforces meaning; I'd want to know how they understand his themes of universality and unity, of individualism and community. In that case, I'd use an essay, which doesn't mean I have the answers in mind - the kids often surprise me. ... What I'm saying is there's room for both... So how to

achieve more of a balance in practice?

Appropriateness is the answer Emma provides to her own question; writing tasks should be appropriate to one's aims. She points out that the high school requirement for students to do analytical and persuasive writing as well as personal and exploratory is quite appropriate, given the variety of aims writing serves. Fully aware that the emphasis is too much on informational and analytical writing ("kids think writing is for the grade"), she doesn't think the solution lies in banishing them. So she cut the number of essays she assigned and created more opportunity for exploratory, expressive, and spontaneous writing.

Students reactions to the response journals were interesting, because they demonstrated the power of context on interpretation: some students didn't "get" the journal because they interpreted it in ways perhaps consistent with their experience of high school writing. Their reactions also demonstrated the importance of students having a clear sense of the purpose of a task: those students who understood and shared Emma's purpose for the journal and those who created private purposes for them learned from the experience, while those for whom the journal remained a perfunctory reading report didn't.

Unsurprisingly, the students for whom the journal worked the best were almost all girls (which is not to suggest that

it worked for all the girls). Libby, Jane, Anne, and Andrea in particular appeared to understand and embrace the form almost from the very first entries. Through the journal, they carried on serial dialogues with their teacher and themselves, trying out ideas and revising them, asking and answering questions, making new and tentative connections among ideas and texts. And, when they had nothing to say, they said so.

Other students found new purposes for the form, using it as a source for discussion, a records of ideas, or, in the case of one boy, "a good way to learn to ask questions about my reading." Five students, all of whom saw the journal primarily as a means of checking on reading or as a series of short, analytical essays, had no use for it. The tenacity with which some clung to misinterpretations of it, after repeated discussions and in-class reading of entries, suggests that they were operating on prior convictions about how writing works in school.

Listening to students' talk about their journals, I was struck by the precariousness of teaching. As teachers, we choose classroom activities for certain purposes, but we have limited control over how our students construe those purposes, over how they see our classrooms. Yet the purpose - or lack of it - they assign to the things we ask them to do defines the task: it is whatever they believe it to be.

No classroom activity or instructional strategy is in and of itself "good" or "bad". All depend for their meaning on how teachers and students use them.

In early December, students were reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Having recently finished a lengthy study of *The Scarlett Letter*, they were ready for something lighter and less demanding. Emma's intern Jan was handling many of the classes on this novel, and in beginning teacher fashion, she was meticulously prepared and eager for the students to appreciate Twain's brilliance. Coming after Hawthorne and just before Christmas, *Huck* might have been the opportune text with which to take a lighter approach, perhaps drawing on ways of responding alternative to analysis. Nonetheless, analysis it was. After quite detailed study of the first few chapters, students balked.

Their strategy was a good one. Seizing upon Twain's caveat ("Person's attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; person's attempting to find a moral in it will be banished;" etc.), they argued that the book was meant to be enjoyed as a good yarn and not "over-analyzed". All three of us English teachers argued that it both was and wasn't a funny story for youngsters, and I was moved to remark that a man as smart as Twain didn't put a young white southern boy and a black slave together on a raft, float them down a river running right through the

heart of America, and introduce them to all sorts of tricksters, con-men, and cheats without deliberately inviting speculation as to his meaning. But I also had sympathy for the students' position.

Their position was simply that some books - even some literature - can be left alone, read for the joy of it, and left at that. They were also suggesting that occasionally this approach might be considered in English class. It made sense to me.

A comment Andrea made during the *Huck* controversy intrigued me. "You respond to the book emotionally, you enjoy it, and you have strong feelings about it. When it's a book like that and everybody sits around trying to say the smart thing, you feel like your feelings are being corrected." Images of students competing for clever answers, of "wrong" emotional responses to literature led me to consider the effects of grading on high school students' attitudes to learning.

CHAPTER IV

THE STAKES

Grading and Evaluation in the Teaching of English

On the office wall of the English Department I taught in hung a cartoon that captured a dilemma familiar in the high school. The cartoon pictured a distraught teacher gazing out at the reader and explaining how he was finally driven crazy by the wall of indifferent faces he met in his classroom every morning. In order to provoke some sort of response from these perpetually unmoved students, the character arranged a series of increasingly outrageous classroom displays. When he danced a jig on his desk, one student yawned; when he led a military dress band through the room, two or three blinked; and, finally, in response to a twenty-one gun salute, someone raised a hand.

"Seems they wanted to know if this stuff was going to be on the exam," read the final frame.

"Does this count?" and "How much does this count?" are two of the questions high school students most often ask. They are also the questions that most frustrate their teachers. Students, looking at their questions from a practical perspective, are generally innocent of their irony

or profundity. How much does *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* count? Does it count if we know who Emerson and Thoreau were? How much does spelling count? And that short story you read to us just because it was funny - does that count? Read in a different way, these are issues that lie at the heart of the teaching of English.

The fact that students so often ask these questions and that teachers are so often irritated by them reflects the differences in priorities between teachers and students. For the English teachers at ORHS, the focus of what goes on in the English class is the learning: the texts at hand and how students learn to construct and reconstruct those texts. Class discussions, writing assignments, and tests, all the paraphernalia of evaluation, are ways of gaining insights into what students do with texts and language. For the teachers, grades are entirely secondary, a rather unsatisfactory means of communicating to students when and where they might increase their efforts.

These priorities are reversed for the students. To them, grades are what school is all about, and their importance increases sharply in the higher grades. Grades carry serious short-and long-term consequences. They determine whether a student goes to college and which colleges she goes to, whether she drives the car, plays on the basketball team, keeps a part-time job, and to a large extent, who her

friends are. Since learning culminates in a grade and grades are the bases upon which opportunities are won and lost, students' attention tends to focus primarily upon making the grade and secondarily upon the learning as the means to that important end. Tom and Andrew, talking about how grade anxiety affects their course choices and work habits, illustrated this attitude.

AV: So what you're saying then is that an awful lot of what goes on in high school has to do with grades and that grades have a lot to do with verification?

Andrew: That's the bottom line. And it gets more and more so as you get higher up in the grades. College is - the pressure to get good grades gets higher and higher and higher.

Tom: And conversely the amount that you get out of what you're learning gets lower, because you're doing things to get a grade. They're supposed to be equal, but you know, they're not really.

Andrew: And then you've got the teachers who say don't worry about the grade, it's what you learned and then they give you a bad grade even though you learned a lot. So you end up pumping gas at the Shell station because you didn't get into college and when people come in to get gas you tell them, "Hey, I learned a lot."

At Oyster River, because of the high percentage of achievement-oriented, middle-class students, in academically prestigious courses competition for grades can be intense. Andrea's comment in the last chapter about feeling "like your feelings are being corrected" suggests the pressure

students exert on each other to perform, to say the right thing, to make the insightful comment. This tendency among students to focus on grades as all important caused concern among English teachers at the school, who, in a series of conversations with me, talked about the potentially deleterious effects on learning in English of student attitudes toward grades.

The four English teachers I talked to (Dick, Emma, Ms. W., and Ms. D.) were not suggesting that grades and grading either could or should be dispensed with in the high school. All felt that it was an essential part of the teacher's role to evaluate students' work and to communicate that evaluation to the students. They had reservations about alternative evaluation systems such as Pass/Fail grading and anecdotal comments, suggesting both might be unwieldy in high school as well as unacceptable to parents, students, and universities. Nonetheless, all these teachers had serious difficulties with the present grading system, and all had conflicts over their own practices of assigning grades. Many of these conflicts arose over the fact that grades mean very different things to different people, particularly to students and to teachers. And frequently teachers also had dilemmas over the weighting of various kinds of evaluation in determining grades: for example, did a student's progress over time count toward the final grade

as much, more, or less than her overall performance as compared to her peers?

This chapter explores some of the grading issues that troubled these English teachers. I begin by distinguishing between grading students and evaluating students, as a way of introducing some of the complexities involved in evaluating students in English and rendering those evaluations in terms of a grade. Then I examine conversations with the English teachers, identifying their concerns and seeing these reflected in students' observations. Finally, I explore how these teachers addressed some of their concerns over grading through developing new or alternative evaluation practices.

Evaluating Versus Grading

At various times throughout my stay in their classrooms, I asked Dick and Emma to talk about the reading and writing processes of individual students I was following, and to comment on their progress in the course. I was consistently impressed by these teachers' ability to talk at length about the reading and writing of case study students whom they saw only for about fifty minutes each day along with at least twenty other students. It became clear from their knowledge of their students and from the nature of the observations they made about them that these teachers engaged in con-

tinuous, informal, minute-to-minute evaluations of the sort Yetta Goodman has called "kid-watching". Furthermore, these formative evaluations appeared of far greater significance to teachers in making instructional decisions than the more formal summative evaluations represented by tests and finished papers. Finally, formative evaluations, which had to do with students' progress across time, frequently conflicted in the teachers' minds with summative evaluations, which had more to do with ranking students' performances against their peers.

In January, Emma spoke about Mark as a reader and writer, illustrating her points with excerpts from his reading journal as she talked.

Emma began by saying Mark "seemed very concrete, very hard-working, able to amass data", but that at least earlier in the course "he'd really fall on his face when he tried to put that together in a cohesive way." He had trouble, she perceived, in putting observations about plot, action, and character together to make "a coherent, well-developed argument" revealing how he saw a book or poem. She had noted this tendency in both his oral and written comments on his reading. She thought the journals had helped him "to make a cognitive leap, to talk and write about things in a more abstract, related way."

I wondered how she thought the reading journals had

helped with this.

Well, first of all I think just by the volume of writing he's done in the journals, he's gotten more comfortable with language, with writing his thoughts about literature. His writing doesn't sound as pedantic as it used to sound - incomprehensible, I mean just very hard to understand what he was saying... Perhaps because of the regularity of the journal, and because it's relatively non-threatening, his writing has gotten freer, much better, much clearer. He doesn't try to sound sophisticated and get into a muddle as he used to, or at least less so...

There's a lot of growth here. He's speculating on things, letting himself go to explore. His writing was so stilted and overwritten, and I've noticed this semester it's much more natural. I've been encouraging him to ask questions of his reading in his journal - you can see he's doing this here [indicates later entries], as a way of developing connections, coherent interpretations. I want him to notice the difference between good and irrelevant questions; I see him working on this, thinking about this. He's asking important questions in class, too.

In an interview with Mark, I discovered that his interpretation of the journal's usefulness for him tallied with Emma's. He told me he was "working on asking good questions about the books... the kind of questions that help me tie the book together." He also thought "the journal's good practice... I'm learning the kinds of things you say about novels when you write about them. I don't think I understood that last year."

Dick talked to me about David's growth as a writer in December, and his comments illustrated a similar reliance

on continuously collected observational data. He saw David as "an imaginative young man, who has a real thing for metaphors, similes, figures of speech, images, symbols, etc." While this was an aspect of his writing the class appreciated, Dick also noted that both he and David's peers had commented on "a problem with focus this fascination with word play sometimes creates." David got carried away exploring metaphors, and in the process tended to "lose his direction." Dick gave as an example an early draft of David's paper "Baby Back Ribs and Small Korean Men", a story about a trip to a New York pub. The point of the story, the inextricable mixing of the world of the rich and elegant and the world of the dispossessed in New York City, was somewhat lost in David's fascination with details and images from the trip. His teacher and classmates suggested to him that he needed to select those images that connected to his focus, his theme.

But David had a very positive attitude, very willing and open, and the main thing was he was getting all this positive feedback about his clever images and wording. And that seemed to carry him through, to double his determination to get these other problems ironed out. Because he also has problems with some basic skills - spelling, punctuation, run-ons. And initially he seemed very fearful and would turn off if you focussed on those. But it turned out after a while that as long as he got plenty of support for his ideas, his ability to phrase things aptly, that he knew he was on secure footing with other members of the class as a writer. And so we didn't have a lot of problems dealing with

[mechanics] because the technical problems were kept in perspective for him. And he seemed all the more eager to deal with them in order to strengthen writing that was already seen by others as good. And that has evolved over the semester.

David's also working on writing shorter, simpler sentences. He would write these thirty, forty word sentences one after another, and I said grab a few morsels every now and then and just drop them in for a change. He grabbed on to that, like [reads] "Second is our faithful pal Chuck."...

So what you have here is writing that is vastly improved over the semester. In these [later drafts] the topic is organically connected, so that you can isolate parts and not damage the meaning... And I think with David, this is because he sees the value of input from others, he appreciates it and knows how to use it, and so he learns more.

David, who in interviews talked about his need to revise for coherence and mechanics (see Chapter 2), shared Dick's evaluation of his writing, as Mark shared Emma's.

The sort of evaluation Dick and Emma engage in as they talk about these two students comes not so much from ranking the students' performances against their peers as from watching students' development in journals, drafts, and class interactions. It is a sort of contextualized evaluation, taking into consideration the person and who the person is. The aim is not to judge the quality of the students' work per se, but to attempt to see what and how the student is learning in order to assist that learning.

These formative evaluations also involve dialogue and negotiation between teacher and student, as the teacher attempts to help the student see himself or herself more clearly.

Such continuous, dynamic evaluations are of prime concern to English teachers because of their immediacy to decisions about teaching and learning in reading and writing. Unfortunately, formative evaluations, central as they are to how we teach or what we learn, cannot be represented in terms of a grade. In fact sometimes it is difficult to reconcile formative evaluation with summative evaluation, or grades. For instance, Patrick's papers are better than David's; yet formative evaluations provide ample evidence that David has learned far more in the course than Patrick. Who gets the "A"? David? Patrick? Both? The likelihood is that the grade is, to the students, a more pressing issue than the learning.

In late November, I attended a group grading session among four English teachers in the high school - an event which in itself suggested teachers' uneasiness about grades. Each teacher brought photocopies of five or six student papers for each of the other teachers to read and grade. The grading sessions were followed by discussions of why the teachers assigned the grades they did.

Emma brought Mark's latest paper, an examination of

character and responsibility in *The Scarlet Letter*. Each of the other teachers except one ranked Mark's paper a grade lower than Emma had. The teacher whose grade for the paper corresponded with Emma's had taught Mark the previous year, and prefaced her comments with, "May I say this paper shows tremendous progress?"

As the afternoon wore on, it became quite clear that the teachers were in considerable agreement on the standards by which they were grading. The papers needed to develop a clear focus or line of argument, supported by reference to the text under discussion. Clarity of expression was important, naturally, so that the reader could make out what the writer was saying. The teachers also looked for evidence that the writer had made the text her own, had explored and developed her own responses to it. Sometimes there were differences among the teachers on the emphasis they placed on these criteria: Emma, perhaps because she tended to teach younger, less experienced students, placed slightly more emphasis on focus and clarity than on originality and liveliness, at least by comparison to one other teacher, whose students were more mature.

In general, there was substantial agreement among the teachers on the grades they assigned each paper. But in almost every case, the teacher who taught the student ranked the paper higher than did her colleagues. This phenomenon

made for some interesting exchanges. One of the teachers suggested that a paper by a student of Emma's was "orderly, correct, and logical, but lacks spark. It's a little dull, he hasn't taken on the book, hasn't put much of himself into it."

"But what if he's an orderly, logical person?" Emma asked. "Or if that's his response to this book? Is it fair to give them an essay formula and then criticize them for not being themselves?"

Similarly, when Emma suggested another teacher's student "might be more clear if he drew on some examples from the play", the teacher responded, "I don't care about that. [The paper] has vitality and personality."

No doubt it is unsurprising that these teachers grade a little higher when they know the students. Yet the incident suggests something of the tension teachers feel between their two roles of ranking students' papers and of teaching flesh-and-blood students who are learning and changing. They are roles these teachers often found difficult to reconcile.

The Trouble with Grades: Teachers and Students

Every school day Ms. D. and Ms. W. met in Ms. D.'s room for lunch and conversation. Ms. D.'s room separated Dick's classroom from Emma's so that I walked by her open door

daily, until one day I asked if I could join them. After that, I quite regularly stayed for lunch with these two teachers, talking with them about women's literature, English teaching, politics, and my research, as Dick or Emma or the intern Jan wandered in and out, joining the conversations when they could. Ms. D. and Ms. W. were experienced, committed teachers, vitally interested in the current debates preoccupying their profession. They were thoughtful, engaging talkers and equally thoughtful listeners: excellent company. Lunch with the English teachers quickly became one of the highlights of my day at Oyster River.

One day near the end of my research I asked the teachers to talk about grades and grading. I was not surprised to discover that, like Dick and Emma, these teachers had certain concerns and conflicts about the issue. They did not like to give grades and found the current controversy over whether the school should move from an eight- to a ten-point spread for letter grades "ridiculous." On the other hand, like Dick and Emma they were perhaps as uncomfortable with the notion of not giving grades as they were with grading. Three of the issues they raised that day were themes I had heard before, in conversations with Dick and Emma and with students.

One of these themes was that a grade communicates very little. It tells the student nothing about the evaluation

process that has gone into arriving at the grade, nothing about the criteria upon which the grade is based - although that is precisely what the student needs to know in order to learn and thereby improve the grade. At the same time, because grades have such power in student's lives, they are likely to be so focused on the grade that they miss the explanation of it. Through this muddle, grades may end up meaning very different things to the teacher who gives them and the student who receives them.

"What I have trouble with in grading is the conflict," Ms D. said.

I have this kid, he's just super, he can think circles around us. But he cannot speak or write in a way that we can see where he's going. He uses ten words when he could use two, he has run-on sentences, he puts three or four 'but's all in one sentence, yet the reasoning is terrific. But you can't write it that way because the reader keeps tripping... So, my conflict is how do you get the kid to identify their strengths and weaknesses without feeling that you don't like them?

... I think our function as teachers and as adults working with kids is to help them understand where they need help.

... But a "C" means you don't like the kid, or they're no good at this, or they're bad.

It is perhaps not surprising that many adolescents are not mature enough to distinguish, as Sharon put it, "between doing bad and being bad"; many adults are not either. Ms.

D.'s point was that grades can be threatening enough to students that they have precisely the opposite effect from the teacher's intentions: instead of communicating something to the student, they can shut down communication between teacher and student.

Both Ms. D. and Ms. W. referred to another potential communication problem with grades that may be of particular concern to English teachers, given the nature of their discipline. This is the "what-do-you-want?" syndrome; when the teacher asks a student what she thinks, the student answers, in effect, "what do you want me to think?" Communication is short-circuited as the teacher tries to understand what the student is thinking, saying, or writing while the student concentrates on trying to guess what the teacher wants her to say, think, or write. Ms. W. saw this (among other things) as connected to "being safe, saying the safe thing...their reluctance to take risks."

Whether or not there is any truth in it, the perception among students that getting good grades was a matter of teacher-pleasing appeared fairly widespread. Patrick talked about it as "the easiest thing to do - figure out what the teacher wants and give it to them." Todd and Mike believed unquestioning acquiescence to teachers was the making of an "A" student. Andrea suggested it in her comments about the competition "to say the right thing". And I saw examples of

it at work in both Dick's and Emma's classrooms, even though these teachers took measures to demonstrate that they were genuinely interested in hearing students' honest positions.

In Dick's class, teacher-pleasing for the grade took the form of occasional students who, like Sarah, revised their papers according to Mr. Tappan's comments whether or not they understood or agreed with the comments. In Emma's class, Tom, an academically strong and quite mature student, was reluctant to talk to Ms. Rous about his problems with keeping the journal nightly "because it kind of puts you in a compromising position to say this doesn't work the best because it's easy to cheat." When I pointed out that Ms. Rous' response was much more likely to be focussed on finding a way for the journal to work, Tom said,

...I can see where you're coming from, but I can also say that it makes me nervous. I worry about the impression she might get. It's hard to say it in a way that sounds like you're not just trying to get out of the work. She might think I don't take the course seriously...

Tom was not a student from whom Ms. Rous or anyone else would expect laziness or manipulateness.

It is hardly news that students engage in teacher-pleasing in an attempt to get high grades. But the practice is of particular concern to these English teachers because of the nature of their teaching. All are working toward

ideals of student-centered teaching, and all believe that they are primarily teaching processes, i.e. the processes of reading and writing. When these are one's instructional philosophies, the propensity of teacher-given grades to interfere with honest communication between teachers and students becomes a more distressing predicament.

Student-centered teaching assumes that instruction begins "where the student is", which in turn assumes honest communication between teacher and student. Similarly, teaching reading and writing processes begins in the initial encounter between students and texts in which students ask, "What sense do I make of this?" When students read or write merely to fulfill an assignment, when they begin by attempting to find someone else's meaning, they circumvent the premises upon which student-centered teaching and the learning of processes are based. If these teachers are more troubled by the sort of game-playing that grading may encourage than some of their colleagues, it is because within their philosophical systems such games are more threatening.

Patrick said, "It is easier to just figure out what the teacher wants", etc. The final theme I want to look at in the issue of the problems with grading is teachers' perceptions that teacher-given grades are just too easy. At various times, all the English teachers suggested that the

grading system somehow asks too little of students, absolves them of their responsibility for their learning, encourages passivity, or discourages risk-taking.

Ms. D.: ...with the pressures to have a grade for everything, when the teacher gives the grade, that in some way absolves the kids. They don't get the grade, the teacher gives it to them.

Ms. W.: ...And the students support teacher-given grades too. I mean it's much easier and it's much safer. They don't want to have to be so responsible - It's like the students who won't open up and be vulnerable in discussions, they don't want to take any risks.

Emma: With the response journals, I'm trying more and more to put the responsibility where it belongs: on the kids. But it's hard. They come from a mind-set where they're always trying to get the grade. Kids who are not necessarily great students get A's on the journals because it has to do with how willing they are to examine what they think. Trying to second-guess me doesn't work because that's not the criterion... it's hard because grades are uppermost in their minds.

Emma: Writing is for thinking. It's for communal thinking. Writing helps me figure out what I think. It allows contact with another... I often think people who can write break down the isolation of being human. I want the kids to see that. The kids think writing is to do an assignment and get a grade.

Dick: I asked them to evaluate themselves because I want them to take more responsibility for their learning. When I give them a grade, they don't have to look at themselves; they don't have to think about the quality of their writing; they don't have to think about what they need to work on and how they're going to do it. I want them to participate in that, and to articulate it to me.

The "responsibility" that the teachers wanted students to take had to do with students concentrating less on what the grade was and more on how the grade was arrived at. They were aware that students found it easy to put grades down to personal preferences (i.e give the teacher what she likes). When students "took responsibility for their learning", they recognized and participated in the standards upon which the grades were based, honestly looking at their own work in terms of those standards and making decisions about where they needed effort. That process could as readily be called "learning".

These teachers saw the grading system as engendering a passive, hoop-jumping view of learning inconsistent with the definition above. Tom's unwillingness to tell his teacher that the journals didn't work for him, Sarah's reluctance to openly disagree with her teacher's suggestions, the general eagerness to please the teacher places the full responsibility for curriculum on the teacher's shoulders. She becomes the arbiter of learning, responsible for all decisions about what is to be learned and how it is to be approached, while simultaneously deprived of the very information she needs to make those decisions wisely. The students, on the other hand, sit back and wait for school to happen to them.

The passivity of high school students is a complex response to many institutional and cultural factors. But undoubtedly one of those factors is that what counts for them in the end is the grade. It doesn't pay to take risks, make mistakes, take a chance at trying something you're not good at if it means you risk ending up pumping gas at the Shell. "To get good grades you have to get the work done," Jack told me. "And it's easier to just do it, get it done, don't think about it too much. It's easier to take notes, write the exam, and don't get too involved."

Addressing the Trouble with Grades: Alternatives

These teachers had a number of strategies for ameliorating some of the difficulties they saw grades creating. To reduce grade anxiety and preoccupation with grades, some graded "easier", giving commitment, effort, and progress as much weight in determining grades as products (i.e., individual test scores, paper grades, and so on). All regularly talked with students about the criteria for grades, attempting to ensure students understood what the grades were based on. One teacher told her students they all had a "B" in the course to begin with, and discussed explicitly the ways they could work up or down from that baseline.

Two of the teachers, Dick Tappan and Ms. W., developed

a grading system that is particularly interesting because it is so uncommon in the high school. Both used negotiated grades in one of the courses they taught - Ms. W. in her Senior Seminar, and Dick in his Writers Workshop, as we have seen in Chapter II. In these systems, students evaluate their own work according to a predetermined set of criteria. The teacher evaluates the student's work as well, and then teacher and student meet to talk about their various evaluations and negotiate a grade. Though Dick and Ms. W. had developed different systems for negotiated grading, they found similar benefits and problems in the practice.

Ms. W.: I guess what I like best is my Senior Seminar in literature where we discuss early in the course how the course is going to run, and how many papers they're going to write, and whether they're going to share them with each other, and what about grades. And in the three years I've taught that course they elect not to have grades [on papers], they just want my comments. We negotiate what the criteria for doing well in the course are, we agree to that at the beginning. And then they have a conference with me at the end of the quarter - they could have it at any time but they usually pick the end of the quarter. They come in with some written rationale for why they should get the grade they think they should get, and we negotiate the grade.

One of the differences between Ms. W.'s and Dick's approach to negotiated evaluation was that Dick and his students did not negotiate curricular details at the beginning, although Dick regularly invited course evaluation

and often modified his practices according to student feedback. Ms. W.'s approach may have had an advantage over Dick's here, in that, because her students had a hand in determining the evaluation criteria, they were not being asked to evaluate their performances according to someone else's criteria. They were perhaps more likely to understand the criteria upon which they were evaluating themselves.

However, Dick's course handled this issue in a different way. Because the main feature of the course was the workshop, which was really all about the evaluation of students' writing, the students in Dick's course - along with the teacher, of course - were actually creating, evolving, and modifying the evaluative criteria ("the standards") for the course throughout it. They took their lead from the teacher, who represented the community of "expert" writers in the appropriate discipline, and who led largely by reviewing general topics he had determined many students needed to work on (egs: tense consistency, effective openings, etc.). In the student workshops, members were then conscious of these standards and "practiced" applying them to their own and each other's writing. But, as Chapter II demonstrates, the evaluative criteria emerging from the workshops were by no means limited to those the teacher introduced. Students, drawing on their substantial if often tacit knowledge of the conventions of good writing, participated in articulating,

recognizing, and applying evaluative criteria that far surpassed, in both numbers and sophistication, what one teacher could possibly address in one semester. The poetry workshops were a case in point.

The fact that students were reading and evaluating each other's papers in workshops also helped ease one of the difficulties of negotiated evaluations that arose in Ms. W.'s classroom. She found that negotiated evaluations were

very difficult for them... I did it myself, though, so I understand. I'd turn in a paper and say "Oh I thought it was awful and you gave me an "A", or I thought it was really good and you gave me a "C".

Like the students who see grades as evidence of the teacher's personal preferences, students in Ms. W.'s class may have had difficulty evaluating their work partly because they were doing this largely individually. In the workshop, students had ample opportunity to see their peers' writing, to find out what the community of writers their age looked like. Evaluation assumes comparison, either with a former self or with others; it is impossible to evaluate oneself against nothing. Because Dick's students were continuously evaluating each other's writing, they had a clearer, stronger sense of themselves as writers.

Both Ms. W. and Dick found that they learned a great deal about their students and themselves as teachers through

negotiating grades. One of the things they learned was that sometimes their evaluation of a student's work was based on a misinterpretation, or at least on an interpretation that differed from the student's. When the student explained herself, the teacher's evaluation changed. This happened to Dick when students pointed out that his responses to their drafts were based on misunderstandings of their intentions for the paper (eg: "If I follow your advice, this will be a serious paper. I meant it to be light."). Ms. W. talked about a student whose evaluation changed after the girl pointed out that she was a quiet person, and had actually contributed a great deal to class discussion for a quiet person.

Negotiated grades go a long way toward addressing the main problems the teachers had with grading. They encourage rather than discourage honest communication between teachers and students. They also require that students think about, enter into, and apply the standards of the community - the standards upon which grades are based - to their own work. Students are asked to become actively involved in identifying their strengths and weaknesses, in deciding where they need to increase their efforts, and how and why they need to do this. The practice places the responsibility for learning where it actually resides anyway: on the student. It asks the student to become a full participant in her own

education.

Dick and Ms. W. cited very similar problems with their negotiated grading schemes. For one thing, negotiating grades with students is a time-consuming process, and as we have already seen, time is of the essence in the high school. Furthermore, both teachers found that self evaluation was very difficult for students. This is not surprising given that evaluating students is clearly very difficult for teachers, too. The problem is exacerbated by the human condition through which it is more difficult to see ourselves than to see others.

But the fact that self evaluation is difficult for students is in the end a stronger argument for implementing it than for avoiding it. School, after all, is where students go to learn to do things they can't yet do. Whether self-evaluation is a valuable thing to learn is not an argument I can pursue here; I assume most educators would agree it is. It is enough to say here that the ability to evaluate one's work is essential to a catch-phrase dear to educators' hearts: self evaluation is "learning how to learn".

CONCLUSION

Having come to the end of my story, I now see how what I have not said becomes as important as what I have said. A former high school teacher embarking on an ethnography of an American high school classroom is not the same thing as a Margaret Mead travelling to unfamiliar cultures to carry out an ethnographic study. Yet the two have certain commonalities, and I have noticed that ethnographers frequently comment on one of them.

That is that there are enormous and uncomfortable discrepancies between the ethnographer's full and rich sense of the people and places she experienced and the selective and linear order writing imposes on those experiences (Neilsen, 1989). The difference between being an ethnographer and reading an ethnographer's report is the difference between going on a journey and watching the slide show of someone else's journey. The images I've shown you are two-dimensional, missing the sounds, smells, gestures and feelings of the original, and I am always at your elbow drawing your attention to that which interests me. Much, much more has happened around you that you have not seen. Do not mistake my slide show for the whole picture.

Oyster River is an academically tough, competitive high

school. The teachers I met in it are among the most genuinely caring, engaged, and engaging teachers I know. Dick Tappan runs a tight, demanding writing course. He is strikingly sensitive and responsive to his students. He has high expectations for them, among which one of the most important is that they will work at their own level. Freedom is an essential in his classroom; discipline is an essential in his classroom. The students at Oyster River are detached, passive. There is a strong sense among them of community solidarity, of quiet pride in the school. Rational analysis, the language of the academy, is hard-pressed to deal with this messy paradox, ambiguity, and contradiction in human social life (Neilsen, 1989).

What I have done in this dissertation is sound some of the themes I heard at Oyster River. Not all of them; just some of interest to me. Among those, one of the clearest is that this high school is changing.

The American high school as an institution has seen tremendous change over its slightly more than hundred year history. Beginning as a preparatory school for university (one might almost say a preparatory school for Harvard), it was transformed in the early twentieth century into a "terminal" school, as high schools were called upon to provide a growing immigrant work force with increasingly demanding literacy and technical skills (Trow, 1977). After

the second world war, the high school underwent a "second transformation", as "much the same forces that made for the development of a mass secondary system in this country were now at work creating a system of mass higher education" (p. 111). This painful transition made the high school into a mass preparatory school. It is the preparatory school role, the social sorting function of high schools, that creates the emphasis on summative evaluation. Perhaps it also contributes to the sense one gets that high school students are biding their time; they do not so much seem to go to high school as go *through* high school.

The high school has also shown itself to be responsive to changes in public mood and social beliefs - sometimes to its own detriment, as Powell et al (1985) argue. Vocational education, tracking, un-tracking, standardized testing, life skills curricula, home economics and industrial arts, guidance counselling - even curriculum details like the rash of "What-I-did-on-my-summer-vacation" themes - were all innovations implemented in the high school in response to very progressive social movements in American society (see Cremin, 1961). When the mood changed, swinging to conservatism as it did in the 1950's, the high school responded quickly and decisively to the first "back-to-basics" movement, initiated by Sputnik and spear-headed by the universities (Applebee, 1974). And, as Emma remembers well,

as the 1960's rolled out, experiential learning and relevance guided the American high school curriculum.

Even in the midst of all this change, the high school has at the same time remained very much the same. Charles Eliot and the NEA's Committee of Ten in 1893 created the separate disciplines structure and the periodic schedule that continues to shape the high school to this day, although the names of many of the disciplines have changed, of course (Cremin, 1961). And the fundamental social purpose of the high school as a credentializing institution designed to sort students according to "probable destiny" has remained unchanged since the early years of this century.

Implicit in the purpose and structure of the institution is a tacit educational philosophy. The sorting function of the high school, for instance, predicates a belief in the possibility of "objective" evaluation not only of others' accomplishments, but of their aptitudes, just as the discipline structure assumes knowledge is compartmentalized. Much of this dissertation is an exploration of the philosophical assumptions institutionalized in high schools, and the impact of those institutional factors on programs (like "writing process") predicated on very different educational theory.

Teachers who ascribe to student-centered educational philosophies, to process approaches to teaching and learn-

ing, to cooperative and collaborative classroom organizations are likely to find their ideas in conflict with many of the rituals and structures of the high school. The institution is quite literally not designed to accommodate such philosophies. Institutional logic (in the form of organization) supports a subject-centered, competitive, individualistic, productive educational metaphor. If the high school has been slower than other educational institutions in embracing recent changes toward more holistic, processive educational practices and theories, there are systemic reasons for this.

Back to Oyster River. Right now there are a number of teachers in this school bringing in ideas and perspectives foreign to the high school. For instance, there are a group of teachers from various disciplines who believe in "connected thinking", who believe that knowing is making connections among otherwise discrete ideas. They are offering interdisciplinary, team-taught courses in areas like "American Studies". Scheduling presents a bit of a challenge for them, but the challenge has been met. Similarly, Emma has a sabbatical to look into ways of building liaisons between elementary and secondary school teachers and study inter-disciplinary cooperation between science and humanities teachers. The Faculty Advisory Committee has set up a sub-committee to look into teachers' and students'

concerns about the rigidity, competitive tension, and flawed communication within the school. This committee is also exploring alternative scheduling arrangements. And in a recent letter, Dick Tappan tells me changes are being made to the school entry, in the interests of making it more inviting, warmer.

The end of this story, then, is of the creativity kindled when teachers looking for change come up against this essentially conservative institution. Dick's teaching had that creativity. So did Emma's. So did Ms. W.'s. Dick's classroom did not look the same as an elementary school or college "writing process" classroom, as Ms. W.'s and Emma's did not look like a grade six reading classroom. It would be odd if they did. But the point is that these classrooms do change, are changing, have changed since I described them. And in changing their classrooms, these teachers are beginning to change the institution as well.

I do not believe that researchers or educators interested in supporting such changes can do so while remaining outside the high school.

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