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SUPPORTING STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING

A Dissertation Presented

by

ELIZABETH N. AARONSOHN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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School of Education

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To Sheila.

To John Fischetti,
who showed me how
to stretch
the boundaries.

And to my mother,
Rachel Zemon Aaronsohn
(1898-1967),
and my daughter,
Rachel Antigone Belouin

ABSTRACT

SUPPORTING STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING

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This dissertation describes the personal struggle of one high school English teacher to conduct her classes according to her vision of student-centeredness, within a school whose culture sometimes made her doubt her own decisions. It suggests that the outside support of a teacher educator was the pivotal force for her gaining of perspective, through non-judgmental feedback, dialogue and reflection. It concludes that both roles, teacher and teacher educator, need to be reconceptualized if teachers whose vision is the empowerment of students are to remain in the public schools.

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C H A P T E R I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

This dissertation documents, through in-depth interviews and classroom observations, one English teacher's struggle to become, in her words, "a better teacher" within the context of a public high school. It documents, as well, my own contribution as advisor in that process.

The teacher's personal struggle has been captured through data which address a number of focusing questions: What does it take for a teacher to continue to teach in student-centered rather than traditional ways, as she comes into collision with a conservative system? What does she take into account when she makes decisions about how to work? What pressures, internal and external, does she feel to teach in "normal" ways? What personal and contextual resources help her resist those pressures?

The presence of outside support has allowed the dissertation to address a second set of questions: Does it make a difference in teacher confidence, in the quality of instruction, and in student learning if a teacher receives intensive personal support from a university teacher educator? What variables of timing

and form appear to influence the effectiveness of such support? What are the differential effects of direct personal support as opposed to more generalized efforts to encourage idealistic teachers through in-service training as it usually operates?

Significance of the Study

For much of my teaching career, I have been working to figure out for myself how to teach, and quite recently how to help others learn to teach, in a student-centered rather than teacher-centered way. My own experience, reinforced by research, overwhelmingly shows that more complex, more long-lasting and more whole learning takes place when students are active rather than passive learners, when they engage with the material rather than just passively absorb it, and especially when they can interact with each other in the classroom. But it is not easy for people socialized within the traditional framework--as most teachers, including myself, have been--to re-define the role of a teacher such that we can allow students to participate fully in their own learning process.

Resistance to student-centered teaching, especially to forms of cooperative learning at the secondary school level, was the topic of a pilot research study [Aaronsohn, 1988]. What I discovered has directed me to

ask a set of questions: To what extent is it possible to do student-centered teaching in public secondary schools as they presently exist? What does it take to develop, and then to support, or sustain, the kind of teaching that transforms the traditional process?

As the section of this chapter called "The Theoretical Framework" will indicate, other researchers have addressed aspects of the problem in which I am interested. Several examined the many conditions within schools that pressure visionary teachers to conform to safer norms, in order to survive. Others looked more generally at how hard it is to bring about any change that asks people to take risks requiring them to live for a while with uncertainty. I have been particularly interested in the studies that address the intersection of external and internal factors, especially those studies in which data consist of teachers' description of their struggles with the contradictions they face. But there are few such studies, and even those that do exist still leave unanswered questions.

Among the questions on which available research seems to be silent are several which are salient to the goals of teacher education. Most notable is whether transitional support, from pre-service to in-service and beyond, can make any substantial difference in sustaining student-centered forms of instruction and in

keeping idealistic teachers in the public schools. If so, what form should that support assume, what problems must be surmounted in its provision, and what particular impact might it produce?

The significance of the present study rests in description of the struggle of one teacher to work in a way that is different from the way teaching is traditionally done. Further, the study provides a venue in which close and extended support can be tested for its power to assist and sustain thoughtful teaching. Pre-service teachers keep asking: if so much is known about what is good teaching, why isn't that kind of teaching happening in the schools? This dissertation may serve as a complex response to that recurrent question, not just for the past but for the future. If teachers have direct access to teacher educators for support as they and their students work at letting go of traditional assumptions, perhaps people who dare to imagine change can stay alive and continue to work freely toward their vision.

Operational Definitions

This dissertation is about supporting student-centered teaching. Since these terms represent the focus of the two-year investigation, I have provided the reader with the range of their specific meanings, as I have used them, and with an operating definition of

traditional teaching, as I have used it.

A. Traditional Teaching

Any teaching in which the focus is on the content, about which the teacher is understood to be expert, and which must be "covered" in such a way that students will be able to show that they have acquired a certain body of knowledge. Student activity is that of watching and listening to the teacher. Students speak when called on in response to teacher questions. Student conversation with other students is generally unauthorized.

B. Student-centered teaching:

Any teaching the focus of which is not on the teacher as performer, rescuer, or repository of wisdom, nor on the content as given material that must be covered, but on students' interaction with meaningful content, with each other, and with the teacher as facilitator of that interdependence. Process is an essential part of the content in this form of instruction.

C. Supporting:

1) A colleague's actively listening¹ to a teacher as she talks through whatever she is feeling about her teaching, punctuated by questions designed to open options when thinking seems to get stuck.

2) Responding to direct requests for help with lessons or classroom management, brainstorming interactive lessons together, co-planning cooperative learning events, and helping analyze their effectiveness.

3) Being in the classroom frequently, seeing what the teacher sees, but with a different perspective, and naming what the observer sees.

¹ "Active listening" is a term understood by psychologists to mean listening with full, respectful attention. The listener encourages and clarifies by reflecting back what has been heard, without judgment or interpretation [Rogers, 1951; Ginott, 1965; Faber & Mazlish, 1982].

4) Being available at the school or on the telephone, for conversations before and after the scheduled observations.

5) Helping the teacher focus on the positive things that happen, as opposed to what doesn't happen.

6) Letting the teacher know what other people in the same situation are thinking about and doing. Decreasing the sense of isolation, by helping establish a network with teachers in other schools whose vision and struggle are similar.

7) Validating what the teacher does well.

The Theoretical Framework

This brief overview of research materials relevant to the study prefigures the fuller development of certain perspectives that are woven into the analysis in Chapter V. It is intended to provide a framework for explaining the nature and importance of the primary research questions and the methods of investigation.

The particular set of research questions that underlie this study grew out of my direct experience of being a K-12 classroom teacher for seventeen years and from observing and attempting to support student teachers as they became socialized into their complex profession. The study comes from witnessing the tension, confusion, and even despair suffered by new teachers who found themselves caught between university teacher education courses, where they had studied innovative methods designed to empower students, and a

set of so-called "institutional realities" that made the implementation of those methods seem inappropriate.

Questions and speculation emerging from observation and experience were sustained, extended, and redirected by an examination of the existing literature. This overview of previous scholarship serves to tie the present study to the context of ideas through which both researcher and the primary participant gained perspectives that helped them understand and rethink their immediate situations. In the data collection, analysis and writing processes which comprised the present study, theoretical vantage points and methods of inquiry from several different literature sources were linked. For the purposes of this chapter, however, these frameworks will be separated into discrete sections: on definitions and aspects of student-centered teaching; on mentoring as an individualized form of staff-development, especially during induction, the first year of teaching in any school, a critical event in a teacher's career; on supporting reflective teaching; and on the choice of case study and qualitative research methodology. As indicated above, in this chapter, and more fully in Chapter V, each of these approaches will be discussed in terms of the literature that was most useful in gaining needed perspectives on questions of interest in this study.

The Research Questions

The research questions emerged from indications that, as the more thoughtful reform reports maintain, the problem with high schools in the United States is not so much that high school graduates do not score well on standardized tests, but that they do not become people who think creatively or divergently, see themselves as competent problem-solvers, read and write intelligently or with pleasure, know about or care about the world, or see themselves as making change in it. Nor do they even have skills for getting along with each other. Goodlad in particular recommends that if students are to be competent, reflective, decision-making and caring people, their teachers must model behaviors reflecting those characteristics, and they must help students develop them.

I have been interested in how teachers might develop complex skills of curriculum design and classroom management, as opposed to mechanical kinds of skills most new teachers think they need and think they should be taught. Some of the inquiry in recent research on teacher education addresses this concern: should certification of teachers merely be a matter of socializing new teachers into the conventional techniques of their craft? Blase [1987] raises the question of what else, besides the traditional academic

content, teachers should be prepared to face, and how programs should prepare them. Editors Haberman and Backus introduce their third volume of Advances in Teacher Education [1987] with a call for research-based attention to process as well as content in teacher education. Goodlad's advocacy of "simultaneous renewal" of schools and of teacher preparation [1990] takes that call even further, as Chapter V will discuss more fully. The question of what we should be preparing teachers to face and how we should be doing that is the place that this investigation begins.

Most usefully in terms of this study, Blase [1988] continues the conversation begun by Zeichner's 1980 review of the literature on teacher socialization, extended by Wells [1984], and reinforced by Tabachnick and Zeichner [1984] and Ross [1986]. That conversation attempts to understand why new teachers, whether consciously or unconsciously, tend to teach ~~they~~ way they perceive that they are expected to teach, regardless of the liberal views that they may have adopted during college [Wells, 1984]. All examine the extent to which internal and contextual factors contribute to teacher conservatism. Blase [1988] names factors affecting teachers even beyond induction. Many of these are factors which this dissertation will show to be pressures for conservatism:

-- Teachers feel vulnerable to the judgment and power of administrators, parents, and the community.

-- They feel isolated from each other.

-- They feel overworked.

-- They tend to focus on the immediacy of the day-to-day interactions with their classes.

As Sarason [1982] points out, practicing teachers do not have time, energy, or inclination to think of themselves as change agents, and in fact tend to resist being asked to operate in ways that are substantially different from those that have been effective for them. This is especially true if the changes require them to do more than they are already doing, or risk not doing things as well as they have learned to do them, even for a while. The discomfort of uncertainty, especially of seeming uncertain in front of their students or their colleagues, is an added stress that most teachers, according to Floden, choose to avoid [1988].

The Literature on Student-Centered Teaching

There is substantial theoretical grounding for defining the role of a teacher in such a way that the professional attention is on the student, rather than on the content or on the teacher's own performance. Most of the literature stems from the work of John Dewey, who advocated that the aim of education must be the growth of the whole child. Writing in 1899 within the context

of a newly industrialized society that curiously pre-figures our own technological society, Dewey challenged the ethics of individualism and of separation of mind from body and spirit. He felt that a school should be a community in which students help each other, working actively together on authentic tasks. Dewey argued radically in 1904 for there to be time within the school day for both students and teachers to observe and to reflect. As both John Holt and the deschooling movement were later to contend, surface proficiency at academic tasks may be attained at the cost of human growth. The main thing to look for in new teachers, therefore, would be their own willingness to grow, and to allow their students to grow [Dewey, 1904; Holt, 1967].

As the present study unfolded, of particular use both in understanding the philosophical basis and designing specific strategies for student-centered learning were the works on cooperative learning published between 1975 and 1986 by David and Roger Johnson. Their Learning Together and Alone [1975] became as valuable a sourcebook for a teacher's work with high school students as it had been for my own initial conceptualization of cooperative learning, especially for thinking about having the students develop social along with academic responsibility.

As subsequent chapters will show, the teaching agenda of the primary participant in my study reached beyond the immediacy of classroom success, both for individuals and for the larger society in which she hoped her students would be active and caring citizens. A body of literature representing those larger concerns from outside the mainstream of educational theory underlay my study of a mentor's ability to respond to a teacher's initial and recurrent doubts about student-centered teaching. The intent of that literature is to describe the role of the professional in enabling the full development of human potential, or in facilitating and organizing for social and political empowerment.

The joining of what is generally separated in traditional educational thinking and practice emerges most clearly as a carefully crafted program of problem-posing education for critical consciousness, "liberatory education," in the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire [1970, 1987], and the decades-long teaching and writing of Myles Horton, founder and director of Highlander Folk School, center for liberatory education in the southern United States. The more recent writing of Freire's North American student, Ira Shor [1980, 1986, 1987], relocates to late twentieth century U.S. community colleges the process of Freire's work with Brazilian peasants.

As Freire, Horton, Shor and others construe the educational process, the people being educated must be trusted with the capacity to talk through the significant issues of their lives, and, together, determine actions toward solving their problems. The revolutionary idea in these writings is that through dialogue, the people can work out solutions to their own complex problems, taking action that emerges naturally out of the community that these dialogues build. The role of the teacher or leader in this pedagogy for critical consciousness is that of facilitating people's coming together, and the creation of a safe environment for their dialoguing.

The main research question for this dissertation was what it would take to translate that kind of liberatory idea to a high school classroom. Rogers devoted an entire chapter of his book, Client-Centered Therapy [1951], to the relocation of his theory of person-centeredness to a classroom situation. Most relevant to this research, Rogers acknowledged the struggle of the counselor or the teacher to stand back, after establishing a safe relationship of "unconditional positive regard," [1977] and, by listening and by encouraging learners' listening to each other, to allow the learners, as Freire and Horton did, to "raise and shape the questions," [Adams, 1972]. In doing so they

could come to their own construction of knowledge. Rogers had come to know as a therapist what Horton learned as a labor organizer, that

the more he did, the less the (people) did for themselves....People weren't used to making their own decisions [Adams & Horton, 1975, pp. 68-9].

Rogers asserted that the situation of trust represented by unconditional positive regard, needs to be modeled by the professional and developed as an ethic within the community of learners. Clients or students would themselves be empowered to do the hard work of discovering and claiming their own individual and collective insights and strengths. Like Freire and Horton, Rogers spoke of a shift of power through dialogue. The teacher becomes learner along with the students, even though what the teacher learns may be different from what the students learn [1977].

Carl Rogers' warning that the non-traditional method is "dangerous to the established order" [1977] gives a theoretical perspective to the alienation that the primary participant in this study felt within the high school building in which she taught. Ideas and methods characteristic of liberatory education seemed revolutionary within the context of a public high school. However, the kind of teaching supported in this case study, with its explicit connection of education to real life and to authentic democracy, was recommended as

early as 1897 and 1902 by John Dewey. Dewey spoke radically of the personal and ethical dimensions of the freedom, consciousness, and action he was advocating for classrooms and curricula. It helped both teacher and teacher educator in this study to be able to refer to Dewey when cynical colleagues attempted to dismiss as a passing fashion the teacher's attempts at student-centeredness.

Some Foundations of Traditional Assumptions. The question of whether content or process is to be emphasized in a classroom, or even whether process is worth considering at all at the high school level, seems to underlie the collision between non-traditional teachers and most other high school teachers, and, in fact, between a teacher and herself. Two directions illuminated this aspect of the study. One was an investigation into the roots of traditional assumptions about a teacher's role. The other explored literature that encourages an orientation toward process.

Combs and Avila note that the origins of the assumption that children are wild and must be led and controlled may be in religious and psychological points of view which characterize human beings as basically evil, not to be trusted [1985]. Combs says that not trusting children is the basis for much of what we do in schools [1982]. Chapter V will examine some of the

roots of that preconception, which seems to be the unconscious basis of what this dissertation refers to as "traditional teaching," or what most teachers and non-teachers have historically assumed was "good teaching."

The most interesting representations of these traditional assumptions appear in works of imagination. When characters in novels take on the role of teacher (for example, Jane in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre [1835]; Sara in Anzia Yezierska, Bread Givers [1925]; Miss Caroline in Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird [1960]; Ursula in D. H. Lawrence's The Rainbow [1915]), they perform as if it is understood that they are expected to tame the children in order to impart a certain clearly defined received knowledge. In their classrooms they appear variously distancing, abstract, formal, punitive, hierarchical, isolated. They demand rote and silence, ignorant of and often contemptuous of the children's own lives or thoughts. These characters in widely-read literary contexts play out what teachers were supposed to be like.

Redefinition of Teaching. The emphasis of this study is on the literature that begins with a positive perception of human beings, and focuses on how to develop processes that will empower them to develop their full capacities. In successful folk schools, according to Adams' biography of Myles Horton,

"emotional warmth (is) made possible by intimate personal contact." [1975] Decisions about how to make time within a school day for both emotional warmth and preparation for mastery tests are the source of much tension for elementary school teachers, many of whom, especially at the early childhood level, enter the profession seeing themselves as nurturers of children's healthy social and emotional development along with their acquiring of academic skills. The question of this study was whether a high school teacher could allow herself to value the affective domain in the classroom: is there room on the secondary level to care about the whole child?

Like Freire's, Horton's, and Shor's, other significant commentaries on curricula for empowerment focus more directly on process than on content. They recognize that even the most liberatory content still requires the active engagement of students if they are to grow from it more than from content that has traditionally been considered suitable for schools [Alpert, 1987; Apple, 1982; Wigginton, 1986; and, by contrary example, Weiler, 1988]. The annotated bibliography for my unpublished study, The Process is the Content [Aaronsohn, 1988]², examines some seventy

²see Appendix B for a partial list of references on cooperative learning, feminist pedagogy, liberatory education, non-violent education, and education for empowerment.

works which, as of that date, were proposing education for empowerment. Using those works as resources, that study attempted to understand, through observation and interviews with teachers and student teachers, why high school teachers are reluctant to use cooperative learning. Its essential finding was that teachers' perception of a role that they must play exerts a profound pressure against their allowing students to generate their own knowledge. As Combs says, trusting requires running risks [1982].

A body of literature exploring teachers' conceptions of their institutional roles provides a useful framework for understanding the important differences between a student-centered teacher and her colleagues at a high school, and that teacher and her own expectations [Rich, 1990]. Biddle's discussion of the cognitive dissonance that arises when teachers are pressured to resolve role conflict is especially helpful in understanding the tensions a teacher feels [1979].

Another whole set of materials emphasizes transformation of classrooms for the empowerment of both students and teachers, and is clearly linked to ^{an} agenda for a changed social consciousness. It is the increasingly available literature on multicultural education. Most accessible for classroom teachers are the volumes by James Banks [1967] and Sonia Nieto

[1991]. Although Banks and Nieto both enrich the repertory of content beyond the Euro-centered canon, both clearly contend that individualistic or competitive processes are likewise Euro-centered. Cooperative goal structures, they argue, as does Aronson [1978], correspond to the cultural styles of Latinos, Native Americans, and African Americans.

How Teachers Choose. In characterizing the bases of teachers' choices in conducting their classrooms, Bussis, Chittendon, and Amarel [1976] look directly at teachers' perspectives. They find it important for understanding a teacher's preconceptions to ask teachers what they think about:

--whether children can learn from their own interests, or to what extent;

--the richness or narrowness of possibilities of materials;

--the need for peer conversation, and the benefit they see in small groups;

--whether affective and cognitive are mutual or separate learnings;

--whether good teaching should be primarily didactic or primarily interactive;

--whether work and play must be dichotomous.

A teacher who looks at children and herself in non-traditional ways represents a view of her role that matches Dewey's and Freire's:

I think that's what schools are about: to call into question what we think and why we think it. [Sheila, January 26, 1990]

To operate from that conviction is to take a risk, as Chapters IV and V will show. Carl Rogers' warning about the danger of encouraging students to call the status quo into question was realized in the politically challenged lives of both Freire and Horton, and gives authority to teachers' fears. Combs indicates that most teachers do not step out so far as to risk political reprisals. In fact, they stay within certain careful boundaries: "Fear of making mistakes keeps teachers playing it safe." [1982, p. 30] Cognitive dissonance occurs when teachers live their daily professional lives in the company of colleagues who make choices, especially the risky ones, that are significantly different from theirs. According to Rossman, Corbet, and Firestone [1988], because cultural definitions of acceptable and valued behavior within a school lie at the core of teachers' professional identities, those identities are threatened by suggestions that social or pedagogical change is necessary or even possible [1988].

Especially for teachers who entered in the late '50's, under Conant's clear definitions of the

preparatory role of the high school, there must have been confusion of objectives [Rossman, et al, 1988]. Rossman says there must be time for nurturance, encouragement, and "a heavy dose of symbolic activity." What the participant in this study did not understand, until circumstances brought it to her attention, was that her difference from other teachers violated what Rossman, et al, describe as seemingly insignificant but basic "rituals, routines, and day-to-day interactions" that contributed to making long-time teachers feel comfortable in the school.

What does the role allow? To begin with, much of the literature agrees that to be able to conduct a student-centered classroom, teachers themselves must be self-accepting and fully evolved persons [Bussis, Chittenden, & Amarel, 1976; Brandes & Ginnis, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Rogers, 1977]. Rogers, rejecting what he calls the "traditional politics" of the teacher in control of the students, says that the student-centered situation comes with the precondition that the teacher

...is sufficiently secure within himself (sic) and in his (sic) relationship to others that he (sic) experiences an essential trust in the capacity of others to think for themselves, to learn for themselves [1977, pp. 69, 72].

The Need for Mentoring

The evidence of the data gathered for this dissertation is that, according to the primary participant,

it was the support of the mentoring relationship that allowed her to take risks in her classroom. There may be, therefore, a particular need to nurture student-centered teachers, who are the ones most likely to be in conflict with prevailing norms. That this is so is indicated by Freire and Shor [1987], Britzman, [1985], Culley and Portuges [1985], and Goodlad [1984, 1990]. The same need for support is suggested by much of the literature on mentoring.

Mentoring for Teacher Reflection. The situation of a teacher who is new to a school system, whether or not she is new to teaching, is well understood to be fragile [Carey & Marsh, 1980; Floden & Clark, 1988; Locke, 1984; Nason, 1986; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1979; Sharan, 1984; Zeichner, 1980, 1984]. As all of these researchers continue to find, despite the efforts of teacher educators to present an alternative vision, the power of context is such that teachers are forced to question their previously effective skills, feeling themselves drawn to behave in ways that are consistent with the culture of the school [Rossman, et al, 1988; Sarason, 1971; Zeichner, 1984]. It was the purpose of the present study to see if sustained intervention by a teacher educator could help a teacher new to a system resist the pressure she felt to deny her larger vision in order to fit in. As Munby advocates, it will be shown that

within the contradiction between traditional and progressive beliefs, the presence of a supportive teacher educator served to remind the student-centered teacher of her deepest beliefs, and thus helped her let go of the context-stimulated assumptions of what she should do [1982].

Chapter IV will show how what emerged from the two-year study was a clear connection between student-centered teaching and the kind of mentoring that encourages reflection. Chapter V will further analyze that connection in terms of the theoretical foundations. Even as the literature on empowerment overwhelmingly supports the importance of students' talking through their understandings of texts and ideas in a situation in which they are clearly heard and respected, the literature on mentoring and on teacher reflection consistently emphasizes the importance of emotional safety as the precondition for open exploration of ideas and feelings. The purpose of such mentoring is not merely that of making the teacher feel less insecure. Like the literature on student empowerment, this literature suggests that within the safety of an effective helping relationship, teachers can come to discoveries that significantly affect the quality of their teaching [Combs & Avila, 1985; Katz, Morpurgo, Asper, & Wolf, 1974; Newman, 1980].

Munby [1982] examines teacher assumptions "and repertoires of understandings" as the bases for their choices. He suggests, as do Bussis, Chittendon, and Amarel [1976], that when teachers have the opportunity to dialogue, in a sustained way, talking through their thoughts and feelings in the presence of a supportive, non-judgmental listener, the opportunity to widen and perhaps even shift their perspective is created. This could be one-on-one, or it could be in the form of group staff-development. In either case, the mentoring literature is clear: time needs to be spent in dialogue and interaction [Wideen and Andrews, 1987; Gray & Gray, 1986; Kram, 1985]. According to Combs, the experience of direct positive feedback may, more than anything else, create well-integrated, effective teachers, by helping them feel positive enough about themselves to devote their time and energy "to the need satisfaction of others." [1982, p. 162]

The recommendations in the mentoring literature differ. Writers that focus on corporations suggest that peer mentoring is more effective than administrative mentoring, [Kram, 1985], because of the generally hierarchical and competitive nature of corporate systems. While the literature on mentoring and staff development of teachers agrees that the fear of judgment interferes with the success of a teacher's being men-

tored by an administrator, and while it generally recommends the creation of mutual assistance among teachers, it acknowledges that competition also exists in school buildings. Therefore, many recommend outside advisors to sustain teachers while they help them build community [Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, 1976; Katz, et al, 1974; Sorcinelli, 1977].

The 1974 report by Lilian Katz, Jane Morpurgo, Lois Asper, and Robert Wolf, "The Advisory Approach to Inservice Training," served as a justification for the decision made in the present study to concentrate on one teacher, as opposed to exploring the less labor-intensive but more diffuse relationship between a group of teachers and one advisor, or the occasional workshop that has been the norm for staff development sessions. That report concludes that important aspects of relationship made the individual mentoring worth doing in spite of the difficulties. According to the participants, these aspects included the advisor's consistent availability over time, concrete situations in the classroom as the basis of conversation, and the advisor's acting as a sounding board in a relationship of mutuality without an overlay of power.

Supporting Classroom Teachers. A growing body of literature that examines support for practicing teachers suggested the research need that this dissertation

addresses: "...It may be that...there is a need for longitudinal studies that follow student teachers into their early years of teaching." (Zeichner and Liston, 1987, p. 45). This body of literature calls for the active presence of teacher educators with new teachers in their classrooms, to help them think aloud so they can examine what they see.

As indicated above, sources suggest that the most effective staff development takes place in direct visits, in context, offering direct feedback to practicing teachers. Jersild, writing in 1955, even more than Joyce and Showers in 1983, talks about the importance of the one-on-one contact. Without that sustained, intensive, personal connection between human beings, it is less likely that teachers will face themselves. As Rogers [1973], Rich [1990], Kohlberg & Mayer [1972], Freire [1968] and others indicate, reflection is the way that teachers confront their own values and preconceptions and deepen their levels of consciousness. Zeichner and Liston say that teachers who reflect will be able to view knowledge and context as problematic, rather than as given [1987]. The job of the advisor, therefore, is to help the student teacher, beginning teacher, or in-service teacher move from super-vision to self-vision [Dewey, 1904]. Ideally, the advisor/mentor provides a mirror for the teacher, until

the teacher has the confidence to look directly and honestly, with acceptance as well as knowledge and clarity, at herself.

Who should be the advisor? The recently concluded five-year study by Goodlad reinforces earlier calls for university support of student teachers beyond graduation [Joyce & Showers, 1983; Locke, 1984; Nason, 1986; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1985]. His calls for "simultaneous renewal" of schools and of teacher education openly advocate the frequent, consistent, active presence of teacher educators within the schools, in rich, mutually respectful collaboration [1990]. Goodlad's postulates form the basis for the hope stated in my conclusion: that the kind of relationship modeled in the present study is a useful, mutually beneficial option for teachers and teacher educators.

The intensive participatory kind of case study that this dissertation represents is specifically called for in the "Recommendations for Further Research" section of the dissertation by Carol Rubin Newman, The Advisor as Teacher Supporter. Her careful definition of the role of advisor, and of the need for that role, served as a significant guideline for the investigation:

The advisor's role is an invaluable vehicle for promoting teachers' continuing growth as professionals. It has the potential to respond to teachers' strengths and perceived needs and interests in ways that have not previously been given adequate

support. By developing collaborative relationships with teachers and fostering self-directed growth, the advisory approach enhances teachers' professional development, and consequently the quality of education. [p. 159]

Throughout Newman's dissertation, the emphasis is on growth of individual teachers rather than on bringing in new programs for change to the schools: a personal rather than a wide-ranging approach to in-service education. The need, she says, is for on-site, practical, humane, personal, regular, individualized, responsive, non-judgmental, non-evaluative and meaningful advising which is supportive and nurturing. Even experienced teachers, she finds, need such support, if they are to develop fully, but the support they need is joint problem-solving in which the teacher initiates the direction. Newman uses Ralph Tyler's term "collaborative interaction" for the relationship she advocates. She talks about teachers and advisors as "allies in the change process," [p. 72] and about the advisor as catalyst for the teacher's thinking, "stimulating and extending the thinking of teachers about ways of improving their work..." and confirming the value of what already exists [p. 77]. It is exactly in this way that the researcher worked with the primary participant in the study.

Newman recommends directions for further research, three of which the study followed [pp. 160-161]:

- 1) A case study of the advisory process which focuses on one long-term teacher-advisor relationship. This study would document the development of a teacher-advisor relationship from both the teacher's and the advisor's personal perspectives. Specific issues and stages of the relationship's development would add to the current understanding of the advisor's effectiveness when working with a teacher over a long period of time.
- 2) An examination of critical issues and problems affecting the advisor's role in supporting teachers' growth. In-depth interviews with teams of teachers and advisors could be used as a vehicle for identifying important issues and problems. While a variety of issues are referred to in the literature on advising, there has not been a systematic assessment of the specific problems involved in the advisory process.
- 3) An examination of how the advisory process influences teacher growth.

Careful attention was paid to all of these recommendations in the process of conducting the study and analyzing the data.

The Qualitative Research and Case Study Methods

Point of View. This is a qualitative rather than quantitative study because I believe that what is missing in much of the research literature is thick, rich and sustained description of the context of teachers' lives in the schools, and close attention over an extended period of time to their changing perceptions of roles, challenges, and possibilities. Investigation of the differences between qualitative and quantitative paradigms convinced me that the process I wanted to

observe and record for analysis--the struggle of a teacher to figure out how she should teach--could not be measured or quantified in the positivist manner, or understood from the positivist perspective. It turned out that the very structure of the research methodology contributed to the growth in confidence of the teacher being observed and interviewed. That should not have been surprising, given the theoretical foundation of the importance of feedback, active listening, and teacher reflection. In a very real way, the texts on qualitative research reiterate psychological texts that advise active listening:

Most important is the need to listen carefully. Listen to what people say. Treat every word as having the potential of unlocking the mystery of the subject's way of viewing the world [Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 137].

The frequency and consistency of my visits to the school site made me available to support the participant's efforts to transform her teaching, even as they provided me with rich description of her struggle to do that in the context in which she found herself. Such rich description of student interactions would not have been possible if I had chosen to do a quantitative study, or if I had chosen to distribute my time, energy and focus of attention more widely around the school. Either would have been a totally different study. The development of the relationship--as friend, advisor, mentor, as

well as researcher--became an integral part of the investigation. As Lincoln and Guba state,

investigator and respondent together create the data of the research. Each influences the other....[1985, p. 100]

Choosing not to operate from a positivist distance kept me challenging my own assumptions about how students learn. That reflection on my own interactions with the teacher caused me, thereafter, to revise my method for supervising student teachers and relating to classroom teachers. I had learned to listen much more respectfully and patiently. I had to be careful to understand that what I was hearing, always, was one point of view that was grounded in one of the multiple realities of a complex situation [Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Griffin, 1987; Lincoln & Guba, 1985].

My need to understand the meaning of the participant's experience from the participant's perspective, and then to report it as such, necessitated a focus on her that sometimes became so sharp as to push the background out of objective focus. As Bogdan & Bicklen and Lincoln & Guba advise, care was taken in the writing to clear up any distortion that might have thereby resulted. Since one of the major questions framing the study was the extent to which the support of a university teacher educator makes a difference in teacher confidence, in the quality of instruction, and

in student learning, my own presence was a necessary variable within that focus. The emergent design of the study became what Lather calls "Research as Praxis" [1986]: to see if the intensive, consistent process of dialogue could empower a teacher. The choice of "a research approach openly committed to a more just social order" [p. 258] meant that I was doing more than simply trying find out if a teacher could sustain her commitment. The participation was a direct, conscious, deliberate intervention to support that commitment. Lather affirms what I found to be the connection between student-centered teaching and the naturalistic research paradigm:

. Insofar as we have come to see that evolving an empowering pedagogy is an essential step in social transformation, does not the same hold true for our research approaches? [pp. 262-3]

Other case studies encouraged my choice of this methodology. Kreisberg's "Creating a Democratic Classroom: One Teacher's Story," [1987] presents the reality and dynamic of a lively, effective student-centered classroom, with deep respect for the teacher who conducted it. Kidder's Among Schoolchildren [1989] represents the very human dimensions of a teacher's daily life in her classroom over the course of a school year. Britzman's dissertation, Reality and Ritual: An Ethnographic Study of Student Teachers [1988] was a model for this study in its rich presentation of the

voices of two student teachers. Especially in Britzman, the conditions of the case study method are modeled. As Merriam [1988] states in her Case Study Research in Education: A Qualitative Approach, the case study researcher must adequately represent constructions of reality rather than attempt to decide what is true.

Particularly relevant for the present participatory study was Merriam's emphasis on internal validity. Because the presence of the investigator inevitably alters the conditions she is observing, Merriam says, validity

must be assessed in terms of interpreting the investigator's experience, rather than in terms of reality itself (which can never be grasped). (p. 167)

My effort was to understand the student-centered teacher's struggle in terms of a complex context. For such an investigation, case study is the design that is recommended [Merriam, 1988]. As Apple says in Education and Power [1982], schools are the sites where very large societal issues are played out. Therefore the insights gleaned from close attention to one person's decisions about her work have relevance beyond the particular building in which the drama of her struggle occurred.

A Pilot Study

During the academic year 1988-89, I conducted a pilot study with Sheila,³ a first-year teacher at Valley Central High School. I wanted to see whether certain research questions would be answered by collecting data from a setting in which I was providing intensive personal support to one teacher who declared herself committed to student-centered teaching.

The Research Questions

The questions that guided the pilot study emerged from my experiences as a supervisor of student teachers, and from my research into the reluctance of high school teachers to use student-centered teaching. A brief review of these questions, only some of which were answered, will provide a reprise of the concerns which directed design of the pilot study, and, at a later point, shaped the present investigation.

1. What goes on with beginning teachers who are trying to do student-centered teaching? How do they see their work? What are the pressures and conflicts that make it difficult for them to follow their vision of student-centered teaching? To what extent are these pressures and conflicts similar to the ones addressed in my previous research? Are there additional pressures and conflicts not previously recorded?

³ Not her real name. The primary participant in this study. Pseudonyms for the school and its personnel are used throughout this study. See *Dramatis Personae*, p.41.

2. As an extension of Zeichner's study [1981], might it be possible that the opportunity for support in this work can make the difference in whether a new teacher stays with it, caves in to the pressures, or quits?
3. What is the interplay of contextual events, personalities, and assumptions within the culture of a school, and how does that change as an advisor works intensively with one teacher? Are there some dynamics about the advisor-teacher relationship that are inevitable? Can just talking to someone who understands and cares about what a teacher is trying to do make a detectable difference in her security about what she is doing? Or should the researcher intervene more directly, and give suggestions?
4. What are the specific characteristics of student-centered teaching as it evolves over a full year in a public school? What curricular or methodological choices does the teacher make, and what influences those choices? Do those choices change when reflection is stimulated by dialogue with a researcher?

Interview/Observation Process of the Pilot Study

In the pilot study, I observed and took field notes in 17 of Sheila's classes from November 22, 1988 through May 31, 1989. I conducted formal (taped) or informal interviews with her at each visit.

On May 31, 1989, I interviewed 12 of Sheila's students. She and I had discussed this part of the project ahead of time, and she carefully chose from among volunteers a range of students whose feelings about her and her classes she judged to represent an entire continuum from displeasure through enthusiasm. She arranged for these students to meet with me during

their regular English period with her, or during their study period, either in the library conference room or in her empty classroom, on a day when the rest of the class was doing independent work that they would not miss. I met with these students in groups of 3, 4, or 5 throughout the day, and recorded our sessions on tape. I did not have a set list of questions, except to open by asking them to talk about how they felt about Sheila's teaching. If it seemed as if they would not be mentioning her having the class work in cooperative groups, I did steer the conversation in that direction. Primarily, I just let the students talk to me and with each other.

As a result of the 1988-89 pilot study, I discovered the rich possibilities of direct, intensive personal interaction with one new teacher in a public high school. The process of investigation taught me a great deal about how to work with a teacher whose agenda is student-centeredness.

The Dissertation as an Extended Case Study

Overview

This overview of the data includes the context, the personae, the chronology of the study, and a summary of Sheila's story. That part of the description of the school and the community which does not come directly

from researcher observation comes primarily from Sheila, and to some extent from others at the study site.

Context: The School and the Community. Valley Central Regional High School is a small regional 7-12 public school serving an essentially rural district in the northeastern United States. The student population of 350 students is almost 100% Caucasian, from mostly working class, lower middle class, and middle class families living in the four surrounding towns. The school is approximately 30 miles from a major university.

Although the school's faculty and administration have made an effort toward completely heterogeneously grouped classes, both students and teachers are aware that the students who might have been the so-called "top group" at Valley Central instead attend the prestigious private school across the road, where they have access to more sophisticated arts programs, better athletic and academic facilities, and a culturally diverse environment. Teachers and students at Valley Central also comment on the long familiarity students at their school have enjoyed with each other. In a relatively stable community, students have passed through six or more years of previous schooling in largely intact cohort groups from four feeder elementary schools. There is a sense that most of the students have grown up together;

one teacher describes the school as a family, another as a kibbutz.

There is a relaxed ease about the building. No teachers monitor the halls or the lunchroom. The large hall outside the office serves in part as an open lounge where small numbers of students, either seniors or students in the National Honor Society, study or talk freely, with no adult supervision. Between classes, traffic is active but not overwhelming. Students do not seem to have to rush, and there is some hand-holding and even more openly affectionate lingering against the lockers just before the bell. Students and some teachers greet each other comfortably in the halls. Almost every student will have had almost every teacher at least once during his/her six years there.

In warmer weather at lunch time or during free periods, students occasionally congregate casually in small numbers around one of two picnic tables on the grass outside of the cafeteria. Outdoors on the opposite side of the cafeteria, near the dumpster, is the student smoking area.

Sports are a major part of life at Valley Central. Some 70% of the students are involved, because sports are one of the few things to do in these rural towns. There are also other extra-curricular activities such as drama and science clubs, which serve as social gathering

places. Students were beginning to produce a newspaper at the time of the study, under the guidance and with the support of the English teacher who ran the writing lab.

Student art, as well as newspaper clippings recognizing individual students, teachers, or school events, takes up more space on some corridor walls than announcements of dances or other activities to come. Otherwise, the walls that are not serving as either windows or lockers are bare. There are not the bright student-made murals that brighten many middle schools and most elementary schools.

In the faculty lounge, bulletin boards display announcements of meetings, social events and workshops as well as clippings of interest to teachers. Every faculty member stops in there at least once a day, if only because this is the location of teacher mailboxes, a coffee pot and a soda machine, and adjacent teachers' bathrooms. Worn easy chairs line half of each of two walls of the lounge, a little space from the three round tables. Teachers trying to work at the well-utilized photocopy machine in one corner have to squeeze around teachers at the nearest table. They are easily drawn into conversations with teachers having lunch or coffee, or spending their free periods reading newspapers or student papers. Almost any conversation, in fact, except

at the most noisily crowded lunch hours, is essentially public.

During the year of the pilot study, her first year at the school, Sheila travelled between several classrooms to conduct her courses. In the second year, she had her own room, and decorated it in a manner that represented her personal and professional tastes and interests. A large poster of Martin Luther King dominated the space between the blackboard on the front wall and the corner that connected it to the entire wall of windows opposite the door. Sheila's desk, placed on a diagonal in front of the poster of Dr. King, held an ivy plant, a box of tissues, neat piles of papers, folders, and attendance sheets. Opposite, the wall adjacent to the door was lined with book shelves, containing hundreds of diverse paperback and hardcover novels that Sheila had gathered for their potential appeal to students, who were encouraged to borrow or keep them.

The rear wall in Sheila's classroom displayed student writing and projects, highlighted by lettering appropriate to the assignments. At one point in the year, a quotation from Gandhi, done in careful calligraphy, accompanied the student work. Strategically placed cartoons and posters reminded students to think positive thoughts, and to dare to take risks. Several

photographs and painting of irises, Sheila's favorite flower, added a gentle touch of her personal self to the displays.

Dramatis Personae

Sheila, whom her students call Ms. M.: English teacher at Valley Central Regional High School

Ralph: English department chair and teacher at Valley Central

Ernest: principal of Valley Central

Jane, Lois, and Sally: other English teachers at Valley Central

Jacob: a science teacher at Valley Central

Joe, Chris, Sue, Barb: other teachers at Valley Central

Jessie, and other students: members or former members of Sheila's classes

Rob: artist in residence at Valley Central, spring, 1989

Al, Cari, Mark: student teachers I worked with in other contexts, 1988-91, quoted in Chapter V

Other teachers at Valley Central are referred to but not mentioned by name

Timeline of Sheila's Teaching Career

1988--90 and beyond: English teacher at Valley Central

1987-88: English teacher at a high school in a nearby state

1985-86: full-time graduate student, MA in Curriculum

before 1985: work with adolescents in both schools and other institutional settings, including student teaching in an inner city high school

Timeline of the Researcher's Relationship with Sheila

fall, 1986: co-participants in one graduate course at the university, beginning of friendship

fall, 1988: chance meeting in lobby at Valley Central, resumption of friendship and regular professional conversations

November, 1988: first observation in Sheila's classroom

March, 1989: first taped interview in formal pilot study

September, 1990: first observations in formal research study

June, 1990: last formal visit and interview

A Continuation of the Pilot Study

Beginning in the fall of 1990, I continued to gather data about Sheila's growth as a teacher. Of particular interest has been what this sustained relationship could teach me about how a teacher educator can be useful as an advisor in the early career of a new teacher. Specifically, I observed and recorded for analysis the events and perceptions which were connected to my provision of close support for Sheila's attempt to persevere with student-centered modes of instruction.

As part of what became an extended, or longitudinal, case study, I also looked closely at the changing context of the school as a backdrop for my focus on Sheila, observing and recording for analysis the extent to which the external contextual pressures described in the pilot study continued to make her teaching a struggle, and looking for how Sheila's struggle and my own interventions influenced other English teachers at Valley Regional High School.

The Data Gathering

Access and Announcement of Intent

My frequent presence at Valley Central High School during the previous several years as a supervisor of student teachers had made me a recognized person there. During the 1988-89 school year, when I did my pilot study with Sheila, the occasion for my being in the school was initially to observe student teachers. Increasingly, it became known that I was there, as well, to advise, support, observe and interview Sheila. She herself informed her department chair, colleagues, and students of the nature of our relationship. Almost every time I came to the school, the chair and I had a brief conversation that affirmed his interest in Sheila's work.

At the end of the 1988-89 school year, I was invited to conduct an English department workshop on cooperative learning. Within that workshop, I requested permission to use my notes for this research. Although I did not obtain written consent from individuals, the group assented to my using the notes, and expressed interest in my study. Many months into the actual case study, the chair of the English department told me that that workshop had marked the beginning of the other English teachers' feeling that they both could and would like to try cooperative learning strategies in their classrooms.

Before I began to visit the school as a regular participant-observer in the fall of 1989, a copy of the dissertation research proposal was reviewed by the principal and the department chair. All individuals directly involved were provided with informed consent documents (see Appendix A).

Visits to the School

As a researcher, I visited the school for one full school day each month from September through June, always by careful pre-arrangement. Each visit included:

1. Observation of at least two of Sheila's classes
2. Interview with Sheila for at least 45 minutes

(one class period)

3. As opportunity provided, observation of other classes: Ralph's, and Jacob's, as well as more of Sheila's. Also interviewed were teachers, students, the department chair, and the building principal.

4. As part of the observations, extensive field notes were taken.

In order to stay in more frequent touch with what was going on when I was not in the school, I had asked Sheila to videotape selected classes for me to observe at home or for us to view together for dialogue about what we both would see. However, until Sheila saw herself on video in another context in May, 1990, she was reluctant to comply with that request. Nevertheless, frequent phone calls allowed me to stay in close touch with her perceptions of what was going on, both in her classroom and in the rest of the building.

Interview Process

Open but focused interviews were used, on the premise that the purpose of the study was to understand the way the participant made meaning of the classroom, the school, or the relationship being described. Within that basic structure, some specific questions arose during the process of my listening to the participant. As is asserted in the section, "Theoretical Framework," and as Chapter III will show, the interview process itself served as a vehicle through which Sheila re-

flected upon her experiences and transformed her perceptions.

The interviews were held in a place mutually agreeable to participant and interviewer. Generally with students, and occasionally with Sheila, that place was the small conference room at the back of the school library. One interview with Sheila was on a picnic table outside of the school cafeteria. More often, I spoke with Sheila, and with Ralph and Jacob, in their empty classrooms. The interview with Ernest, the principal, was held in his office.

Other Conversations with Sheila

Sheila visited me at my home twice during the school year 1989-90. In addition, we met at her home on five occasions during the year. These conversations, more extended and more relaxed than the 45-minute on-site interviews, allowed deeper reflection on points which arose as analysis of data proceeded. I also was in touch with Sheila by telephone on a bi-weekly basis. I maintained a log of all these supplemental conversations, adding content notes as appropriate.

Data Management

All of the taped interviews with Sheila were transcribed verbatim. Decisions about which interviews with colleagues, supervisors and students were

appropriate for full or partial transcription were made as the study proceeded. As soon as possible after each interview, a duplicate tape was dubbed and placed in secure storage.

Reflective Journal and Other Documents

I kept a running record of my own thinking about the data, separate from the field notes and other documents. Among the important things I recorded were speculations, hunches, and decisions about the data (see section called "Foreshadows"). I also recorded my concerns about the influence of my own background and beliefs on my perceptions of the situation. Finally, I attempted to capture my own response to playing out the support role.

I asked Sheila to continue her habit of keeping a reflective journal on her teaching, with the understanding that the writing in it should be done when it seemed useful for her. I asked her permission to use sections of that as part of the data. I also asked Sheila to accumulate for me, in a systematic way, copies of all of her assignment sheets, tests, and samples of student writing from the classes I observed. These were collected, reviewed and catalogued as part of the data used for analysis.

Reciprocity and the Study

Sheila had frequently said that she wanted to make her students uncomfortable with their old ideas, but safe to be passionate about the world. In those terms, there was a trade-off for Sheila's participation in the proposed study. In return for giving up the total privacy and autonomy which characterize the classroom teacher's role, she gained the focused perspective of an experienced teacher who respected both her and the work of teaching. Whether our dialogue made her feel more comfortable or less comfortable, or both, Sheila has said that my presence in her professional life during the school year 1989-90 continued to be a regular, persistent reminder of her commitment to the kind of teaching that puts students at the center of learning.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Credibility

By extending the work of my 1988-89 pilot study, I believe it has been possible genuinely to meet the criterion of prolonged engagement: "the investment of sufficient time to achieve certain purposes: learning the 'culture,' testing for misinformation introduced by distortions either of the self or of the respondents," and "building trust." [Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301] The dual process of narrowing in on Sheila's learning and broadening out to include the context in this second

year has provided the persistent observation that should give depth to the study. Similarly, the inclusion of observations by her colleagues and other significant participants in the surrounding context has extended the opportunity for triangulation already begun in the pilot study. By balancing interviews with classroom observations I created both a description and an emerging understanding which have the believability of an insider's account.

Two peer debriefers who shared my interest in non-traditional teachers each reviewed four interview transcripts (September, October, February and June) as the basis for discussing my evolving interpretation of Sheila's work. Our periodic debriefing sessions allowed articulation of my questions and concerns relative to data gathering and analysis.

Throughout the pilot study, and more systematically during the case study, I have done informal member checking with Sheila. Once the tapes began to be transcribed, I shared approximately one third of them in full, and portions of the others, with her. They thus became part of the dialogue as well as a reminder to Sheila of her own vision.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba [1985, p. 316] define the limits of expectation for transferability: "...the naturalist

cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility." I feel that I have provided such a rich data base.

The Data Analysis

Foreshadows

In the 1988-89 pilot study, I began to notice certain themes and patterns that appeared repeatedly in the interviews and observations. What I looked for, therefore, in the dissertation study, was the recurrence of those themes and patterns and the contexts in which they emerged. In particular, it was important to ascertain whether Sheila perceived herself to have overcome some struggles and to be moving on to new ones.

I looked with particular attention at the manner in which a longitudinal study may provide new insights into teacher development. Data from the pilot study foreshadowed deepening of Sheila's personal understanding of the complex forces which impinged on her struggle to do student-centered teaching. For example, before the formal part of the dissertation study began, she had already begun to realize how pervasively the system she was challenging was within her as well as outside of her. Therein may lie insights useful to teacher

educators about the collision within a teacher's belief system: between conscious professional choices, on the one hand, and deeply ingrained behaviors based on unexamined assumptions on the other.

The Issue of Researcher Bias

The methodological tension between the role of researcher and the role of advocate of a style of teaching made it necessary for me constantly to examine my own perceptions. To watch, listen, question and understand was the agenda of the research; but to give support was a clearly stated agenda as well. Correctives to my tendency to forget the doubleness of my role were:

- the sustained time over which the research took place;
- interviews with other persons in the school;
- observations of Jacob's and Ralph's classes;
- conversations with peer debriefers.

In the process of coming to terms with the more than one thousand pages of interview transcript, and especially in the process of writing, I took care to represent Sheila's views on her situation as Sheila's view, within a context of multiple views.

I acknowledge that in taking such a close look at one aspect of a picture, the background inevitably becomes distorted. Not to attempt to clarify every

distortion was a conscious choice. My aim in this research was not to find out "the truth" about Valley Central High School. It was to see if, by being there for Sheila, I could help her work through the issues that arose. Her perception of the full, complex, sometimes contradictory reality, therefore, is, by design, at the center of this dissertation.

Systematic Organization of Data

The themes and patterns foreshadowed within the pilot study already began to provide suggestions of a theoretical framework for the design of the formal study. A systematic organization of data already collected was the first step in a process of analyzing data for the dissertation.

In late August, before engaging in the first observations and interviews of the 1989-90 school year, I made two photocopies of the transcripts from the pilot study, after re-numbering the pages sequentially according to when the interview occurred. One abbreviated copy was shared with Sheila as the first formal stage in member-checking. Representative transcripts were shared with the peer-debriefers. Appointments were set up with both Sheila and the peer-debriefers to process their perceptions of what they read.

I then read one full set of the transcripts, checking them for both accuracy and nuance against the

tapes, and recording my own comments on the right sides of the transcript pages. (For exactly that purpose, the typist was asked to set up the text on the left side of each page only.) From that preliminary reading and listening process, I identified those themes that began to emerge as compelling, and set them up as coding categories, identifying particularly compelling passages to be available for direct quotation. After coding separately for date and content, I sorted sections of the transcripts, filing those sections in the folders where they seemed to belong. Before doing any physical cutting and sorting, I photocopied yet one more set of the now re-numbered and coded transcripts, leaving that set intact for chronology and for a fully contextual second reading.

This preliminary process set up a system which facilitated subsequent work with observations and interviews as they were conducted within the project year. Tapes were sent for transcription almost immediately after they were recorded, allowing 24 hours after the interview for listening to them while taking notes in my journal. To the extent possible, tape and transcript were submitted to the above process before the next visit to Valley Central School. This procedure was effective both as a way of breaking down the complicated data analysis process into stages [Bogdan &

Biklen 1982, p. 145], and also as a way of discovering recurring and differing themes and patterns to consider in subsequent visits, framing deeper or more specific questions, checking for negative cases, and either extending or narrowing the range of concern.

As soon as possible after each interview or observation (but not limited to that particular time), I recorded my own feelings, concerns, cautions, and questions in my journal. I freewrote a one- or two-page summary of what I thought was emerging (Bogdan & Biklen, p. 149), as part of the journal and as a way of extending observer comments on the field notes immediately following each visit. Reading the previous visit's journal entries and observer comments preceeded each new visit, as a means of providing structure for observations and interviews.

In the spring and summer of 1990, all the accumulated journal entries, observer comments, class observations and other field notes, and intact interview transcripts were submitted to a second reading. This provided awareness of new patterns the shape of which might not have yet emerged within the pilot or project years. More specific sub-categories were identified at that time, as were relationships among and between sub-categories. The synthesis which occurred from that combination of reflective processes clarified the

purposes and focus of the investigation, showing up what was missing, either within the investigation or in the literature. At that time, also, selected intermediate analytic products were subjected to member-checking by Sheila.

As Bogdan and Biklen suggest [p. 153-154], it was useful to stand back from the research at that point to "play with metaphors, analogies, and concepts," in order to disengage from the nearsightedness that might develop from such an intensive study. Preparation for a proposed AERA presentation, as well as for my own teacher education classes, on "metaphors as a means of reflecting on the teaching relationship" was a helpful corrective to that distortion of vision. Another exercise of distancing I employed within the journal entries was comparison of the research site with the sites at which I was doing collaborative work with elementary and secondary teachers and administrators in a nearby community.

Throughout the spring semester, as the data gathering continued, previous data from visits, interviews, and observations were coded and sorted, and new data were coded and sorted as it was acquired. Thus within weeks of the end of the school year every piece of data had been assigned a tentative category. Within the next weeks, I went through the folders one by one, re-reading

and synthesizing. By early August the material was sorted into folders representing my clearest decisions about coding categories and relationships of ideas to each other.

I then generated a working outline from the topics represented in the file folders, having re-photocopied when pieces of data needed to overlap categories, physically placing the folders in the order that made the most sense. For the writing, I focused on one folder at a time, keeping open the options that arose within the writing itself, but trusting that the extraordinarily careful pre-writing would take care of most decisions.

Summary of the Data

Although it is ordinary practice to put the summary of the data at the end of a study, such an overview is intended here to serve as a framework for the reader, useful because of the complexity of data that Chapters II, III, and IV contain.

Sheila began her first year of teaching English at Central Regional High School in the fall of 1988. She had accepted this job, and had been told she had been chosen for it, because of her commitment to the school's stated policy of heterogeneous grouping. She had felt ready with strategies that had worked for her in her previous teaching. She came with a set of beliefs:

that high school students are capable of working cooperatively; that they can learn what they need to learn about writing and even grammar through journals, projects, and reader response papers; and that they can, without much direction from the teacher, collaboratively work at discovering for themselves the meanings in a literary text. By the middle of September, she found herself in collision with student resistance to the interactive processes she tried to introduce. Worse, she was troubled by colleagues' scoffing at her beliefs. What she had been so successfully doing before wasn't working. It was not what the students expected; it was not what the other teachers were doing. What was her role?

Comparing her own work with what she understood the other teachers in the building to be doing, she felt confused. The prevailing ethic in this new context seemed to be traditional academic performance. Previously, working with so-called "low achieving" students, she had essentially been allowed to define her own success. Her vision of young people coming to hear and trust their own voices had been realized in those earlier situations.

Now she was asking herself whether her focus on classroom community-building, relationship, self-esteem, and personal interaction with texts was inappropriate

for heterogeneously grouped classes. Were those approaches, was that freedom, good only for students that nobody seemed to care about? Listening to other teachers, and to the students, she was apprehensive. Would her students get what they "needed" if she did not accommodate to the teaching norm? Would she have to rethink her values, her expectations and hopes for her students? Sheila's sense of her professional self was deeply shaken.

The support of a teacher educator who shared her values helped Sheila gain perspective about her situation. That support gave her a means to examine all of the pressures, internal and external, that were keeping her from achieving her vision. In practical terms, it gave her specific feedback that allowed her to try new strategies to achieve fully the student-centered teaching for which she had been hired at Valley Central. Increasingly, with that support, she began to take risks with both the content and the pedagogy of her classroom. Simultaneously, she began to speak out within the building when she perceived that students' real needs, as she defined them, were not being addressed.

Her progress toward finding her own way with student-centered teaching was set back during the semester in which she team-taught one senior course with the department chair, whose approval she had always

sought. During that fall 1989 semester, because of the frequency of contact, and because of his authority, she felt compelled to become like him in her own teaching, at least of the team-taught class.

In changing her own approach, however, she had not counted on the rebellion of students who had known and flourished under her earlier teaching. That rebellion intensified her struggle. She saw herself again, as she had the the year before, as an outcast. Part of her still wanted very much to fit in. Nevertheless, when she re-focused on the students, she realized, "I've betrayed the kids by doing it Ralph's way." An adequate alternative course of action was not clear to her. She felt, "but I'm not sure my way is better."

The ultimate result of Sheila's personal-professional struggle to become a better teacher was that, within less than two full academic years, she was able to assert with full confidence that her preferred way of teaching was in fact better for her students. Her struggle now was to develop and practice ways to bring her students to acceptance of themselves and empathy with each other and with the world community. Her focus was redirected to the students, as she let go of caring whether colleagues accepted her or even if the students liked her. Conscious of that difference in her approach,

she finally came to believe that she was teaching better than she had ever taught before.

As she claimed her own power, colleagues began to seek her out for feedback on their own work and to admire hers. As she had done in previous schools, she expanded her interest in her students' lives to include the parents, the school committee, the community, and colleagues in other schools, many of whom now praised her for her energetic commitment to heterogeneous grouping and student empowerment. The administrators of the school and the district recognized her work. More important to Sheila, the seniors invited her to be their speaker in graduation week's Senior Chapel. In her speech to the graduating seniors, she told them what her teaching had been telling them, and herself, for two years: believe in yourselves, love each other, have the courage to live according to your consciences. By the end of the two-year study, she was sure of what she wanted to do and could do, and was looking at what she needed to learn in order to do it even better.

The process of Sheila's arriving at such a clear sense of who she wanted to be as a teacher can perhaps be described as her gradual letting go of needs and expectations that got in the way of her focusing on the real needs and real abilities of the individuals and groups in her classes. What will be described is the process of

her becoming, in reality, a student-centered teacher. What that means will be analyzed in depth in Chapter II.

The data indicate that this was a spiral process, not a linear one. Chapter III will describe how her vision was shaken by her need for approval of colleagues and department chair, her separation from most of the people who seemed to be criticizing her, and what she came to feel she must do when the struggle tired her. Chapter IV will document the reinforcement of her original vision by a two-year relationship with a university teacher educator/mentor who shared that vision, and then increasingly by like-minded people in Valley Central High School. She began to discover whom she could trust with her professional enthusiasms and doubts. The data suggest that her growth in confidence was directly connected to her taking the enormous risk of allowing the ownership of the classroom, and what happens in it, to be shared.

C H A P T E R I I

SHEILA'S VISION

Introduction: Reconceptualizing the Role of a Teacher

Before I observed Sheila teaching at Valley Central Regional High School, I recognized, from the language in which she described what she was trying to do, and from the focus of her attention as she spoke, that this was a teacher who operated from assumptions about young people and about her work with them that were fundamentally different from traditional assumptions about students and about teaching.

This chapter presents the development and articulation of Sheila's ideas and her efforts to translate those ideas into action as a teacher of high school English. Her choices, her interactions with students, and the students' interactions with texts and with each other will be presented as evidence of her struggle toward increasing student-centeredness. Although some of the internal and external factors that interfered with her achievement of the vision are woven into this chapter's discussion, a full description of those factors in terms of Sheila's attempts to understand and overcome them will be saved for Chapter III, "Collision with Institutional Realities."

Experiencing The Possibility of Empowerment

The first formulations of her vision of the role of a teacher were prefigured in the series of reader response writings Sheila had done as a student in a graduate writing class in the School of Education at the nearby university. It was as participants in that class in 1986 that she and I had first met and had been interested in each other's ideas as expressed in shared writings and discussions. I had kept the papers from that class, my own and copies of other peoples', as a valuable text that had emerged from that experience of mutual empowerment.

In a late October reader response to Peter Elbow's Writing with Power [1981], Sheila wrote that the process by which our class worked--sharing aloud and then responding to each other's reader-response papers--had helped her find her voice and hear it validated. She realized from the process of the class, as much as from the content, that her own previous writing had been judged rather than heard. Having to be guarded out of fear of a negative reaction, or no authentic reaction, had silenced her:

I write often for someone else's purposes. I write reports that are edited and added to other reports. I write papers that supposedly show the depth and breadth of my knowledge. I write notes reminding other people of things they have forgotten. I write

notes to myself reminding me of things I have forgotten. Many purposes, little meaning.
[September, 1986]¹

Writing out of her authentic thoughts and feelings became a risk that she was determined to take if, as a teacher, she was to ask students to take similar risks. What Sheila directly experienced in that graduate class was the safety within a classroom to share a kind of writing that could satisfy the self:

I want to reach down inside of me to the feelings, to the real voice, and speak it and write it and experience its power and its magic, but I'm not quite sure how to do it or what it will sound like...maybe it won't even sound like me...maybe that's ok for a while.

I know that I would like to see kids sharing and experiencing...I know that I would like to be the kind of teacher that makes it safe to share, that says the right thing when the writing and reading are done. I guess more than saying the right thing I want to say the real thing and use my real voice and be an example of theory in practice. [December, 1986]

She began to talk about the personal writing we were doing as "communion," which she defined (December 9, 1986) as "gathering at a table to re-tell and re-live a story." In this kind of ungraded, unjudged personal response writing, and particularly in the listening, she

¹ Throughout the text of this chapter, I have used one of two different ways of identifying the date of the citation: either the quoted material will be dated, as it is here, or the date of the interview will be contained in the text that precedes the quoted material.

spoke afterwards of having found a new way to think about empowering her own students.

It seemed to "click in" for Sheila, then, that this was what she really wanted to be doing in her own teaching. On December 2, 1986, she had written about the "romantic notions" that had informed her thinking when she first began teaching, about "the magic that would take place" in her classroom. But, she wrote, it had not worked, in the troubled urban school that was the site of her student teaching:

The vast chasm between my students' public and private lives was something I did not even imagine, and I struggled to mold their public selves in my own image....

I asked those children to leave whatever skills and abilities they brought from their homes and communities at the door, and become like me. I asked them to conform to a standard that simply contributed to the marginalization I sought to erase.

I knew nothing of their alienation beyond the fact that they were not learning. Yet, I blamed them. They were discipline problems. They were unruly. They didn't want to learn. They stood apart from me, and while I hated the distance, I did not know how to make it go away. The romantic notions quickly jaded and faded away....

I understood for the first time that perspectives existed beyond my own, and that student perception was a significant component in creating an environment where kids could learn....

I believe that it is my job to continue to learn the ways of dialogue so that I can use language and in turn help my students to use language to reflect, criticize, re-name, create and change reality.

In an earlier paper, a response to Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed that prefigured the isolation she herself would feel three years later at Valley Central, she understood as oppression the fact that in schools people do not talk to each other. She committed herself to working against that oppression, at least in her own classrooms:

So many barriers, both personal and institutional, inhibit and prohibit true dialogue. I am reminded of many schools where after the morning bell rings, doors shut and teachers never see each other, let alone talk to each other, for the rest of the day, or year for that matter....

Who has a voice? Who doesn't? Who is listened to? Who is silenced?...If I do nothing else as a teacher, I must at least encourage each child to find his/her voice and to join that voice with others to speak out for what is right and true.

Vision of a Different Role

When we met again in the fall of 1988, Sheila described her now much more clearly formulated hopes for herself in her classes. It seemed to me then that her operational framework was consistent with the research and writings of progressive and liberatory educators and theorists, although at the time she was not aware of having been influenced by many except Freire, Ralph Tyler, and John Dewey. As we worked together over the two-year span of the study, she was buoyed up by hearing her own instincts confirmed in the words of respected

theorists, as I represented them to her.² When she confronted the dominant mode of teaching at Valley Central High School and felt, within the narrow context of that school, isolated and even wrong at times, it helped her to know that the bases of her most radical-seeming choices were affirmed by well-established theory. Throughout the two years of the study, Sheila articulated with clarity and with increasing conviction the recurrent interconnected themes that characterized her personal definition of the role of a teacher:

--nurturer of young people whom she deeply admires and respects;

--adult who models appropriate behavior, especially ethical behavior: a "good person;"

--creator of a stimulating but safe environment for student growth;

--fully present human being within a community of learners.

As later sections of this chapter will show, these convictions had been the basis for her prior experiments with student-centered teaching, and for her readiness to transform her own thinking even more fundamentally in order to implement strategies that would increase

² Because the readings were not at the forefront of my conversations with Sheila during the investigations, I have saved the development of specific theoretical connections for discussion in Chapter Five.

student-centeredness. The challenge of teaching by these convictions became Sheila's personal struggle for identity at Valley Central Regional High School, as her beliefs and practices came into collision with the reality of most faculty's and students' traditional assumptions.

Teacher as Nurturer:

Creating a Safe Environment for Growth

Although Sheila respected her own sophistication and range of experience as a reader and writer, she rejected for herself the traditional role of teacher as owner and imparter of knowledge. In spite of frequent reiteration of her conviction that her best skill was assessment, she refused to see her role as that of judge. She prized her ability to structure a lesson and a class session such that students would be working in ways that she had carefully predetermined that they should work, but she did not see her role as controlling student learning or student behavior. Rather, she preferred to think of herself as as facilitating, carefully designing situations so that students could move toward their own greatest possibilities.

For herself and for her students, she valued talk rather than silence, relationship rather than isolating individualism, humor and pleasure rather than grim seriousness, all within the framework of intense,

passionate, fully engaged and connected work in consideration of ideas. Above all, she valued two things: her own and her students' authenticity, and their caring for each other.

The Struggle to Live the Vision

My observations of her at work with her students confirmed that Sheila was actually doing in her classrooms what she said she believed in doing, living the role she described. Increasingly, as she developed a wider repertory of strategies for enhancing student-centeredness, and especially as she let go of center stage for both herself and the academic content, her vision became a reality for herself and her students. As an unexpected result, this dissertation will later suggest, to a great extent her vision became first a challenge and then a model for her colleagues.

It was clear to me during my first observation of Sheila's teaching, November 22, 1988 that, although she had represented that class to me as a "disaster," she nevertheless felt at ease in the classroom, and genuinely respected and liked all of her students. In traditional terms, she was "in control" at all times; it was clear to an observer that the students fully accepted her authority. Her behaviors were those that nurtured their growth: comfortably walking among them, as they worked individually; humorously defusing one

boy's avoidance of the assigned task, letting him know that she liked him even if he had not done his homework; giving lots of smiles and direct eye contact, touching shoulders or heads, and direct eye contact, listening with full attention to whoever was talking to her; using ordinary language, frequently saying "good," "yes, sir," and such personal appreciations as "you did a good job, yesterday, answering questions."

Inviting them to work together in pairs for the next task, she encouraged them to talk to each other, and when some were reluctant to do that, she said, "Tell me." If two disagreed about an answer, she asked the parties to defend their positions to her first, first modeling for them the active listening to points of view that she was urging them to practice. After the work in pairs, she declared each pair to be "experts" on their assigned section from the end of the book, The Scarlet Letter. Their task was to present to the rest of the class what they had determined to be the meanings of certain difficult passages. Always, even when the speakers' voices were very soft, particularly in the large group now returned to desks in rows, students were listening to each other, knowing they would be held accountable for what the others had discovered. Occasionally, Sheila reminded them, "It's ok to have different interpretations." Urged by her reassurance,

"Don't let confusion stop you--talk from what you know," students engaged in speculation that was thoughtfully based on details from the text. Just before the class ended, Sheila had them draw slips from an envelope, to accompany a homework sheet:

YOU WILL RANDOMLY RECEIVE ONE OF THE FINAL CHAPTERS IN THE NOVEL.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT IS TO REWRITE THE CHAPTER IN YOUR OWN WORDS. WRITE THIS IN THE WRITING SECTION OF YOUR NOTEBOOK.

BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS YOUR VERSION OF THE CHAPTER WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CLASS, SHARING YOUR IDEAS AND COMBINING THEM TO CREATE A CLEAR AND ENTERTAINING VERSION FOR THE WHOLE CLASS.

YOU WILL THEN BE ASKED TO READ AND EXPLAIN YOUR VERSION TO THE CLASS.

The students from this "disaster class" went out the door eagerly checking with each other to see who they would be working with for the next week.

Three weeks later, I watched a different class share reader response papers on Arthur Miller's The Crucible. The students were comfortable with each other, with Sheila, and with the sharing process. For most of the listening to papers they were respectfully attentive to whoever was reading or speaking. The language of the papers, and the conversation, was honest, direct, not inflated, raising questions that moved easily in and out between present day situations and the world of the Puritans on the surface of the

play. In a brief directed freewrite that followed the discussion, Sheila asked them to address whether

there are people, in 1988, who are mistreated because they're different from "the norm." First decide what's "the norm." Is it completely unheard of that people are killed because they don't fit in?

The peer editing that followed was done comfortably, with Sheila going around encouraging students to use each other as resources: "Well, what does she think? You can trust her." Most students remained on task the entire time, appearing to be confident that they were both heard and necessary in this process.

Balance. In mid-January, 1989, Sheila was struggling to figure out what to do, herself, while students were in cooperative groups. What is the role of a teacher in a student-centered classroom? In spite of the essentially non-traditional nature of her vision, the dominant model drew her. Her strong initial inclination was that she had to be part of each group: "isn't it my job to teach them?" That inclination was in conflict with her stronger motivation to acknowledge and nurture the students' abilities to construct meaning with each other, without direct instruction.

She worked hard to find a way to practice restraint without disappearing completely from the intellectual process. As I observed, and she confirmed when we spoke after one January 17, 1989 class session, she was

training herself to assess for each case how much latitude to give. Sometimes she intervened in a group that was off task, offering guidance in the form of a time limit, a page reference, a clarifying question, or just support for the group members who were trying to stay focused. Sometimes she left a temporarily off-task group to itself, as she eavesdropped from a respectful distance, accessible and aware of everything that was going on, without interfering. The more she practiced that kind of active restraint, the more it seemed to suit her, in terms of the kind of teacher she wanted to be.

Even when the content was fairly traditional, such as vocabulary or describing the different characteristics of transcendentalist vs. romantic writing, her affect with the students showed intense attention to what they might be thinking, ready to adjust the process if it wasn't working:

I think we need to stop if people really don't know what we're looking for. Let's get a list, because you're confused and I'm confused.

Then, hearing one student's continued undercurrent of question, "How do we pick all these things out of a poem?" Sheila readjusted again, saying, "I think this is hard. There'll be some things." Then she sent them back into partners "to pick out two or three of the list that you can find in the poem," giving a manageable

task: "I'm going to ask each group for one verse to look closely at." As a result of this shift, students began to see connections between the academic content and their own teen-age culture. The student who had asked the original question said, "I can find all these same things in a Judy Blume novel, or Call of the Wild!" Another recognized aspects of romanticism in Guns and Roses songs. Two students argued over whether Animal Farm was romantic. The labels had become real for them in terms of their own lives.

Empowerment as a New Agenda

In spite of what she had discovered in our graduate class at the university in 1986, it took two more years of teaching and then several months of intense reflection for her to see that her very success as a traditional teacher had been getting in the way of fulfilling her own high vision of student empowerment. She admitted that, in the past, she had never really thought about her expectations for her students, just her expectations for herself. Student-centeredness had not been her agenda:

I put on a show. That's what I did. I was the entertainer, 'cause I do that. I know how to do it. Kids would say to me, "You're like watching TV." They would sit and I would do it. I'd be jumping around and do this do that. I entertained them, made a lot of jokes, was really funny.

And I think there's a real fear, when you know that you can really captivate, to shut up, 'cause you don't know what will happen. It's a risk, to say, "What will happen if I shut up?"

I think that what happens is that the kids that you least expect it [from], work.
[June 16, 1989]

The work she wanted them to do now would not satisfy her if it was done merely for the teacher. Nevertheless, she was uncertain of exactly how to design structures that would allow the work of the classroom to offer students understanding of themselves and the world.

Sheila had begun her teaching of high school English in the traditional manner, teacher-centered and content-centered. Even then, however, she had been different from most high school English teachers. While she loved literature and was especially aware of the power of language, her study of English had focused not on the traditional canon, but on such literature as the French existentialists. More important, her academic background had also included special education, guidance, and curriculum. Thus it was not surprising that her approach to the literature and writing content of her courses resisted close examination of certain texts--knowledge about a text--as an end in itself. Instead, she understood text to be a vehicle through which students could consider certain issues of importance to their own lives.

On those fundamental issues, as Chapter III will show, Sheila ran into conflict with her colleagues as a result of what she perceived to be the difference in their priorities about content and different assumptions about their roles as teachers. In spite of that conflict, and the distress and doubts it caused her, she never really lost sight of her larger goals: 1) to validate students' lives exactly as they were, and 2) to have them extend their ability to appreciate the validity of other people's lives, thus entertaining other possibilities for meaning in their own.

As early as March 14, 1989, she stated this complex conviction:

Sometimes I'm not sure why I want them to read. I want them as thinking people to have experience of different philosophies so they can choose what they think.

If everything is already decided, what good is it? I'm desperately afraid. If they're not willing to consider choices of ways of living--

That's all I think teaching's about: offering choices. And literature is the place where I can most clearly teach it.

At the end of that month she said,

If the kid doesn't like what he or she hears, he or she can choose...You know, "I read Thoreau. I think he's a crackpot. I don't like what he has to say."

But at least they have heard some other ideas besides one.

And I really think school's about confrontations all the time: confrontation and

making people uncomfortable with their thinking so they're forced to have some new thoughts.

I mean I think every book is a confrontation in thinking....

She knew that her perception of the function of literature was not commonly held by English teachers. By the time we were working together as researcher and teacher, she had carefully considered her own beliefs:

I think people want to be bound by their subject matter because it's safe, and because then they don't get into trouble. But I think that if school is anything--and I've said this to you before--it's about teaching people how to be human.

Sheila knew that what could happen from the kind of study of literature which she envisioned, and which she was trying to put into practice, came only from its being accessible to students:

I think boys, particularly, have a very difficult time dealing with difficult things [like sexuality], and literature is a way in for them.

But if they're always kept at a distance...they won't get to the meat of the things that are hard for them. [March 20, 1990]

This is essentially what she had been saying a year earlier:

I think that if we simply talk about Frankenstein but we don't make any connections to human nature--because all literature is about human nature--then it doesn't make any sense to me. [March, 1989]

She felt clear about this: that the teacher's job is not just to ask students to do what some high school English teachers call "lit.crit."--that is, to become skilled at talking about a literature "out there," apart from themselves. Instead,

I think you need to make them uncomfortable, because as long as they're complacent they can think things that are not true, and they can make judgments that are not accurate, and I think that part of the teacher's role is to confront them with things they don't know about.

I mean they can make their own choice in the end. They can choose not to agree with some of the choices that I'm presenting, but at least it's there in front of them, at least they have some different colors on the palette....

I think what happens to kids is they come, most kids, come to school with one view, and my impression of school always was you open up all of the possibilities. [March, 1989]

When Sheila spoke of teaching as confrontation, she did not mean conflict between student and teacher, or between students and each other. She meant confrontation with ideas, often represented by characters living out their lives in worlds substantially different from the worlds most of her students experienced. Dealing with those ideas involved careful attention to text, so that the characters and their worlds could be understood as they were drawn. It meant students' being clear about why they think the way they think, respecting the integrity of the text rather than just

asserting a position. Furthermore, especially because Valley Central was an all white, essentially lower middle and middle class rural regional school, she felt an urgency to have students question the context of their own comparative privilege:

...when you're dealing with kids you know will move into positions of power in the society, it's frightening to look at how they think, or how little they think, 'cause they will make decisions without ever considering what those decisions will mean for others.
[March 28, 1989]

In that conversation, she was thinking aloud about a heated argument in the ninth grade class I had just observed. The issue was one students had come up with themselves, from their previous small group discussions. They argued the question of which society in Lord of the Flies was "better", Jack's or Ralph's.

Her assessment of what she and I had witnessed was that many of the ninth graders were still at the stage where they "simply wanted to hear themselves argue their own point." But even as she described the classroom scene, her language indicated that she felt sure that, within time and within the structures she was creating, they would arrive at the next stages:

They're not ready or they're not used to hearing someone else's point and discussing it, although as I watched a couple of pairs work together, they were really saying, "Ok, now, what did you say?"

...The other thing that was interesting is that people couldn't defend their

positions. They were just loud, and that's why they complain, "Why do we have to use the text?" But they have to base their ideas on something and learn that you just can't make blanket statements.

...I'm saying to them that...just because they yelled the loudest or had the last word doesn't mean that it's true.

During that class, one student noticed that some of them were talking about which society was "better," while others were talking about which was "more appealing." Could Jack's violent solution be more appealing because it meant survival, but still not be "better"? It was not lost on the teacher and researcher that the struggle to deal with that sophisticated moral issue was coming from the students themselves.

Accessibility: Choosing Books That "Hook" Kids

For her teaching of adolescents, Sheila rejected the idea of a necessary canon of "great books," in favor of books that would "hook them in": books that would engage students and challenge what they thought they knew. She would also use some conventional classics, but would start, she said, with something students would really like, something that was immediately accessible to teenagers. First, she said, "they have to buy into wanting to talk about things that are hard." [January 1, 1990] Because she recognized that her students were at different places in their development, interests, abilities, and prior knowledge, she worked mostly from

"choice books" as well as some books that the entire class would read. The choice books would allow individuals--hopefully in pairs so they could have conversations about their books--to decide what interested them and what they had to say.

Nevertheless, one "anchor book" she assigned to everyone was Harper Lee's To Kill a Mockingbird:

...The kids loved the book. It was the most favorite book they read. They loved it because it really touches, I think, the basic issue for people, and that is how you live a good life.

What does it mean to be a good person? What is that going to mean for the decisions that you make, and how do you make those decisions? How far am I willing to go? [March 20, 1990]

Throughout the two years of our professional interactions, the character Atticus Finch from To Kill a Mockingbird was the hero Sheila kept referring to for the kind of modeling of courage, integrity, and empathy that she wanted students to see, in literature and in life. Her aim for the teaching of that book was that readers would invest emotionally in the characters by reading and writing freely, by talking about it with other people, and by spending enough time in thought, writing and talk to see that people have options in their lives. Her conviction was that focusing on how people make choices, and on the consequences of those choices within the worlds of the stories, would help

readers live their own lives with more awareness, more sense of options, more imagination, and therefore more freedom. She was sure that the traditional ways of "studying" Mockingbird--"getting" everything there was to get by full-class round-robin reading, remembering of details, quizzes--would not accomplish her aim and might make students hate the book and hate reading.

Believing that the function of literature for high school students is neither escape nor "lit.crit.," she had them read a range of works for a variety of reasons. One she chose was I Am the Cheese, a compelling book by Robert Cormier about a teen-aged boy in search of his identity:

...'cause the kid has no identity. His identity has been changed. But what's more significant about it is that it really opens up for discussion why we believe what we do about America, and in fact what might be true about America.

People don't want to have that discussion. This is the most banned book in America. It's on top of the list. That's why I think everyone should read it. So, and then when we talk about why is it banned, what's bad about it? There's no sex, there's no violence, there's no swearing. Why is it banned?

And they understand. They get it when they're done, although it's a hard book for kids to read [March 20, 1990].

She did this because she felt that "learning comes out of not understanding;" it comes out of "being uncomfortable with something, or needing to figure

something out." [June 10, 1990] I Am the Cheese, she told me, "presents them with some ideas that they might not have considered before." Although Cormier's works may not be on the usual list of books required for high school students, Sheila liked him "because he portrays the way kids feel: he keys into their own ambivalences."

On January 6, 1990, Sheila said of her long range agenda,

My goal for them is really to come to some understanding that the things that we do in the world affect other people, whether we like it or not....

Sheila presented them with a wide range of engaging, accessible stories in which people who could be real make hard, real choices, and live out the consequences of those choices. She required them to listen to points of view other than those they walked in with. She hoped to accomplish in one semester, or one year, or three or four years with a student, the kind of education that Atticus Finch in Mockingbird achieved over many years with his own children, Jem and Scout. She hoped to teach them that "you can't appreciate anyone until you, for a moment, try to imagine what their life is like."

Sheila reported one measure of her success in achieving that goal. One student, a young man who had been with her for four consecutive semesters and had challenged Sheila on many of her choices, responded to

the visit of a tax resister to their class, "Literature of Social Responsibility":

Bob basically said, "I really respect this man. I really could listen to him. And a year ago I wouldn't have. But that's what you've taught me. You've taught me that even if I don't agree with someone, I can respect the way that they think and feel and live."
[March 20, 1990]

Bob got to that place, Sheila felt, because she had presented literature in terms to which students could connect. The questions she chose to ask were not the traditional literary questions. Instead, she had focused on students' experiencing ways of thinking about being good people. Again referring to Mockingbird, Sheila said on June 16, 1990,

My wish for my students when they leave my classroom is that they're more humane: to themselves, to each other, to me....The kindness level, to me, is a real indicator of how they're engaged in the literature, because I think I try to choose reading that will encourage them to be humane.

In that same interview, she described her distress in hearing from her students that their heroes were people like Oliver North, or "someone that's successful, that has money, that owns things, instead of a person that's living a good life."

So I had them name the people among them who were giants. That's what I called them, giants. They didn't really know who those people were. That really bothered me, because I thought, number one, we need to appreciate each other's worth. It's a small community. Number two, I felt like if you could only be a hero or heroine if you

achieved a standard set--if you had money or fame--that if you couldn't be a hero if you were simply a person that was living a good life, that was trying your best, that was helping someone, even in a small way--I don't know. That really worries me.

Her corrective for that narrow kind of thinking was literature:

I think that in literature there's the opportunity to have a hero that's sort of average. Atticus Finch is an average guy. He was raising his family. He does something that's above average, but we would be called to that. We could be called to be ready to be above average when the need arises....

The Process Is the Content

It was not just the content of the readings that asked students to consider their own behavior in the world. In her every interaction with them, Sheila modeled respect for her students: welcoming them into the room in a manner which indicated that she was genuinely glad to see each of them every day, hearing them with interest and taking them seriously, dealing with their occasional disrespect to each other or to her in ways that did not reproduce disrespect.

Whenever a student had occasion to interrupt conversations between Sheila and me, her tone with them was never patronizing, never humiliating, never scolding. She dealt with their needs directly, if briefly, often with good natured humor, and always with a tone that conveyed that she really knew them and liked

them. Unfortunately, it was not possible for me to record much of that kind of interchange on tape or to transcribe it. Her respectful tone of voice and clearly attentive body language conveyed to students that whatever they thought, felt, said, or did, they were human beings whom Sheila valued. As time went on, I was able to observe students behaving with each other in many of those same ways.

More formally, the processes of the lessons Sheila constructed required students to develop respect for each other within the classroom. Although I was able to suggest certain strategies that she had not otherwise thought of, her utilization of them seemed to come naturally out of her expectation that all of her students were responsible, capable, thoughtful, intelligent, caring and interesting human beings.

Whenever, as inevitably happens in a high school classroom, a student began a distracting cross-conversation within the large group, Sheila brought him/her back to the main focus in a way that respected the student as a person: "Steve, just stay with me so you'll be clear about what to bring tomorrow;" "Sean, it would be really helpful for me if everyone was listening." When students needed to interrupt our interviews during her lunch or other free time, she

spoke with them in the same respectful tone of voice, honoring their needs as well as ours.

Sheila's reconceptualization of the role of a teacher had involved her calling into question many of the teacher behaviors that often are institutionalized as "rules." For example, she chose to rethink for herself whether--and especially why--to ask students to raise hands for speaking. She decided that the main thing was to make sure no one would be dominating the conversation while others were frustrated in their waiting to speak.

A more troubling issue for her was her own relationship with the students. At first she was saying (March 31, 1989) that at Valley Central, she had felt more competitiveness, "more of an 'us-them' mentality," than she had felt in her previous teaching positions, and thus felt self-protective, wary of establishing intense closeness this time. Reflection brought the realization that she had been teaching as she had been taught, by the force of her own vibrant personality. As a performer, therefore, she had looked to her students to meet her own need for validation. The process of talking through her vision helped her separate the students' needs from her own.

Teaching Is Not About Getting Your Own Needs Met

Her expectations that the students would like her were not, initially, met at Valley Central Regional High School. When we first began working together, she spoke of feeling alienated from these students, cautious, even a little afraid. Well before we had concluded the study, she had worked through her initial distrust of the students at that school. She realized that it was possible, necessary, and healthy to decide for herself what would be appropriate boundaries between genuine respect, caring, and affection for students, on the one hand, and her professional sense of self on the other. Her own clarity on that issue gave Sheila renewed energy for centering attention on their needs, their abilities, their struggles, and their growth.

By June of 1990, Sheila felt she had achieved the balance toward which she had been working between her own need to be involved and the students' development of responsibility:

...what's clearly different about the way I teach now than I used to teach is that I used to expect that my students would take care of certain needs that I have, or do or make me feel good about myself and what I do, and now I have no expectations for that at all.

If they do it, that's great, but I don't look for it, I'm not waiting for it.

I don't--I miss it sometimes, but I don't think in any way that they should be stroking

me at all, and I used to really--I think I used to almost set it up so that they had to.

I spent a lot of energy on that, like getting feedback, making sure that I was ok, making sure they thought I was a good teacher....

Overall when I look at some of the interesting things that my students do I think of two things. I think they're pretty amazing and number two I've learned that I can do better next time.

And whether or not they like me or like the class or whatever is sort of a moot point. It's really irrelevant to what goes on in the room....

What had shifted, by then, was her fear of outside judgment:

There's a resistance to want to be told or to hear what someone else sees in your room. And I think I was resistant. Now I sort of feel I don't care. I sort of have given up that it's mine.

I guess that's the issue, that if someone criticized the class or said it wasn't a good class I would feel like everyone in the room had a responsibility, not just me.

When you're teaching using cooperative strategies and sort of when you are student-centered, I mean, yeah, you can have a lesson bomb because you didn't set it up right, but generally they're doing the work. If the lesson isn't working maybe they're not into it, or they had a bad day or they just ate lunch....

And I'm sure that a lot of people perceive my class as very loose. Like there's a lot of freedom, and a lot of "kids can do whatever they want" type of attitude, even though I know and the kids know that is not the case. I think other teachers would perceive it that way.

I think you have to give up ownership of the classroom. Once you do there's really nothing to be afraid of, because it's everyone working there together to make something happen, and sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't, but it's not the end of the world.

What Teaching Is About

As she herself got used to the student-centered strategies, they became a vocabulary that fitted her agenda of empowerment. As I watched her classes operate, even when the seating returned from small groups to conventional rows, the large group conversations that followed small group decision-making were lively, mutually attentive and respectful, and inclusive of almost everyone. Sheila was sure that to a great extent this full participation represented people's safely reporting or further developing of ideas that they had already tried out on a smaller number of peers. In fact, frequently, especially in her course entitled "I'm Nobody. Who Are You?" (which, she told me, had drawn many students whose self-esteem was shaky) she validated effort and achievement on the spot. As she went around to groups, eavesdropping and quickly checking in on and extending progress, Sheila invited people to prepare to repeat to the entire class, "when we get back together," what they had just been saying to each other.

As they spoke in large group, she recorded student insights on the board "keeping track of all the information we come up with together. When all the separate decisions appeared before them, they could see that they had, with each other and without direct instruction, generated the important things that needed to be said about a reading. Her closure of such a lesson was always as much affective as academic. Along with the assignment to go on reading, bearing in mind what they had just come up with in class, and to "find all the examples so you can tell me what you know and how you know," she told them, "You did a really great job today! I'm really impressed!"

The task in her classes was for students to "make meaning" with each other about what they were reading, rather than to try to ingest what a teacher or other authority had decided the meaning should be. For a book as confusing as Fade or I Am the Cheese, Sheila acknowledged the difficulty of "knowing," and reassured them that they would be able to handle the task:

Make a list of everything new that you and your partner can put together about the character, with the page numbers....All the little things will turn out to be important, and they'll help it not seem stupid.

If you're confused, write down what the question is....if the two of you have differing reactions, write down both.

It's ok for you to be confused--you're interpreting based on what you know. [March 22, 1990]

By the end of the semester, one of the non-readers in that "I'm Nobody" class had read twenty three books! Sheila was proud of her, but not surprised, because as early as mid-February she knew the process was working, even with--or maybe especially with--those particular students:

If the goal is engagement in literature, if the goal is critical thinking, if the goal is considering new ideas--if these are the goals for an English teacher, I meet those goals.

Her view of what was important to teach was consistently at odds with the judgments usually made in traditional schooling. She felt that the traditional teaching of English, by its distancing from students' lives, does a disservice to students, especially to young men:

I'm leaning towards trying to figure out how young men are encouraged in a school system to reconcile the dichotomy of being male in our culture, which is to be loving and sensitive and caring and at the same time retain masculinity.

Because I really think school does not encourage people to feel, to have feelings, to respond to things at a gut level.

Not that, for Sheila, the gut level of response was enough. As she told me on March 5, 1990,

Your gut feelings are sometimes affected by things that are inaccurate, and we need to

get closer to what's true, not just what we feel, although that's where we start.

But traditional English teaching, she felt, forgets the starting place:

I think that's something that bothers me about [literary] analysis. Analysis is very distant. You look as the critic at something. You don't look at it as yourself, as feeling, as emotion. I think that's really lacking.

...I think that's what's hard about history. I think why kids say they don't like history is because they cannot make the connections to themselves.... That's why one of the things I do with American literature, I'll say, "Take on the voice now. Write in the voice. You are the person."

That really makes things personal for the kids, and then it makes sense. [February 12, 1990]

The affirmation of her agenda was in the students' understanding of it. On March 5, 1990, one of the students I interviewed said, as the others nodded agreement,

She wants you to think. She wants you to be able to defend your position and make your point, to make her actually believe what you have to say. That's basically what she focuses on.

The Stove Isn't On

The students told me that Sheila was interested in what they thought, not in whether they could reproduce what she or any other so-called "authority" thought [March 5, 1990]. But it had taken them a while to realize that she really meant that, and would operate

upon it. Jessie, the valedictorian, told me on April 27, 1990,

Before I had her I never really--I didn't think anyone really cared what I thought....She's actually have us write essays in first person, just what we thought, and I thought it was pretty neat that anyone would actually care what I thought about.

It was just so nice having someone, knowing that someone actually listened to you. Sheila spoke frequently about her determination to make her classroom a safe space for students to take risks with ideas, feelings and language. She worked hard to create that kind of space, where no one got hurt, humiliated or left out. On April 27, 1990, Sheila described what she herself had learned about students' hesitation to let go of fear:

I think Nicole really said it well: that whole idea that what is most important is your own understanding. And I think that's what I'm really trying to get them to believe-- 'cause they've been taught that that isn't true.

By the time they get to ninth grade-- probably by the time they're in third grade-- they already know that what they think is not important at all, and they need to shut up. So they're waiting, and they're so fearful.

The thing that kills me about kids is that they know what it's like to be wrong, and they know what it's like to be humiliated. It's kind of like you touch the hot stove one time, and that's the only time you touch it. They're not fools. They've learned. Why suffer?

....But what I try to show them in my class is that the stove isn't on....It's ok....

She worked behind the scenes, essentially, to create that safe space. She sought out students in their study halls if they had not gotten their work in, or were confused, or unprepared, and she sat with them as they worked on it:

I worry a lot about the kids that aren't necessarily getting it, especially the special ed kids that come into the class and are struggling. [December 1, 1989]

Sheila also did that for any student who was not performing, for any reason. She encouraged drafts and rewrites until the student was satisfied with a paper; she called parents to tell them about the good things their children were doing; she baked cookies for the class, and sometimes sent cards or gave small presents, such as bookmarks; she knew individual preferences in music; she praised, and she hounded. She worried about students who were outcasts, or tormented, or misunderstood by teachers or peers. She would not allow aggressive students to shout down shy students.

Students knew that Sheila cared about them. Moreover, Sheila believed that a teacher should care in the way that she cared. Thus it was devastating to her to realize that her behaving like a "mother" with her students was not respected by other faculty members. But in spite of what she heard and felt to be the disapproval of many of her peers, and the academic distance that she saw to be the norm to which she felt

she was supposed to conform, Sheila persisted in her conviction:

I really feel like these parents lend me their children. I have them in my room for 45 minutes a day. They're in my care. I have to treat them with care.

I don't think of myself as an academician who's imparting knowledge. I don't feel that way about high school. [December 1, 1989]

If faculty members did not value Sheila's "mothering," her students did. I heard from more than one of them on December 18, 1989, that

If you need help or something she's not somebody you're afraid to ask. Some teachers are intimidating....you just hesitate, and she doesn't make you feel like--if you don't understand or something like that, she--you know, it's ok.

One of Sheila's earliest concertns was about her own self-protective distancing from the students when she first came to Valley Central, in reaction to what she perceived to be student closedness. Why were these students closed? Her analysis was that a high school is not set up to attend to feelings, and that that creates problems on many levels. Frequently, especially during the spring and summer of 1989, Sheila expressed frustration that the structure of the school, as of other public schools she had been in, did not allow time or situation for students, especially boys, to process difficult feelings. For example, after a speaker came to talk about AIDS in mid-May, 1989, Sheila kept

wondering where young people could go with the deep feelings that such events necessarily draw forth:

What was incredible to me was there was no time when it was over for kids to just hang out and talk. I met up with C.J. to go over-- he was like trying to do an assignment. He talked for 45 minutes about this man. He was almost in tears. He felt really sad.

He had a lot of conflicting emotions, and I thought, why aren't we letting kids just talk about the things that they're really worried about?

They're really worried about AIDS. They have a lot of issues about sexuality. We're telling them about it. We're not letting them tell us. So I just sat there and listened, and he just went on and on. I don't really know what he said.

He just had so many things in his head about meeting this man. He said he was really worried that people would be mean to him....

I thought to myself, this is what kids need. They need more confrontation with things they're afraid of or unsure of....I mean I think he could have cried, and there's no place.

There's no time in the day for that....

Traditionally, teachers play it safe, she mourned: "Even the adults don't want to ask the real questions...."[June 16, 1989]. Speaking of herself, Sheila frequently commented that she was probably considered crazy, "wacko," because she was one teacher who felt that the classroom should be a place for strong feelings. She herself would cry openly during the films she showed in her class. Students knew that she cared passionately about many of the issues raised in the

literature, and about many issues from the world outside the classroom. Likewise, she invited students to be as personal and as passionate in their reader response journals as they needed to be. She was convinced that in their engagement with rather than academic distance from pieces of literature, they would discover options for their own lives.

Teacher as Model: Modeling Ethical Behavior

Sheila knew that the behavior her students were looking at was not only in books, but all around them. Direct contact with adults in their lives would give them some directions to choose from for their own lives. She was concerned about what those directions might be.

Sheila's agenda for herself was to model humane behavior, which was what she meant by "ethical" behavior. Such behavior, she felt, was not a problem for her; it was how she had already chosen to live her own life. However, much of the on-going discomfort she experienced at Valley Central resulted from her feeling that not all faculty members were careful to avoid modeling behavior and conversation that disrespected other people. She felt that students were seeing and being allowed to practice behavior outside her classroom that made it harder for them to behave respectfully inside.

Apart from wanting her colleagues to behave in ways that would not undermine respect for themselves and each other, Sheila wanted them to speak up, not to retreat into the safety of silence or so-called objectivity, on serious and sometimes uncomfortable issues:

S: My impression is that, two things: people won't speak even if they have a feeling about it. They won't speak. And number two, you're penalized for speaking. I mean I know that's true.

L: That's why they won't.

S: I know in my lifetime, in my short lifetime, that it's true. People are penalized for speaking.

But it's so crazy to me that in a school where kids should be learning to defend what is right, people are silent. The adults are silent on things that are at least worthy of discussion.

I really worry because I think schools are really not talking to kids. People in schools, we're not talking to each other about the things that are really important....I just think that things are not engaged in anything beyond the superficial level. [December 1, 1989]

She especially hoped that the male teachers would talk to the boys in the building about appropriate ways of expressing feelings, helping them see that males could have strong feelings other than anger and still be acceptable in society:

I don't believe you can be a teacher and not stand up....I told Joe that the men in the building needed to model that violence against women is not ok....Moral relativism is not ok.

I talked a lot about boys laughing about things that were violent in the video. Most of the people said things like, "that's boys."

I said, "When you laugh, you sanction it for young men."

The men said, "The boys are insecure." I said, "That makes it more important for you not to make jokes....[December 13, 1989]"

She worried deeply about denial of real feelings:

What is so true about young men in schools is that they have these internal conflicts between being what they think they're supposed to be, and being pulled in other directions....

Whether people are going to say it or not there's a sexual issue going on all the time for young men, and young women also, although I think they are made to feel more repressed about it, and I think that men need to be talking to young men about, "boy, this is hard.

How can you be both? How can you be compassionate and loving and a macho man? How do you reconcile it? And for women, on the other hand, how can you be assertive and strong, and loving?" [January 26, 1990]

About this issue, as about others that affected young people's lives, it was caring and courage that she demanded of herself, and of others:

Why is it that teachers remain neutral? That's ridiculous. That's modeling neutrality when teachers should take stands on things and explain why they take those stands. [December 1, 1989]

I asked students whether they felt her taking of stands put pressure on them to think her way. On December 18, one girl acknowledged, to the nods of the others,

Sheila's respect for their freedom, which other students also affirmed in my interviews with them:

It's not like she says something and that's the way it is and that's the way it goes. We decide things for ourselves.

There were antecedents for Sheila's conviction that part of a teacher's role is to model ethical behavior. In our December conversations, among others, Sheila recalled the powerful impression made upon her by one of her own high school teachers:

She modeled for me what I thought was a good life. I guess I just thought that's what teachers did: they modeled what was a good life. Not necessarily who were the smartest, who knew the most, but what was a good life...
[December 1, 1989]

More frequently than any other single aspect of her vision, the theme of teacher as model of that good life, as she defined it, reappeared in my interviews with Sheila:

I guess I'm trying to model being a good human being, what it means to be a good human being: to consider others, not only yourself.
[December 1, 1990]

This conviction was not merely a rhetorical one. My observation of Sheila's classes, and of her other interactions within the school, confirmed for me that she did, consciously and deliberately, model the kind of consideration for others that she claimed as a value. On January 2, 1990, for example, students presented "travel brochures" they had created from the point of view of

various immigrants to America. Sheila demonstrated her deepest concerns in both process and content: 1) in giving such an assignment; 2) in validating the enormous work and thought they had put into it; 3) in showing her pleasure in the products by spending an entire class period having students share them and then put them up on a bulletin board for other classes to see; 4) in making room without comment to a student who came in late; and 5) in praising students for listening to each other.

When some laughed at African names, she reminded them, but gently rather than in a scolding tone, "How important is your name to you? Slaves got masters' names. What does that mean?" and "What happened to your original culture here in America?" As a result of these very personal interchanges, the personae the students had developed for the classroom assignment took on a dimension through which, in talking and thinking about their own lives, they could see connections with others.

Her commitment to modeling "being a good person" went beyond the classroom:

I will not cut in the lunch line. There are a lot of things I will not do because I feel that they watch us. They watch everything we do, they watch everything we say. We're the significant people in their lives, along with their parents.

So I feel like, look, if nothing else I want them to see a woman who's strong, who's smart, who stands up and says, "This is what I think,"...who will treat them with respect.
[July 1, 1989]

Sheila's concern for ethical behavior for herself and for her students extended beyond what might go on in a school building. She told me frequently that part of what she considered to be her job was to be ready to respond with courage "when the need arises." She admitted in July of 1989 that she would not be satisfied for students just to discover their own voices. She wanted them to have ethical voices.

So you're angry. OK, what are your choices? To kill? You could yell; you could hit. What are you going to do? What is the best choice?

To achieve those ethical voices would require them to determine, and try on in their imaginations, what their own ethics were. So she constructed courses that would confront them with characters whose decisions would suggest options for behavior. Her invitation to one course she designed, "A Walk on the Wild Side," offered a range of safely vicarious experiences and choices:

THERE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN PEOPLE AMONG US WHO HAVE WALKED TO THE EDGES OF CIVILIZATION AND BEYOND. INDIGENOUS NATIONS CROSSING HUGE CHUNKS OF ICE AND NARROW STRIPS OF LAND. EXPLORERS FASCINATED WITH THE SHAPE OF THE EARTH. PIONEERS FORGING WEST INTO UNKNOWN TERRITORIES. SPACE TRAVELERS. OCEANOGRAPHERS. THE MIND. THE FINAL FRONTIERS. FICTION. FANTASY. REALITY. THE PEOPLE WHO WALK ON THE WILD SIDE OF LIFE AND THEIR JOURNEYS INTO THE REALMS OF THE UNKNOWN WILL BE THE FOCUS OF

THIS COURSE. WHAT KIND OF PERSON DARES TO WALK INTO THE UNKNOWN? WHAT MOTIVATES THIS PERSON TO EXPLORE AND TAKE RISKS? WHAT IS GAINED AND/OR LOST IN THE EXPLORATION-- PERSONALLY AND GLOBALLY? WHAT WOULD BE A RISK FOR YOU?

As the process of the course developed, issues of courage and of context kept recurring, culminating in a passionate confrontation, through the vehicle of Manchild in the Promised Land, over whether people start out with even chances in the world. On December 1, 1989, Sheila told me:

They're really struggling with that idea of choice: do people choose to live outrageous lives, or do they end up there?

In terms of the fundamental questions that she wanted students to explore through literature, Sheila's "A Walk on the Wild Side" course dovetailed with her other two courses--"Literature of Social Responsibility" and "I'm Nobody. Who Are You?" "Given a certain context, how do people behave? Why? How would you behave in such a context? Why?" Always, she wanted them to be looking at options. She described her plan for the "Literature of Social Responsibility" course:

This course next semester's going to be really important to the kids. Like what would you be willing to stand up about, and what would be the consequences if you did? Are you willing to face those? And what's going to happen if you don't? What's going to happen?

One of her first directed freewriting assignments for that course asked students to see the relevance of

Shirley Jackson's story, "The Lottery," for their immediate lives:

List any traditions and/or rituals that you see in our society. Are there things that continue to exist that are bad just because no one questions them? [January 26, 1990]

For homework for that day, her students had read and made notes on an article by Alfie Kohn, "Beyond Selfishness," which she had found in Psychology Today [1988]. The article challenged readers to think in new ways about whether competition is an essential ingredient in human nature, and what it would take to be responsible--empathic or altruistic--instead of competitive. The questions she had generated for them to discuss in pairs or trios asked them to decide how certain everyday actions affect others. She realized after the class that the range of issues raised in both readings required much more time than a single class period, if every group was to deal with them all. Nevertheless, she was pleased with how the students had listened to each other, and how they had engaged seriously with the problems in terms of their own lives, such as:

1) Joe throws trash on the floor of the classroom, or stuffs it into his school desk.

2) Jane reaches for a soda, in her refrigerator, and knocks over a glass of milk. She leaves it there.

3) Listening to and/or telling a racist or sexist joke.

- 4) Starting a rumor that hurts someone's feelings.
- 5) Accidentally hitting a parked car and driving away.
- 6) Using the car and leaving it, gas tank on empty.
- 7) Driving drunk.
- 8) Dumping cigarette butts out onto the pavement.
- 9) Throwing beer bottles out the car window.
- 10) Working for a company that is dumping toxic waste into the Connecticut River.
- 11) Finding a nice jacket or money lying around the school building and keeping it without saying anything.
- 12) Paying taxes that fund or support violation of human rights in other countries.

The single long range assignment on Manchild in the Promised Land that followed was further evidence of her desire that, as students read, they try to understand characters, and themselves, in terms of the worlds that define them:

Focus on the main character--CLAUDE BROWN

What is his life like and how do you know?
Give specific examples (quotes/page numbers).

What choices is he faced with?

What obstacles must he overcome?

Is his life different from yours? In what ways?

Do you think that his choices/opportunities are the same as yours? Explain.

As with Mockingbird, "The Lottery," the Kohn article, and Manchild, Sheila's agenda in having students read The Hundredth Monkey was not to sway them on the nuclear issue, although some students told me

afterwards that they felt she had offered only one side. What she cared about was for them to feel their own right and their own power to make decisions, and thus to get into the habit of taking seriously the possible consequences for others of the decisions they would make. But she knew that in asking that of high school students, even seniors, she was asking a lot:

...If only one person changed their behavior it could be the one person that would push us over the edge....What they were talking about today...if you were the one person that took the action, you could, you yourself, by starting with that small action, in fact make a huge difference--which is a concept that is really hard for them right now. But we'll get to that.

By the end of their senior year, at least the valedictorian of that class had gotten to that. Sheila told me that in Jessie's speech at graduation in June, 1990, the young woman affirmed what Sheila had taught her. She said, "be kind to each other, and know that you do make a difference in the world."

Student-Centered: The Focus Is on the Students, Not the Teacher

Knowing that she was a "good person" did not mean that Sheila felt she was always right, or that she never made mistakes. Indeed, she was very hard on herself about perceived as well as actual mistakes, as later sections will show. What she did know was that she was willing to admit that she made mistakes as she tried to

"figure out what the best way is for the students, not what the best way is for me." (December 1, 1989):

I think you have to put your ego aside when you're in the room with kids, because there's too many egos that are bumping into each other. And it's funny. I'm not a very secure person, but when I'm in a classroom my ego's not a consideration for me. [January 7, 1990]

Her commitment to focusing on the students' needs, rather than on her own or on the requirements of an academic schedule, was consistent with the fundamental approach that allows for successful heterogeneous grouping. This approach was described to me by Ernest, the principal of Valley Regional, when we spoke on February 12, 1990:

The primary thing is that the thrust of it [heterogeneous grouping] came from teachers putting kids first. And I think that makes all the difference.

Putting kids first seemed to be a given, for Sheila. What it meant to her was, for one thing, that she was not trapped in an adversarial relationship between her agendas and theirs, simply because as she saw it the learning she wanted to happen was contained in the process of a session as much as in its content. She managed the class by tuning in to what they were about, as individuals and as a group.

In our first formal interview, March 31, 1990, she sorted out variables of response and tone from a class I had just observed:

Some kids can handle an activity beautifully, and then again it depends on the day. Like today--I'll use my ninth grade as an example. On another day I might have felt they were more focused. Today they were sort of focused. Some were, some weren't, but it sort of depends on the day.

If I were to evaluate them, I think they worked hard, but it was not one of their better days. It could be a lot of reasons. I think having someone in the room for the ninth grade is something that they're like--"ooh, someone else is here."

That's part of their makeup, which is different from an eleventh grader. So I took that into consideration.

I want them to get through the task, but I'm also paying attention to the way they go about the task.

Her job as teacher, she felt, was primarily that of intense, active paying of attention to what was going on, and that was expressed in the alert, leaning, fully concentrating affect of her body as much as in the decisions she made within a class period. Tone was what she was listening for, as well as on-task behavior, respect for each other, and clarity of ideas. When things did not go as she had expected, she characterized the class experience in language that a mother might use about her children, and about her own adjusting of plans to meet their needs, as she read them:

What I've noticed is that they get together in a group and they're fussy....So I don't know, I don't know. Maybe they're tired. We've been doing the stories for about a week and a half. Maybe we've done enough. Maybe we should stop. [May 9, 1989]

Her on-going work of designing curriculum came out of the events of the classroom, as the intellectual and affective needs got defined. Even though she had worked all summer choosing books and thinking about lessons, what she decided to do tomorrow came out of what happened in the classroom today. That was how she chose to assign Claude Brown's Manchild in the Promised Land to the class on social responsibility. Coming out of a particularly volatile session, she decided that the class needed a safely distancing literary focus to deflect their personal focus on each other as they dealt with heavy issues of inequity. At the end of January, just a few weeks into the new courses for the semester, Sheila told me, a class confrontation lived out a teacher's worst fear: "It got away from me." Students accused each other personally around the issue of socio-economic class:

Sheila: They started pointing their finger at each other: "Well, you can say that because you've had everything handed to you on a silver platter and I don't. My family has had to struggle."

And then other kids were saying, "You don't know about my family!" I let it go for a while.

And at that point I said, "You know, this is anger, and when you're angry and defensive you don't talk any more. This is the deal. I would like us to be able to talk to each other like we're doing, like we started doing, but it's my job when it gets, when it goes too far to stop it."

Well, they knew that that was ok. They knew that that was true.

Liz: And they were probably grateful that you stepped in...

Sheila: Oh, yeah! I think it even went too far. I think it went a little too far. That's my feeling. For my comfort level, let me say.

Liz: So how come you let it?

Sheila: It got away from me.

Liz: Did that scare you?

Sheila: Oh, yeah! My heart was pounding. I thought one kid was going to hit another kid....People went berserk: "It's not my fault that people are homeless. People are lazy! They choose to be homeless!"

And people were like, "Bullshit! That's not true!"

It was like, "Everybody can make it! If you don't it's your own fault."

Kids have personal experiences of that not being true for them, but the other kids couldn't listen to that, because they're not ready.

The situation Sheila described might have caused a teacher to take refuge in a comfortably distancing classroom, avoiding such confrontations for the future. But Sheila believed that the classroom is the place where students must confront, sometimes passionately, themselves and each other, and the very difficult realities of the world of which they are already a part. She did many things before the next session of that class to re-direct the focus of the conversation. She

sought out and spoke privately and individually with the most shaken students, asking them to allow her to deal with it. Then she worked hard that night to decide what the fundamental issues were, and how to approach them so that people would not feel personally attacked or needing to attack. She went into that class the next day with a carefully worked-out de-personalized way to separate "responsibility" from "fault" or "blame." It worked. At the end of that class, Sheila reported, one student wrote,

Well, if we could expand our world vision
we're really responsible for everything.

Because of what she had learned about her students in that class, Sheila redesigned her curriculum. First, she decided that Manchild in the Promised Land would be an anchor book, not a choice book. Everyone would read it. Then she decided to have them play the "With the Odds Against Them" card game,³ to take the focus off of each other, to keep the classroom a safe space, but without in any way avoiding the social issues.

Her own modeling of socially responsible behavior may have helped her students look more openly. Although not all of them knew how she conducted herself outside of their class--she never talked about it--some of them

³ from Schniedewind and Davidson, Cooperative Learning, Cooperative Lives: A Sourcebook of Learning Activities for Building a Peaceful World, 1987, pp. 247-250, 294-298.

were aware that she spoke up in faculty and school board meetings, standing up for students' rights and students' needs. Some of them had read her letters to the editor of the local newspaper, and some knew that she volunteered in many ways in the local community. It got around that what she was asking them to think about were not just academic exercises. She would take the kinds of risks that she was asking them to watch other people take, and asking them to consider as they read. Ultimately, her question to herself, and to them, was, "Will I speak out, even when it's not comfortable?" What am I willing to stand up for?"

It was not always only her own assessment of what students needed that Sheila attended to:

I want them to see, I want them to engage, but it could be that they say, "We hate this. This stinks." Ok, let's try something else. [July 1, 1989]

There are some days with some kids you just have to back off and leave them alone, and there are other days when you need to be on their ass, and you have to know it. [July 1, 1989]

This knowing was a loving kind of attention, not for manipulating students but for understanding where they were coming from, in order to help them grow:

Most kids want you to like them, and they want it to be easy. They don't want to feel like it's really hard and you don't like them.

I think we have to remember what it's like to be 14, 15. You get terrible things. You come to school [with] zits on your face

and you think you're the ugliest person in the world. There is such beauty in that to me.

I just love how they struggle with the silliest things. But that's where they are, so to fool with them and make light of how terrible things feel....[July 1, 1989]

During the reflective summer of 1989, Sheila expressed her commitment almost as a statement for beginning teachers:

I've made a lot of mistakes. When I should have shut up I said too much. When I shut up I should have said something. That's the beauty of it. I think that's the beauty of the job. You learn as you go.

And kids are very forgiving. It's great. What you'd probably get fired for in a business, kids forgive you for, unless it's a really bad mistake. I've been fortunate. I haven't made too many bad ones.

You have to be a watcher. I think in teaching the one thing you have to have is an instinct. I think you have to know how to read people. If you're not good at that, that's going to be hard, because I think you have to be able to read the crowd, like tune in....

That will be the only thing I think you have to have some clue about. The rest you have to learn.

Responsibility. In November of 1989, Sheila gave credit to a previous year's class for their patience with her as she explored with them the possibilities of open-ended reader response, and less formal teacher direction. As Chapter III will indicate, she felt a sense of responsibility to that class for allowing her to experiment with greater student-centeredness. She

saw their inexperience with certain traditional skills as her own failure. The students felt differently. Several of them told me in mid-December of that year that they appreciated, above all, her caring about them and about what mattered to them, and her letting them work out their own ideas:

boy: I like the fact that you can tell her if she's wrong and she'll accept it, as long as you can--

girl: As long as you can back it up!

girl: Yes, that's the big thing. That kind of thing is always in our papers. If you can back something up then it's valid.

girl: Like if you don't agree with something she put down, or something like, remember when she passed out that first thing for our projects? She just had ideas written down, but by the end of the class I think we had some things changed just because we, we talked it over and stuff and she agreed to change things.

It's not like it was a set format that we had to do. As long as you go up to her and you have a good idea she'll bend it. As long as it's a good idea and it fits into the project. If it's your own idea and it's a little different she'll let you do it.

Earlier, they had agreed,

girl: I just think she's very easy to relate to. She just cares. She has feelings, unlike other teachers that I had. And I don't know, it's kind of like because she cares that I do my work. I do my work, 'cause I don't want to disappoint her, you know?

boy: I feel more level with Ms. M.

girl: Right, like she's a human like everybody else.

The students appreciated that she really read whatever they wrote in their journals, and wrote them something back, so they didn't feel "like you're just writing to no one." [March 5, 1990] Over and over, students reaffirmed that what counted for them, that they were experiencing with Sheila, was the personal contact.

The ways she achieved personal contact varied. In that same March 5, 1990 interview one boy told me, "She really gets around to see us. She makes a point of that every single day." In terms of work, at any given point, she knew exactly where everyone was in their writing, because she had read their drafts and watched their progress; she knew where they were in their reading because she kept up with their daily reader response journals. If individual students decided they did not want to finish a certain book, Sheila would ask them to write in their notebooks, "I stopped here because...." Believing in the importance of process over product, she would not let large projects get to a final stage, ready for evaluation, before she saw them, especially if the projects were collaborative. Her aim was students' success, not her judgment. Therefore she made sure, even from a respectful distance, that students were either participating fully or else talking

to each other about why and about how to work together better.

With individual students, it was clear from the beginning that she was unwilling to write anyone off. Other teachers may have been annoyed with Dave's unwillingness to take a step without asking, "What are we supposed to do?" Sheila, without impatience, would say to me, "That's Dave. That's the way he is." Because she genuinely enjoyed him, she found ways to encourage him to value his own initiatives but also to be aware of the needs and rights of others. When a student behaved inappropriately, she would intervene immediately in ways that gave the offender clear choices in terms of her insistence that all people be shown respect, without loss of her affection. On December 1, 1989, she described one such situation:

I had a run-in with two boys in my senior class, one boy that I continually have conflict with because he wants to make stupid comments. The character in Heart Is a Lonely Hunter, the retarded man, he wants to keep calling him a "tardo." I told him that that was not ok for him to do.

...He's really funny because I think he probably likes me and likes the class, but he always needs to posture himself, always.

The last two days I've just had to say to him, "You may not say anything if these are the things you're going to say. You must be quiet." He didn't say anything to me in the class, but later on he said, "What's wrong with you? You're really picking on me lately."

And I said, "I'm sorry that you feel that way," but I didn't engage with him because I thought, that's how he perceives not being allowed to throw his--to be the loudest.

Like he told a kid one day she was wrong and it was stupid what she was saying. And I said to him, "You know, you can't say that to someone else. It's not ok to do that."

Her restraint in such situations respected the students no matter what their offense:

The tenth graders--I mean, it's kind of funny. It's funny because I just want to be really careful about how I deal with them because I don't want to say, "You're a jerk; shut up." On the other hand they are a jerk and I want them to shut up so I have to figure out what is appropriate. So I try to have a sense of humor and laugh with them as best I can. [March 20, 1990]

The students' reports to me about these infrequent run-ins were that Sheila was always fair, never insulting, and that she guided students through the process of learning the social skills they knew they would need.

It seemed to me that the students understood her perspective in these situations because, from the beginning, she included the students in her decisions. As early as March 31, 1989, she told me about how she worked at getting groups to discuss rather than just copy each other's information:

I tape recorded them. One day I taped all of them, because I realized that they were not discussing; they were listing, except for Kelly's group. I wanted them to hear the difference: "Here's someone listing information and everyone else just saying, 'Ok, I'm writing it down.'" Here's a group

saying, 'Well, why did you think that?' and 'Where did you find that?'"

And it was great. For that moment they heard the difference.

That activity was successful. But at the beginning of our working together, she was struggling with the problems that can arise when a teacher relinquishes control of the classroom:

Kids who are insecure either dominate or they simply copy. I feel like I need to give them a third choice, but I'm not sure what the third choice is. [March 31, 1989]

Again later in the year, she admitted:

Sheila: That's one of my difficulties because, see, I was a loud girl. I was a girl that would be heard, so sometimes--and I like the spontaneity of kids that are generating those ideas, but what I know happens is--

Liz: kids get lost. [November 13, 1989]

At a different time in the November 1989 interview she looked at the problem in another way:

And quieter kids--that's why a small group works to their advantage, because those kids get a chance to talk, to speak. So I think that might be the next step, is having them work together, brainstorming a list, getting it up on the board, everyone looking at those ideas, seeing things that maybe they didn't see that they think might be important...

Maybe that's a way to go. That way they're working together, they're getting a lot of different perspectives.

A few months later, she was still figuring out how to get students to internalize their own responsibility:

I can grade them. I can say, "I will grade how well the groups listen to each other." That's a motivator. I hate doing that, but I can do it. For tenth grade, it might be a good structure for them.
[February 12, 1990]

By the time the students talked with me on March 5, 1990, Sheila seemed to have successfully solved the perennial cooperative learning problem of individual accountability:

Liz: But why isn't it a free ride in Ms. M.'s class?

girl: I think it would be for certain people. I think I've just been lucky enough to get with the right people in this class.

girl: I think Ms. M. usually makes you put stuff in the notebook so she'll read it and she knows that you did do it. Like we'll usually be talking about notes in a book, and we had taken the notes the night before, and then right after that we write what we do in the group, so she can tell who's done it.

girl: To me in Ms. M's class it seems like she knows what each person has done.... When we're working in a group she'll go around and talk to us, people in the groups. We won't know it but she'll be behind you listening, so she'll hear who's there and who's doing what. And in other classes they just say, "Ok, it's group time," and they'll sit and do their own work and they won't be intertwined with the groups.

These interactions worked because Sheila's preparation for them was by no means purely academic. The students were her text:

I feel like my job is not simply to come into the classroom and give the information. I know a lot of people think that's teaching. For me it isn't. It's hanging out, listening to things, watching.

I watch them a lot. I watch how they act with each other. I watch them in the halls. I listen to them. Not listening--I'm not like--some kids might perceive me as nosy.

I'm not trying to--like I don't really care about their personal lives except I know when they come into the class they bring it all with them, so I have to know something.
[July 1, 1989]

This work came easily for Sheila, because, as she told me in that same July 1989 interview,

...there's something about that passion of youth that I find so refreshing, that I find rare in older people. And I think the best teachers will probably be teachers that hold on to that, that passion, for whatever--you know, for nice weather--for anything!

Because youth has it. Not all of them, because I think we beat it out of them, but they have it...Rachel Carson's sense of wonder....that feeling of youth that I adore--that energy that believes in its passion, believes in its ideas, means it!

That's why I do this job. I feel like I could take or leave literature. I mean I like it. I like to read. I think it's very, very important to read. But I do it 'cause they're there.

You know, there are some days I can't wait to get there. I just can't wait. Not for the adults--I could care less if they all went away--but I think [the students] have so much to offer me.

As later chapters will show, Sheila's enthusiasm for what her students had to offer her became transformed into what seemed, to both of us, to be an even healthier relationship with them. Still adoring their passion and their brilliance, still and even more intensely challenging their detractors, she gradually

separated her own need for affirmation from their successes. Practicing strategies for gradually disengaging herself from their struggles, she was deeply satisfied with facilitating their coming to know and appreciate themselves and each other.

That fall, she described to me her introductory remarks to the other students she worked with, pre-service teachers at a local college:

I said, "I think we're about the most important job in the world, and I feel that strongly. I want you to know that about me. I feel that strongly about it. When I look at you, you're joining my profession. It's the most important profession in the world to me. I take that responsibility--like our time together is really important to me."

I told them, "I shut the door and I say to my students, 'For the next forty minutes you're the most important people in my life. I enter into a relationship with you.'

"If the teacher isn't willing to do that, the kids are not going to learn unless they're fantastic incredible kids, and they will despite the system." [September 9, 1989]

Because of that relationship with her classes, that individual and whole-class personal contact, Sheila could essentially count on students doing the work, as they themselves admitted. She also could count on their respect for her so that in spite of some real trouble between senior boys, most of whom happened to be in her class, she was confident that "they're not going to fight in my room." [May 24, 1990] And they did not.

Admiring and Respecting Young People: Believing That "Kids Can Do It". Sheila's vision of the role of the teacher as both participant in and facilitator of the learning process of people she deeply admired and respected was a developing one, over the course of the study. Before we started working together she already admired high school students for being basically "interesting people," especially because they were ardent, open, alive, basically unjaded. The hardest thing for her to believe fully was that she could trust them to generate, without her intercession through leading questions, meaningful interpretations of what they were reading. In spite of her not having recently read either Freire or Dewey, nor much of the other literature on student empowerment [Adams & Horton, 1975; Bussis 1982; Combs, 1982; Rogers 1977), however, Sheila's regular personal experience of watching and hearing her students and finding them brilliant helped her take the risk of trusting that they could construct their own knowledge. At first, especially between March and May of 1989, she vacillated between her joy-- "They're fantastic!" "They got it all by themselves!" "It was beautiful!"-- and her doubts: "Can they?" "Should I?" "Will they?" In April, 1989, she described a video made by two students to represent their understanding of the transcendentalists:

It started out with U2 singing, "But I still haven't found what I'm looking for," and it was Emerson. One of the kids was Emerson. What a great song to pick for Emerson. He assumed this persona and this accent and he talked about himself.

Then he sort of went to Jimi Hendrix, and this kid dressed as a hippie. This kid's like making connections to his way of thinking to Emerson, and then they met at the end. It was like 20 minutes long. It was great. At the end they said, "Did you get why we played the U2 music? Did you make the connections?"

It was great. It was better than anything I could have said about Emerson.

And they talked about pieces of writing, nature, self reliance, American Scholar. It was great.

Then the guys who did Thoreau filmed themselves standing by a pond. (laughs)
"Well, I came to the woods 'cause I got sick of life and I needed to..."

They were great! I was just beside myself, almost in tears, thinking about how--

...I just sat there like, "do you see how great you are? Do you see this?"

...This semester the kids have done some really interesting things, and I think that I'm being influenced to take more risks....

By the end of the summer of 1989, and especially by the middle of the next fall semester, Sheila was beginning to trust that if a teacher knows her students well and believes in them, they can meet her realistic expectations. She had watched their success with taking on personae in writing and in acting. She found their energy, their inventiveness, their resourcefulness wonderful. But she still had to work on herself when

the work seemed, on the surface, to be more like the traditional reading, writing, and discussing. On September 10, 1990, she acknowledged:

I intervene too much. I keep jumping in. I have to believe they can do this.

Having another teacher present who was conscious of and trying, himself, to practice student-centeredness may have helped. Her department chair, Ralph, talked to me about having witnessed her desire to have the students come up with their own thinking, and her tendency to jump in. Regarding the class they were team-teaching, he said, on September 18, 1990:

...It's a learning process for both the teacher and the student and it's very difficult. I know Sheila works with me and there are several times when I say to her, "You've got to be quiet..." and it's difficult.

And now when she goes to do something she'll say to me, "Should I say it?" and I'll say, "No!" and then when it's finished she'll say, "Oh! Everything I expected to happen happened!" or "They answered all the questions I was going to ask them!" which is exactly what we wanted.

She and Ralph were practicing this dynamic together. Ralph said, "They are capable of getting there if we give them time to get there." He went on:

I think she made a good pitch to the class the other day, because she was going to ask them some information and give them some information, and then suddenly she turned to me and said, "Should I give them?" and I said, "No. Go ahead and see where they go."

And by the end of the class she said to them, "You know, I was worried you couldn't get there, and you got there! You brought out all the points that I was going to make!" And for the class that was an important boost, because it made them think, "Ah! We can do it by ourselves."

What made the difference between Sheila and Ralph that semester, as Chapter III will describe, was that the range of literary interpretations Sheila was willing to accept from the students gave them greater latitude than Ralph was ready, at that point, to accept. In Sheila's perception, Ralph, and the other English teachers, had some clear ideas about what needed to be said about certain pieces of literature. Sheila, instead, was willing to be stunned by how the students read:

It's fantastic. They're really smart. I notice that all the time when I say to them, "What do you think?" and they start really thinking about what they think. They have great ideas.

I don't necessarily agree with them, or that isn't necessarily how I'd interpret it, but it's just as valid the way they're seeing it. [September 18, 1989]

She understood the risk she was taking:

It's power, and control, and it's fear: what if you can't control what they come up with? [September 10, 1989]

What if, indeed? Her instinct was to take the next step of trusting the students, moving through her own fear:

I think that I'm willing to accept they can do it. Now I just have to let them, because I think I intervene too much. I

believe, well, they can do it, but I'm too worried, so I keep jumping in.

I had my 11th grade read parts of The Ovid, which is very difficult reading, but they're looking at metamorphosis. They did a beautiful job with fairy tales, so I thought, ok, they're ready for something like this.

I said to them, "You're so smart that I think you're ready for The Ovid, and they were like, "Oh, my God, these names are so hard!" and I said, "Well change the names: if it begins with an A call it Amy, call it something else. Don't let the names stand in your way."

So they came in the next day and said, "This is really hard. We can't do it." So I put them into groups for five minutes and I said, "Help each other understand the story and identify all the changes, and see if you can figure out literal and figurative," because that's what we were trying to figure out.

Well, they came back as the large group. They generated all the changes. They knew everything. I looked at them and said, "Why didn't you get it? What didn't you get?" And I said nothing. "You mean that's it?" "That's it." It was the greatest thing!

I looked at them and thought, now they're ready to go, and from there some of the lower ability kids picked The Metamorphosis by Kafka to read. I said, "Go for it!" They're in groups of five and they'll help each other.
[September 10, 1989]

Still struggling in mid-October against her own feeling that she should be following a traditional agenda, Sheila also knew,

I feel like at some point, yes, I want them to know what a plot is. I want them to know those things, but a lot of these things they will discover on their own.

In that same interview (October 16, 1990), she defended the reader response journal that she believed in as "their starting point to engaging with their book:"

It's a place to keep track of references, important things that happen in the story, but it is also the place where they say, "I like the book," "I don't like the book," "This is what I think so far," "Why did this happen or why did that happen?" or "This really is exciting me."

That's where they say what they think, because in a formal paper they don't get the opportunity to do that. So if they don't get to do it somewhere, they're not doing it. They're not responding at all to the book on their own level.

After less than two months of using the reader response journals, Sheila was thrilled to see that most of her students had begun to move from summary to analysis, without having to call it that. By November 13, 1989, she was sure of the process:

...they will make all the important points, I'm convinced of it, but they have to hear each other and they have to keep track of it.

Three months later, she reaffirmed that students can do this work:

They found all the important things about the book. They can do that, but they have to be willing to listen to each other. [February 12, 1990]

But their first job was to learn to listen to themselves. When a new ten-week quarter started in April of 1990, Sheila felt confronted again with a class she considered difficult. The composition of this one

was similar to that of her original "disaster" class of November, 1988--predominantly boys, several of whom seemed too large, or too preoccupied, for schoolroom desks that somehow were terribly uncomfortable for them. For the session I observed, on April 27, the homework assignment had been to read Eudora Welty's short story, "A Worn Path." They were to notice language, and to underline on their photocopied version details that they liked. Some students also had written comments in the margins, which Sheila encouraged.

The first task of the class period was a brief initial response to the story. Sheila asked for five sentences: "Push yourself to write." Then she got them into partners, to share these responses, and then, first, to "decide together on five details you like, and why," and second, to "look at what dialogue explains or reveals." Almost everyone wrote, and almost everyone talked, some quite animatedly, trying to figure out what it meant that the character was named Phoenix, what really happened, and why, and why her eyes were blue. When they came out of groups, Sheila validated all readings of the story, encouraging them to speculate, but to back up why they thought what they thought, allowing them to be different readers of the same story. By the end of the class, which had started at a very low energy, my impression was that everyone was listening to

each other, and was even excited about what details might suggest:

Darrell: This may be her trail of tears!

Ned: Oooooo! ...Maybe she didn't get to the doctor on time, and she's trying to make up for it?

Sheila, herself energized by the quality of their insights, ended the class with a challenge: "Be able to say on Monday what you think has happened."

What I observed in that class reinforced what Sheila consistently told me about how she saw her role of guiding her students, not to so-called right answers but through processes that would enable them to do careful reading of texts and real listening to each other. This happened for students partly because she herself modeled it, and they felt heard. When Sheila tuned in to her students as they worked in groups or as they were reporting, her entire body tilted with the listening. She was able to tell me in each post-observation interview why she had made the decisions she had made about who would work with whom and why, and when to intervene and when not to and why. Her reasons always had to do with what she understood each individual student needed at that particular time. For example, on March 20, 1990:

Liz: I wanted to ask why you put Mark with that group to sit in and listen, rather than with Josh and Matt....

Sheila: 'Cause Josh and Matt really struggle, and Mark would tell them everything, how to think and what to know. I want Josh and Matt to struggle. They feel comfortable enough with each other...

Her aim seemed to be realized. Comfortable now with each other, with texts, and with their own perceptions, Sheila's students seemed more able to take the risks in their thinking that allowed them to amaze her, and each other, with their insights. The basis upon which she chose to operate showed that she was comfortable with that level of risk-taking:

Now I'm not saying I don't go into the classroom with more knowledge and skills than my students have. I'll admit to that. But what I think is that when we start something together it's discovery.

When I ask them for more information it's 'cause I'm learning. I want to know more about that because I never thought about that before, and maybe they'll change the way that I thought about something.

I mean even if it's facts...you can have a fact but you can respond to the fact in a lot of different ways. It's not like there's only one way. [March 20, 1990]

Expecting amazing insights from her students was normal for Sheila. Her vision of what was natural and to be expected was not, however, the norm of teacher-thinking. Ralph, who also was trying to restructure his classes toward student-centeredness, was more restrained than Sheila about what students could do when you let them:

Often what happens is their, well, not often but a few times, their own perception of what we've given them or what we asked them to do is quite different from what our perception is, and sometimes their perception is better than ours, so we go with theirs (laugh). [January 26, 1990]

But Sheila had no such reluctance about going with what the students generated. In the classroom, she made it her role to record on the board when students reported their discoveries, and then invite them to see the patterns they had generated:

Sometimes I do things really right, so when kids are done they think, "Wow, I really did this. This is great. I get something."

...I sort of mapped out what it is they were saying..., and they looked at it and they looked at me and said, "Did you plan for this to happen?"

I said, "Absolutely not. It was brilliant. If I had planned it it couldn't have worked out this beautifully. It just wouldn't have happened." [November 10, 1989]

Ultimately, Sheila understood, it was her believing in them that gave students the freedom to create in the way she had consistently observed them to be doing. On April 22, 1990, she said to me, "If you limit them then they're limited; but if you don't, they're not. It's so simple." On April 27, she said of students who don't yet participate, "I think they've just been trained to be passive, and that's what they do." With that analysis, she was ready to recommit herself to

working harder with them, right then, and the next year, to help them feel their own power.

The Work of a Student-Centered Teacher

For the sake of her agenda of student empowerment, Sheila was willing to do a tremendous amount of work. Occasionally she resented it when she saw colleagues doing what seemed to be much less work, following commercially-prepared lessons. She was especially resentful when some of those teachers teased her about her not seeming to be working as she walked around the building checking study halls for her students. But she came to accept both why she had to do things her way, and why other teachers did what they did:

The incredible pace I described is why a lot of teachers give worksheets or have the kids answer questions at the end of the chapter: because they run out of steam.

It's really hard. Sometimes when I go home I feel really angry that I spend three hours designing my own activities, figuring out how I can make something go better.

But I've made a commitment to myself this semester to design my own activities, because I think they're better than anything else I'm going to find. [January 26, 1990]

Thinking about her own commitment provided a framework for making choices about student accountability. In that same interview, she spoke to a question that skeptics of student-centered processes invariably ask:

Liz: Can they get by in here without doing the work?

Sheila: It would be hard. I'd know from their notebooks. But without a test or a worksheet--you can do all those things, but you don't have to. They're not the only way to make sure kids are reading, in my opinion.

It's a lot of work, but it pays off when they do good work. They're engaged, and it's not just...spitting back information. [January 26, 1990]

In fact, Sheila's vision had nothing to do with the acquisition of information. On April 27, 1990, she spoke with more emotion than at any other time about what she wanted for her students. What she wanted was already happening, she said with great joy, for some of them:

I think that's what teaching is. It's like saying, "It's ok to come closer."

That's what Darrell is doing. He's getting closer and closer to himself. That process is happening for him, and that's the success of teaching. He is doing it.

I mean he was ready to do it. He came ready, but--and even Scott is writing poems that would blow your socks off. He's ready to do it and he's willing to take the risk, and saying, "I'm going to put myself out. Here I am for the world to see. I'm going to take the risk."

The Issue of Talk

As she confessed to her teacher-certification students at a local college, Sheila recognized her own inclination to jump in, to fill up silence in a classroom with her own talk. Her reconceptualization of her role had caused Sheila to question what was tradi-

tionally called good teaching. Responding to an example in Theodore Sizer's Horace's Compromise, Sheila said,

I'm not convinced Sister Michael is a good teacher. She stands in front of the room and the class centers around her. If she is not there what happens? Can the class function on its own? Would the discussion be as lively and engaging?

I don't agree that teaching is like acting. That implies, once again, that the teacher should be on stage, the center of attention. [September, 1989, reader response paper]

Sheila could criticize the role because she had performed it:

I know...that in my early years of teaching I loved to be the center of attention. I laughed, told jokes. The kids loved me. I was like watching TV. They were just sitting, watching me. I did all the work. I put on a good performance. What did they do?

Changing my view of teaching has been a slow process for me. I have had to struggle with the issue of silence Sizer talks about. When the room got quiet I thought nothing was happening. I would fill it up--BLAH-BLAH-BLAH!!!

Now I know that silence is where ideas are born and the courage to speak is gathered. When I am quiet my students speak and they are brilliant.

She described the contradiction she felt:

Letting them struggle made me uncomfortable. I thought my job was to help them and make it easier. But thinking for them, or giving them the answers, didn't help them learn. It only taught them that they didn't have to think because I'd think for them. [September, 1989]

The consequence of teacher talk was student passivity, and that troubled her. Her decision to restrain the dominance of her own voice was a commitment to letting the students find theirs. At the same time, she began to risk trusting students to arrive at what they needed to get, without her direct intervention, from a text.

Having committed herself so clearly, verbally--in taped conversations with me, and on paper, even with her own college students--to such a clear vision for change, Sheila began to see ever more clearly the extent to which she was different from other teachers, even people she respected. The same day she wrote about Sizer's Sister Michael, Sheila was talking in my presence with Ralph, her department chair, about their goals in teaching. What came clear to me, as I re-viewed that session much later, was that the two of them were talking about totally different aims, although the difference between them had not yet become the problem it would become by early November. Ralph was saying that he wanted the students to know "great books"; Sheila said she wanted them to find books they liked. Ralph wanted them to be able to talk about classic characteristics of greatness, and Sheila wanted them to feel confident about reading and talking about what they like and what they don't like and why. Those funda-

mental differences were to cause severe distress for Sheila. Who was right? What should she be doing?

On August 24, 1989, she told me, "I need to give up having to comment on everything that gets said." Well before the end of our two years together, she had come to understand, from her own experience of talking on tape, the value of being heard. She determined to let that happen for all students, even the shy ones who would never dare say something to the whole class. She was pleased to see small groups providing a first forum for real conversation in which students could enjoy essentially uninterrupted sorting through of feelings and ideas. She took time to work with students on really listening to each other in those groups. Staying out of the conversation herself was not easy, especially when the small groups reassembled to report and reflect together as a whole group. After all, she had been trained, herself, to do what was called "leading" the discussions:

I'm really confused, because there are times when I talk, and I think I'm trying to find a way to get them talking.

I'm struggling, but I'm trying.

I was trained to ask leading questions.
[November 15, 1989]

In September of 1989, she had commented on the unnatural situation that a classroom is:

If you're in a room with a bunch of people, the instinct is for those people to talk with each other, but we're taught you stand in front of the room and have everyone quiet.

Well, if you're at a party or you're with people or working on something, you're not quiet. You're busy talking.

Her impulse to jump in troubled her, because she saw that her talk dominated theirs. Having read David and Roger Johnson's Learning Together and Alone [1975] over the summer of 1989, however, she was beginning to see her behavior as a remnant of traditional teachers' not really believing that students can "get it" without teacher intervention. In a three-way conversation over lunch on November 13, 1989, Sheila and Ralph were talking again about her talking too much. He had to admit the tendency about himself as well: "we all tend to preach--we get excited!" By keeping the construction of knowledge, accompanied by the talking and getting excited, for him/herself, they admitted with some personal regret, the teacher effectively deprived the students of that experience.⁴ While Ralph could see the fault in Sheila, she felt he and others did not always see it in themselves. She told me on November 15 that most of the talk she heard coming out of classrooms

⁴ The issue of teacher talk and student passivity is explored in Collins and Seidman, 1978; Adams & Horton, 1975; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Freire, 1968; and Culley and Portuges, 1985.

was teacher-talk. What she understood, well before the end of the second year of the study, was that here again she needed to find a balance. Her own inclination to talk, she decided, and that of other teachers, was a thing to be valued as well as to restrain. Teachers, she told me after the study was completed,

have to model saying things that are hard to say. They need to take a risk. They should not be silent. That's my role in life: I take risks, and [students] see that's ok.

The tension she felt had to do with her conviction that teachers don't let students talk enough, that their own talk dominates, and that it is not always at appropriate times.

Sheila had administrative support for her perception that students need to talk ideas through with each other. The principal of Valley Central, Ernest, was also looking for the buzz of conversation that meant to him that real learning was going on. Of the school's decision in the early '80's to move to heterogeneous grouping, Ernest told me how excited he had been to overhear faculty conversations stimulated by a course, "Models of Teaching," being taught on site at Valley Central by one of the university professors:

We had about 15, 16 participants in that course, and it started discussion going in the faculty room about, "I introduced this material using this model, and it worked out great. How did it work with you?"

And back and forth. The dialogue was just neat--to walk into the faculty room and hear these people talking in this way.
[February 12, 1990]

What he had seen among some members of his faculty was what Sheila was now seeing with her students.

Ernest told me that the original idea for change to heterogeneous grouping had been sparked by the need to evaluate the school for accreditation. The verbalizing of what needed to happen, he said, was the process that

...emboldened the people who were feeling that way to kind of find out if we couldn't make some changes. [February 12, 1990]

Clearly both Ernest and Sheila understood talk to be empowerment. By March 5, 1990, Sheila trusted that, if they talked enough about an issue, students would arrive at clarity and understanding of a text and of themselves. Through talking to a respectful and patient audience, she had come to believe, they would come up against their own narrow assumptions, and hear themselves change. The same with grammar. Students needed only practice with talk, and with writing: that is, with trusting their own voices:

Or if a lot of times a kid is writing something that's not working I'll say, "Well, tell me what it is," because they'll say it correctly. And then I'll just say, "Write that down." [March 20, 1990]

Patience: Seeing Teaching as a Process, Not a Performance or a Product

Sheila was willing to work against her own habits of teacher-centeredness, and then of content-centeredness, because she already felt comfortable with the attitudes that seem to be preconditions for student-centered teaching. She trusted already in students and in interactive process, in the face of the doubts which the dominant culture of the school had about both. Describing herself as normally impatient and dissatisfied with less than total participation, Sheila nevertheless found herself willing to try to be patient with the students and with herself as the new skills were learned and practiced. Determined to focus on the positive aspects of all their interactions, Sheila used her students' initial resistance to new ways of working as information about how to help everyone in her classes, including herself, move forward.

During a break between two classes that were reading abstract and difficult U. S. Revolutionary War speeches on January 17, 1989, Sheila and I had discussed her students' uncertainty about how to proceed. I suggested she might break down the tasks into more manageable sizes. In the next class, she revised her instructions to the students in terms of our conversation. She tried out "jigsawing" parts of the

assignment [Aronson, 1978], giving each group a section to focus on and then to share, rather than asking everyone to look at everything. She encouraged them to use each other as resources, raising their hands for her help only for things that the group had determined it could not figure out. After they had formed into groups, she went around helping those groups rearrange their desks for more connection within and more distance between the separate groups. When two groups of two wanted to work together, even though they had different things to do, she acknowledged that they could collaborate "for the first question." She told them, "You need those people? ok!"

All of these were subtleties she was trying out for the first time. It was not a perfect class. Predictably, and partly because the material was so abstract, traditional habits persisted: individualism, search for right answers, dependence on the teacher. Three girls were facing each other but reading and writing separately. In a mixed group of three, the two boys were doing most of the work. In another mixed group, a girl told Sheila, "I need some help. I don't know what I'm looking for." She had not thought to consult with people in her group. When Sheila tried to get the other two to help, they were frustrated, as well. Throughout the class there was not much real

conversation or discussion. People seemed to be searching their texts for right answers, sometimes not even trusting each other to help them find those. In the group closest to where I was sitting, people were asking each other, "What did you put?" Some were ready to give up.

By my next visit, February 14, Sheila was struggling with herself to stay back as students resisted the unfamiliar process of constructing their own meaning. In an early class, students were choosing modular courses for the fall semester. Many were uncomfortable with choosing. One girl asked Sheila, "Why do you give us all this responsibility? Why don't you just stick us in a class?" In response to their expressions of dissatisfaction with the choices, Sheila suggested, "If you're complaining, design a course in your notebook."

In the class that followed, setting up presentations on Cooper, Irving, and Bryant, the groups were still not working perfectly; in fact, there was considerable wasting of time, but Sheila obviously had determined to be patient. This class was the first in which I noticed her watching from a careful distance, recording how they were operating, letting them work, trying not to interfere. When they came back to the large group, she gave back to them what she had seen,

that they hadn't gotten far: "How do you think the groups were operating? How could we do it better?" Some students were defensive, ready with the traditional punishment for themselves: "Give a quiz." Sheila suggested having a scribe in each group, reminding them that 50% of their grade was for cooperation. She was determined that they would take responsibility for their own presentations, and determined to discipline herself to let them do that.

In the next class I observed, March 7, 1989, Sheila showed me that she had accepted the long-term nature of helping the students through their resistance to a student-centered process. She briefly joined a group that was asking, "So what are we supposed to do?" Acknowledging that they were confused, she invited, "Ask me a question," to get them to be specific about what they thought they needed before they could move forward. Their questions revealed that they were stuck, not on aspects of substance in Huck Finn, but on issues of form: "How long should it be?" and "Do we have to do three examples?" At the end of almost twenty minutes of her going around trying to get them to tell each other what they thought, Sheila asked them all to return to their own chairs in the original rows, and told them, "I'm not so sure that that time was well spent, but this is what I learned." Essentially, what she had learned

was that the task needed smaller groups and more thought about who works with whom. More important than those specifics was that instead of blaming them, she was sharing with them her thinking about how to make the process work better. What she told me afterwards revealed her confidence: "Next time they'll do better," and "I need to model alternative ways of presenting information." She did not panic about their not having learned what they were "supposed to" in the precious class time. She did not consider it a waste, because she had done some important learning:

I'm letting them fumble a lot...I try to keep reminding myself that when you do things kids aren't used to, you have to be patient.

That she did it is not to say that it was easy for her. In that March 7 visit she told me of one of her own reservations: "The bad part is I want to know what they're talking about." On the phone the next week, she suggested another, with hope, "Maybe next week everything will click in. It's based on fear, primarily-- that they can't do it." On March 31, she told me how hard it was:

I think what you have to realize about grouping, as far as I'm concerned, is that there are great moments, and then they'll take two steps back and they'll be horrible again.

I think, I know for me, I just have to remind myself of those things so I'm not totally discouraged that they're not doing anything. They are doing something.

She continued to try, in spite of how hard it was, because she basically trusted the process: students' writing would help them discover what they think, as would having to explain and to listen to others. On May 9, 1989 she said,

I've watched kids change their minds on issues, when they're presented with other choices.

Using our conversations as a place to reflect, Sheila looked at both the negatives and the positives of a class session, figuring out for herself what would make it go better next time. There were lots of "Maybe I should" kinds of statements about what options might work. On May 15, 1989, her assessment of the year that would soon be ending was positive and forward-looking:

You know, I'm still frustrated. Some of them, I think, I could have done better. It took me a little while to get in gear, and even now I look at a lesson and I think, I could probably do this differently, but I would say, overall, if I were to be really fair to them, they've done a really good job. They've come a long way, and I'm going to tell them...

And at the very end of the year, she said,

I think next year will be better. I think it's going to be a lot better. I hope. [June 16, 1989]

Already by May, and certainly during June and the summer, Sheila was talking about next steps, for herself and for her classes.

On September 18, 1989, her comments revealed pleasure that her patience and restraint had been worth the effort. She said of her students, "They're struggling, but I'm really impressed with them." "I'll be interested to see how they work together." "I think that they're doing ok." And of herself she said,

I feel like this is the year I'll get better at organizing the processes. I'm practicing giving them time. [September 10, 1989]

She could be patient with herself for how long it was taking for herself, as well as for her students, to unlearn traditional habits and learn new ones. Over the summer she had read materials on cooperative learning:

It's ok that I don't know how to do cooperative learning--I wasn't taught.

I didn't learn how to be a teacher. I'm learning now. My instinct with relating to people is for them to talk to each other, but we're taught you have to be in control and they have to be quiet. [September 10, 1989]

She was now working to overcome her instinct to protect her students from confusion:

I'm learning to deal with silence. I wanted to jump in. I want to be patient with them not knowing. It's hard to have them struggle--it's my job to help them! I have to get over feeling that, and just let them struggle. [September 18, 1989]

Sheila's working through of her own and her students' reservations might have characterized the struggle for change throughout the English department, as Ralph perceived their efforts. The other teachers,

he said, "are learning that the process has to be trained." They were learning, he said, that students "can get there if they're given the time to get there." But there were cautions, even in that September 18 conversation, that prefigured later conflicts between Sheila and the rest of the department. Sheila said, "the kids perceive us as easy because there's no pressure." And Ralph said two things that were to get in his way that year. Of the students he said, "They're not sure what questions they want to ask;" and of himself, "If I set it up correctly, they don't need me, and I'm lonely."

Sheila, by the fall semester, had almost dealt with being left out of the students' small group conversations. She did not yet completely trust that between her active but respectful eavesdropping and their later reporting of findings, she would know what was being said beyond what was in the reader response notebooks. Perhaps more important was the loneliness Ralph mentioned: she missed the full-time contact with her students.

But her successful preparation of the students was apparent. On November 13, 1990, the small groups in the first class I observed got to work immediately on tasks about which they were very clear. Each group had one character from Lord of the Flies. Arguing within the

groups was animated, but personally respectful. Once they had made decisions, spokespersons went up to write those on the board. Everyone else began to take down the information their peers had collected. When it was all up there, Sheila asked spokespeople to talk about what they had put on the board, and then asked everyone to focus on the larger task. They were to predict, according to the information they had so far, whether a particular character would survive or not. They spent the entire period making this one decision. The energy level, and the sense of accomplishment, felt powerful to the observer.

At the end of that day's classes, Sheila knew what she wanted to work on next: 1) to figure out better ways to balance between spontaneity and having students listen to each other; and 2) to let go of her own need for personal contact with them. She had worked through both of those by the end of June, 1990, and again was ready to take what she defined as the next steps for her own development as a teacher.

What It Means to be Student-Centered: Looking at "How He Learns Rather than What She Had to Teach." The strongest force compelling Sheila to take the risks involved in conducting a student-centered classroom was her own direct experience with her students' capacity for complex, intense, and rigorous thinking, once they

had developed the confidence and the procedures for exploring texts. She trusted the insights their explorations gave her, and them, about their lives.

In a May 9, 1989 class on "The Lady and the Tiger," the small-group task was to decide what the lady chose, and to back up their choices. When students came back into the large session, they were to hear from each other. Then they would decide whether and why they liked each choice and whether the choice made sense, given the story. What the students came up with suggested that they had indeed engaged in the story. Many of them spoke from an understanding of the force of jealousy in their own lives. One group was cynical about how the man trusted the princess's love for him. One student said, "I'd do the same thing!" Another talked about a selfish woman. Dave decided to rewrite: if it was a story about a woman choosing a man or a tiger, he would let her get the man and then shoot him. No one took the leap of breaking through the initial dualism and suggesting a third option of any kind, and no one talked about woman-hating, so Sheila did not raise those possibilities: she allowed all that they said, and they walked out of the class talking about what they would do in the same situation.

That, Sheila felt, was why she was teaching literature. She wanted young people to look at the

choices people make in their lives, and at the consequences of those choices. She wanted them to test out, in the safety of their minds and imaginations, all the possible ways they might behave in similar situations.

Almost every class period, students came up with ideas that Sheila herself had not considered, and she told them so. Her not wanting to be seen as an expert on the literature was not a matter of her not trusting her own sophistication as a reader. Indeed, she considered herself a widely-read and very competent reader. But she cared about students' engagement with the works, not about the works themselves. What could they learn from literature that would help them live their lives? And what could she learn from them? She was honestly interested in what they thought.

Not every piece of literature, to be sure, offered such openendedness as "Lady and the Tiger." Bcause there were no right answers, it was a good choice for their practice of having their own direct, personal experience with a story. Again stressing that there were no right answers, she made it clear that the focus she wanted them to maintain in their peer editing sessions was not on "criticizing"--which the students took to mean finding all the errors--but on what they got out of each

other's papers, and how to make them and their own clearer and stronger.

To make the total system work, she changed her method of evaluation almost immediately after our working together began to give her a theoretical grounding for her instincts. She stopped testing on literature in February, 1989, deciding to read only the response notebooks. She let the groups chose what to focus on, and she gave 50% of their grade for cooperation. She wanted them to struggle with what was confusing in the books, and she urged them toward, and gave them credit for, using each other as resources. Some late 1989 and early 1990 exams, she had decided, would be to engage with some new text and talk to each other about it. In other classes, she decided to use anthologies of their own writing as texts upon which to base exams.

Protecting Without Taking Over. In all the class sessions I observed over the two year study, even before she began to practice specific cooperative learning strategies, Sheila's physical presence in her own classroom was with the students rather than distanced from them, as if she embodied her own commitment to be discovering along with them [Freire,1968]. When the seating was in rows, she would be moving around the room as they talked, often sitting on top of uninhabited

desks, not just at the margins, but right within the rows. She tried to be at the front only when she was writing instructions or recording their findings on the board. Her moving around made it necessary for whoever was talking to turn around towards her, so a student's comments were usually audible to everyone, even a visitor at the back of the room. In spite of her efforts at inclusiveness, however, my early observations confirmed her experience of boys' domination of classroom conversation. Small decision-making group work turned out to be the solution she had sought: to create space for the girls, as well, to contribute, and do their learning by talking through their ideas.

As early as February 14, 1989, Sheila was urging students to be resources for each other: "If you're struggling, the best place to go is to the people in your group." She respected their choices, sometimes letting go of a certain theme or issue from a book if no group chose it, sometimes offering to explore it herself as her own contribution to the conversation. Protecting them from the frustration of not knowing what to do, while allowing them to struggle with their texts, Sheila's instructions for group work indicated that she had tried to anticipate every eventuality when she was designing her lessons. According to the students I interviewed in both December of 1989 and March of 1990,

She tells you exactly what she wants you to do, so when you get in your groups everybody understands.

I don't know, the way she explains herself you really understand what you're doing....[March 5, 1990]

She effectively balanced trusting students with responsibility for their own learning with her own accessibility: she did not abandon them as they worked. As early as March, 1989, she moved around among the groups to check on how they were doing, encouraging: "You're doing a really nice job of talking to each other." She would check in more frequently with students who tended to get distracted without her monitoring.

Sheila's students were grateful that her reading of their daily response journals and her alert attention to tone and dynamic as they worked in their groups allowed her to know exactly who was doing what in every group. Therefore they felt protected from exploitation, reporting that in her class, unlike some others that used small group work, "hitch-hikers" could not depend on one person to do all the work. That was something she worked at:

L: Dave was leaning back. Dave was with Paula and Jen. What was that about?

S: I don't know. He said he was giving them information. What I'm going to do tomorrow is he's going to have to write everything down. See, I'm making him work

with them, and he doesn't want to, 'cause he can't just fool around, basically.

But next time to really fully engage him he's going to be the note taker. 'Cause Dave has trouble. He struggles a lot. He wants to just fool around and have fun. He has to stay after, Tuesday, 'cause he's not doing the work to my satisfaction, and it's really hard. He wants it to be easy.

But actually I really like him, so we'll figure it out. [March 20, 1990]

The Role of a Teacher. On June 16, 1989, Sheila talked to me at length about how far she had come in her thinking about the role of a teacher. The student-centered strategies came naturally to her, she maintained again on November 10, 1989:

I remembered that I do like it. That's the funny part, that I like my students. So when I remember that about them, it's fun. There's not as much pressure.

When she did things her own way, rather than the way she saw other teachers around her teaching, she enjoyed her work:

When we relax together, the work gets done, everyone has fun, it's not a big deal.

Her view of her role was different from that of teachers she saw:

I think teachers feel that...their job is to be in charge. I guess I just don't feel that way. I really think that in a class, we're sort of in it together. I don't feel superior. I don't feel better. I just feel like I would like to be a facilitator of kids finding things that they're interested in doing.

That's why it seems to me that it makes a lot of sense to have kids choosing their own reading, and kids talking to each other about the books that they read....just sort of sharing about things on their own level where they are.

Because I feel that where I am in my life, I'm not necessarily interested in what they're interested in, in terms of their reading. But it needs to be where they are.

Her vision was of being the kind of teacher she recognized Jane, another English teacher, to be--a teacher who "looked at how he learns, rather than at what she had to teach" [November 10, 1989], a teacher whose decisions about literature were always in terms of how to connect to students' lives, never in terms of "right answers." Always, she was aware of the reality of her students' fourteen- to eighteen-year-old lives. She had given up thinking in terms of tracking before she got to Valley Central. As a result, she treated all the students, even though she knew their individual strengths and insecurities, as competent. Sheila felt that they lived up to those expectations. From their own testimony, the students felt her respect for them.

On January 26, 1990, she found herself having to step back to find a way to reach the students in terms of their lives. It was harder than she had anticipated to get them to think in terms of social responsibility, even though they had signed up for the course by that name. She watched and she listened. She watched the

groups in their interactions. Of one pairing that worried her that day, she commented:

I just wanted to make sure he wasn't doing anything to (A.), but they worked it out, so I stayed away.

By April 27, 1990, Sheila was confident that she could set an agenda and design activities so that the best would come out of her students. She defined a good class:

It's good because everyone is working together in a positive way. We're helping each other out....I really didn't do anything except allow for that to happen.

I'll bring out the best in people because that's what I'm looking for.

As later chapters will describe, there were times, especially at the beginning of the study, when Sheila's focus tended to be on what did not go well in a class rather than on what did. In those cases, she valued the feedback of an observer who helped her redirect her focus toward the essentially positive context of disappointing moments. By the end of the school year 1989-1990, she was seeing things that did not work well as things she would not worry about, but would take responsibility for making better:

I know one of the things that I really need to work on is boys--9th, 10th grade boys--and what they need in the classroom and how to channel a lot of the energy that I often find negative or silly or stupid. They grate on me. They rub me the wrong way and then I get angry and then they get angry. It's like a real cyclical thing.

And that's something that I need to be thinking about. But I notice that when they're working on something that they're really into or they really like, there are no difficulties.... [May 24, 1990]

In every instance when things did not go well in a class, when she perceived the students to be "out of control," her instinct was to adjust herself, not them:

I can clearly see...what a struggle they have trying to engage in material they're not ready for. But there's other stuff they are ready for, and their own writing really engages them. They want to be telling their own stories, which is ok.

So when I get off of--I fight with them when I try to control the group when I want them to listen to me. They cannot listen to me for more than five minutes, some of those boys. So I have to limit, and if I limit it they will. They're pretty attentive. But it took me a while to figure that out. [May 24, 1990]

As she described her own classrooms, Sheila recognized how far she had come toward realizing her own vision:

I think I have often been in kids' way to get things done, and this year I've noticed that I've been very willing to get out of the way, and have been happy with what has happened. [May 24, 1990]

Sheila's vision of what she hoped students would take from her classes did not change fundamentally over the two years during which I observed and listened to her. What changed, over time, was the range of strategies she was able to develop to achieve her goals, and her confidence that her agenda was a worthy one.

SUPPORTING STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING

A Dissertation Presented

by

Elizabeth N. Aaronsohn

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C H A P T E R I I I

COLLISION WITH "INSTITUTIONAL REALITIES":

THE STRUGGLE

Introduction

My decision was to focus on Sheila's work, her developing perception of it, and the multiple perceptions of it among some of her students and some of her colleagues. This decision necessitated a further methodological choice not to take a broader in-depth look at the other faculty members at Valley Central Regional School who had also made a serious commitment to try to work in more student-centered ways. Visiting only two of Jacob's and two of Ralph's classes, and interviewing each of them only twice, I could not glean as much information as I was getting from Sheila from multiple visits and multiple interviews. I will not presume, therefore, to draw conclusions about their teaching or their understanding of the nature of teaching from the limited amount of data I accumulated from what they said to me and what I actually saw. What is important for this study is Sheila's view of the extent to which her vision was shared within the school and thus the extent to which she felt personally and professionally supported at Valley Central. Most of what I saw, and will report, was through the prism of Sheila's feelings.

In both of his long interviews with me, Ralph mentioned that he and his English Department were "all in this together," and that they were "all just learning how to do this." However, Sheila's perception was that because he never shared with her his own feelings of uncertainty, he did not feel at all unsure of himself as he went about "just learning how to do this." Whenever he spoke with her, as she reported it, he spoke only of how difficult it was to train the students to this new kind of working, not of his own version of what she was experiencing, not of his internal struggle against habits conditioned by years of successful teaching in the traditional mode. As this chapter will show, because Ralph and other teachers did not mention or seem to be dealing with internal struggles, Sheila felt almost totally isolated in hers.

Certain social forces contributed to the alienation that affected Sheila so strongly. As the literature since Lortie [1975] indicates, one of the most distressing realities of a school, particularly a secondary school, is the physical constraint of time and space that keeps teachers from interacting naturally with each other. The literature on cooperative learning¹ indicates further that habits of

¹ See Appendix B, List of References for Student-Centered Teaching

individualism and competitiveness are deeply bred into students. These habits reinforce the structural distance among professionals, who in many cases were successful as students within individualistic and competitive classroom systems. Traditional schooling does not make a value of having students practice developing the kind of trust of each other that would allow people to admit to not knowing something, or to not being quite sure of what they were doing. Adults who have become teachers still carry those habits with them, and may operate under them under the pressure of a role which seems to require that they be experts. In traditional classrooms, from which most teachers come, to ask for or give help is considered "cheating." Habits of supporting or asking for support are not developed.

As this chapter will describe, certain habits developed in their own schooling cause teachers to be wary of each other. Most expect that they will be judged by the next teacher on the basis of their present students' academic preparation. None of those forces contribute to the kind of open sharing of delight in the students, nor, to be sure, the sharing of uncertainty and sense of struggle, that would have made Sheila feel "normal" at the school.

Expectations

Almost as soon as she began teaching at Valley Central High School in the fall of 1988, Sheila's sense of herself as a teacher was being daily shaken by the collision between what she had expected and what she was actually experiencing in the school. Basically, her discouragement with herself, her students, and her colleagues had to do with what turned out to be a set of unrealistic expectations. She felt she had been assured that she would be joining a faculty fully committed to heterogeneous grouping and fully engaged in innovative teaching methods to make that kind of grouping work best for all students. What she perceived, instead, was that most of the teachers in the school were still teaching in ways that seemed quite traditional to her. She was confused. Maybe what they were doing was what the school wanted, and she was wrong?

As she watched and listened to other teachers, it seemed to her that no one else was uncertain; no one else talked about making mistakes. She, on the other hand, had daily uncertainties and doubts, as she worked to overcome the resistance of her traditionally-trained students to the new processes she was introducing. There seemed to be no one to talk with about the kinds of situations she was experiencing in her classroom.

Everyone else seemed satisfied. Everyone else's classes were great.

She became afraid to expose her sense of inadequacy, for fear the other teachers would condemn her. In fact, she felt criticism on many sides, but felt an absence of balancing encouragement, even from the principal, whose ideals agreed with hers, in the abstract. He was too busy to give her the concrete feedback and affirmation that she felt she needed. Increasingly, she felt like an outcast: "I don't fit in here."

Marginalization was not the position she had been led to expect to have to occupy. She was not prepared herself to retain her centeredness when she sensed disapproval, particularly that of her department chair, Ralph, since, as she understood about herself but could not yet overcome, she had been trained to seek the approval of authority. When a series of systematic taped interviews replaced our earlier less formal dialogues on March 31, 1990, she already was working on this issue. There would be some things about her that people would not like.

At her previous school, where the students she taught had been tracked lower ability, people did not seem to check on whether she was preparing students formally to meet a series of next teachers' expectations.

She had felt free to allow the learning to take place naturally. Here, on the other hand, the specter of a different kind of accountability for what students would be measured upon felt threatening to her. In her recurrent vulnerable times, she wondered if she was a "bad teacher." She could say she was being "paranoid," but the uncertainty itself frightened her: "I don't know, I can't tell;" "What if...?" "It's scary when you try new things."

Her extreme self-doubt carried over to our research project together. The September 1989 interview was one of several in which she expressed fear that I had picked the wrong person to watch, that her mistakes would "mess up" my study. I had to reassure her more than once that my interest was in documenting the struggle, seeing the process, rather than observing a "perfect" teacher.

Once she began to look back on that paranoia in January, 1990, she described her thinking about the whole first year and a half:

So I get into a school and I think, what am I supposed to do? So I look around at what the other people are doing, and part of me just thinks I need to do it that way because maybe I think I'm supposed to do it that way....I could do that, but so what? I don't get it.

But then I think, maybe, no: I know about hyperbole. Maybe [the students] should know it. Does that make someone smart? I don't know. Does that make them culturally literate? In whose culture?

Who's deciding what things are important?
That's another thing that's just a kicker. I
don't know.

Adjusting the Focus

Dissatisfaction with herself deeper than others could feel about her had to do with Sheila's expectation of herself with her students. As successful as even the very first class sessions I saw her teach seemed to my eye, she came out of them expressing disappointment:

I feel frustrated. I try things and they don't work. I want intense discussion. I start to think that I'm not a good teacher. I feel like I have to do what other people do to survive the day, and I hate myself. Maybe I'm not good. I don't know how I would know-- they're bored, they hate the reading, they're lazy, they want to watch TV.

It's easier to just give information out. I can do that. That's what I mean by compromising. I don't know the steps. They don't want to think. They demand grades. Some kids can't read Scarlet Letter. Talking to each other is how they get it, but they won't do that.

Liz: What are your expectations?

S: I don't know--I want to reach everybody. I don't want to lose anybody.
[October 16, 1988]

Later, the November 22 class on The Scarlet Letter, described on pages 70 and 71, did not meet her expectation of "total interaction." Coming out of the December 6 class on The Crucible, described on pages 71 and 72, she apologized to me for some students' satura-

tion with too many papers to listen to. "I want them to be perfect!"

This expectation of perfection represented what Sheila came to recognize as her tendency to focus on the almost insignificant flaws in an otherwise overwhelmingly positive experience. As Chapter III will show, in the process of overcoming internal pressures that blocked her vision, the first step was her becoming aware that the disappointment she felt was a function of her own unrealistic expectations of herself and her students. Our work together gave her solid strategies for avoiding the kind of situation in which students had to listen and respond attentively for such a sustained time as they had been asked to do during The Crucible discussion. It also allowed her to reflect on, name, and let go of the traditional sources of her own perfectionism, which underlay her assumption that if a class wasn't totally good it was totally bad. This was one of the first habits that she overcame, as she realized that demanding perfection for herself and her students interfered with the achievement of her vision of learning as process rather than product.

The outcome of her having made a conscious decision to focus on what went well in a class session was surprising to her, but would not be so surprising to observers familiar with the literature on and practice

of student-centered teaching. By the end of the study Sheila noticed that, without her expecting or even thinking much about it any more, she was achieving almost 100% participation in all of her classes.

The Expectation of Heterogeneous Grouping

Sheila's expectation that her values would be widely shared and already in practice in the school was based on Valley Central's recent history of restructuring. According to Ernest, the principal, a decision had been made in 1981-1982 that the school would not use any system of tracking [February 12, 1990]. The impetus had come from the guidance counselor, the librarians, and teachers of remedial reading, art, industrial arts, home economics, and the resource room. These were people who, seeing students one-on-one or "as a mix," observed that lower tracked students characteristically had low self-esteem. What that meant, for these teachers, was that the school was not doing the job it ought to do. They began to talk to each other and to Ernest, who knew the research on tracking vs. heterogeneous grouping and had been hoping for this kind of change in his school. He knew, too, that the change could not come from the top; the teachers themselves had to support it fully.

Some of the regular classroom teachers, particularly in math and science, resisted the notion that

it was possible to "get across a body of knowledge" in a classroom where abilities were widely mixed. But enough teachers wanted to do it. Thus it was recommended that the school try heterogeneous grouping, starting at the junior high school level. The school committee, as Ernest described it, was not difficult to persuade, for an important reason:

...there were some people who were very supportive of it, school committee people who either had kids who were in the low tracks or remembered when they were in the low tracks themselves. [February 12, 1990]

He had noticed an interesting fact about the adult population of the feeder towns to Valley Central Regional High School:

The people that are college bound in your top track, they move away to all over the country to college, and they seldom return to their home town. The people who stay in the community and eventually become the school committee people themselves were in the low tracks. [February 12, 1990]

The factor that reinforced the school committee's inclination to try heterogeneous grouping was the number of the teachers fully committed to the idea. What happened then was surprising:

By the time we got into it, the English department, which was the critical department to make the changes, they were ready to try it through the whole 7-12. And so we kind of jumped into it faster than we probably should have, in hindsight, but it worked out.

Thus the conviction that she was moving into a department already in the vanguard of a school in a

dynamic process of change might have been a reasonable one when Sheila started teaching at Valley Central in September, 1988. Perhaps she took Ernest's own total commitment to heterogeneous grouping as representative of that of the entire faculty. What Ernest already knew about pockets of resistance within the faculty was something Sheila was to discover for herself, with the accompanying disillusionment that this study describes.

Ernest and Sheila were in agreement about the connection between tracking in a school and the inequities of the larger society. That is why they both felt so strongly about wanting to make the change within Valley Central. They wanted the students and teachers to experience, in at least one small place, the equality of opportunity that America claims. It was consistent for Sheila, therefore, to be linking heterogeneous grouping and cooperative learning with the reading, writing, talking, and listening about the content she was asking her students to consider, inviting them to ask some very hard questions:

We're institutionally saying that some people are going to get more than others. We're encouraged to feel, "as long as I'm the one getting everything, then I'm satisfied." But is that ok? Is that ok? [January 6, 1990]

The playing out of the social forces she described may have been represented by the example of Darrell, whose powerfully thoughtful insights I had witnessed in her

classes for the entire year. Without heterogeneous grouping, she said, "because of his socio-economic background and his behavior" he would have been tracked into a lower ability class, and probably lost.

Trying Cooperative Learning

Commitment in theory to heterogeneous grouping turned out to be an easier step for most classroom teachers than the next one: re-conceptualizing the process of teaching within untracked classes. Until Sheila joined the faculty in 1988, the lecture-discussion format continued to be the unquestioned norm for most academic classes. Most teachers assumed that the new kind of grouping meant that they had to either "water down" their material and slow their pace or focus on meeting the needs of the students formerly tracked high ability. In either case, most had resigned themselves to reaching only a portion of their students.

When I started visiting Valley Central High School as a university supervisor of student teachers in September, 1986, my efforts to encourage student teachers to become less teacher-centered were met with scorn by some of their cooperating teachers. "The university is fantasy-land," a few veteran teachers in the faculty lounge told me, reminding the pre-service teachers and me, "This is the real world." "Those methods don't work in high schools," was the more subtle but pervasive

message of less outspoken cooperating teachers. Thus I was surprised and delighted when the English department, spurred by Jane, one of its members who had been a student teacher there under my supervision, invited me to give a workshop on cooperative learning, April 12, 1989.

By then I had supervised many more student teachers placed there. As a result of their work, more Valley Central teachers had seen cooperative group strategies in action. I had also begun to work intensively with Sheila. Most important, the institutional commitment was there. Ralph told me that cooperative learning, for the English department, was an area in which

...the front office expects us to be working. They expect when they walk into the class to see group work. They don't expect to see any lecturing going on or anything of that sort, and if they do we have to have a reason as to why we're doing it....[January 26, 1990]

Experimenting with Groups. When I conducted the workshop in April I found many members of the department open to thinking in new ways about what students can do when teachers back off and give them more responsibility for their own learning. Some of them had already begun, tentatively, to experiment with groups in their classrooms. In that April session, the other English teachers brought up concerns and questions which

had troubled Sheila as well, but which she was actively working through.

Cooperative Learning Is Not Easy

On March 31, 1989 Sheila had asked me,

How do you avoid copying, or simply one person dominating? How do you get the kids to really talk to each other? Because I find that's very difficult....

I think the hardest thing for me is setting something up so that they get the most discussion time and thinking out of that....

Sheila was making a distinction between cooperative learning, with its emphasis on interdependent decision-making, and the kinds of group work in which students, sitting together, do essentially individual work. By the end of April, 1989, Sheila herself had already begun to have fun with the new way of working, especially once she had let go of the kind of "answer-pulling"² that had characterized her content-centered approach as recently as the month before. She was trying specific strategies that we had brainstormed together. What she told me excitedly on the phone was,

Today, they were responsible for their own thinking! They were to take notes on each other's statements. They were writing in their notebooks. I didn't look up--I kept a list of who talked.

It didn't always go this well. Sheila and I would be speaking together about every two weeks, figuring out

² A phrase used by John Holt in How Children Learn, p. 123.

in very detailed ways what activities would make sense for certain situations, with certain groups, with certain students, for certain books. My role, as Chapter IV will describe, was primarily that of listening as Sheila talked through what she wanted to do or what she would now do differently, with occasional questions or comments from what I had observed in the classroom that day. The focus of most of those later spring interviews was on the intricate choreography of group processes, as she learned, from watching and listening to students, what worked well and what seemed not to work so well.

What students themselves told me, in a series of small-group interviews,³ affirmed much of the work Sheila was trying to do. After so many years of operating only individually or competitively, however, they were, predictably, not at all convinced that the work in groups was what they wanted to be doing. Some absolutely preferred to work alone. Students carried into this new process their old fears:

first student: Because if there's people that you don't know as well, I think sometimes it's like intimidating, because you're afraid of what they're going to think of your idea, or whatever.

second student: Like they'll probably say, "Oh, that's stupid."
first student: Right. So it's harder,

³ Recorded in April-May 1989, December 1989, and March 1990.

that's harder to discuss with them. [December, 1989]

But others said,

third student: I think it's pretty good, 'cause you learn a lot from people.

fourth student: not so much just the teacher; your friends, too. [December, 1989]

Mostly, their objections, especially those of the formerly "top" students, were that the "less motivated" students ("somebody that can't do the work as good") were essentially hitchhiking off of their work. Unanimously, mostly for that reason, they resented the group grades, which, according to the students I interviewed in March of 1989, Sheila did not give. They were pleased that "she likes to recognize individual abilities":

student: I found myself doing everything, like rewriting the whole script and typing it all out, and everything like that, and she recognized that I did it by myself, and so the others didn't necessarily fail but they got graded for what they did and I got graded for what I did.

Liz: You thought that was fair.

student: Yeah, I thought that was fair.

Students in those later sessions indicated that Sheila seemed always to be aware of who in any group was prepared and who was not. This was the impression I recorded every time I observed in Sheila's classes. While students worked in their groups, she was quietly but actively eavesdropping and checking in. In our

conferences after class, I would ask her about things I had noticed as groups worked. Invariably, she too had already noticed everything I mentioned. She had also thought through and made decisions about each of those things.

In our interviews, the students were telling me that in classrooms where a teacher did not eavesdrop as intensely as Sheila did, or did not require individual freewriting, the "deadbeats" got away with their scams. The question of individual accountability plagued all the teachers who were trying forms of cooperative learning. It was an issue that might have been addressed, perhaps in another workshop. But the funds for that did not materialize, and, not seeing great interest, I was hesitant to volunteer my time.

By this time, Sheila had been reading about cooperative learning,⁴ and knew that heterogeneous groups are one of the advantages of that process in that they offer an effective mix of gifts, learning styles, points of view, abilities. Sheila recognized and enjoyed that diversity within her classrooms. Predictably, she found her 9th graders, who had come up through the junior high in heterogeneous groups, more willing to work with "just anyone" in a group than were some of the 12th graders,

⁴ David and Roger Johnson's Learning Together and Alone [1975] and Nancy Schniedewind and Ellen Davidson's Cooperative Learning, Cooperative Lives [1987].

who had not had significant heterogeneous experience. By all their reports, however, they had been learning from their work, individually and together, what I knew Sheila had hoped they would learn.

Heterogeneous grouping and cooperative learning were happening in some teachers' classes and not others, in some departments and not others. This created problems for the classes in which Sheila, and, tentatively, some other teachers, were trying to use small group methods. Heterogeneous grouping was incomplete because foreign language classes and advanced science and math classes effectively caused English and Social Studies to be re-tracked through scheduling. Even if that had not been the case, almost unconscious language and thought processes assuming superiority and inferiority were difficult to undo. According to Jessie, the 1990 senior class valedictorian whom I interviewed in late April of that year, a system that values verbal ability over other abilities is a kind of elitism that distresses even those who are successful in that system:

Jessie: I mean this sounds really weird but you judge people. There's the smart people and the not-so-smart people, and you basically judge them by how well they read or how well they write, and there's nothing about science.

Like this friend I was talking about, he gets D's in English all the time, but he's so smart in science and everything, but you don't even think about that, 'cause English and writing and reading is really what our whole

school system is based on, and that's not fair....

I feel guilty when I get better grades, because that's only one type of learning....I don't think it's fair that I get the grades that I do when some people study for a lot and they try so hard and they don't get anything.

Liz: How would you feel if there were no no grades?

Jessie: I don't know. I'd feel pretty insecure.

But where IS Everbody?

"The people I work with are very traditional thinkers"
[January 14, 1990]

It took Sheila almost the whole of two academic years to sort out what she could reasonably expect of her colleagues at Valley Central High School. Whether there had been actual misrepresentation of the number and identity of teachers committed to innovative teaching, or whether Sheila misunderstood Ernest's investment to be representative of everyone's investment, she clearly had expected her colleagues to be working as hard as she was to find ways to implement student-centered teaching. Of her department chair, Ralph, in particular, she had expected supportive feedback that would help her move forward toward realizing the vision she assumed they shared. She had assumed that the students would have been used to the kinds of innovative methods she was bringing in. But in our earliest dialogue [October 18, 1988], Sheila was in despair about

the students' resistance, the failure of her own expectations, and her disappointment about having no real allies in this work:

Sheila: It's hard to put the university ideas--and my own!--into practice when no one else is doing it!

Her alienation from her peers was not just in terms of what was going on in her classroom or theirs. It was not just a matter of professional differences. Personalities and styles were subject to subtle messages, to which Sheila felt vulnerable because of her other insecurities. Casual remarks about teachers who work hard and those who do not, as well as other judgments of appearances, judgments based on traditional assumptions, had, by the spring of 1989, begun to affect Sheila, who was working many 20-hour days:

Well, I was walking up and down the hall a lot today because I have kids in here [study hall],...so she was teasing me, but I really wanted to say, "Come to my house some night when I'm racking my brains over how to do it and how to do it better."

Comments made to her directly in the faculty lounge frequently felt personal, even sexist, and were very disturbing to Sheila. She knew how to handle inappropriate behavior in a classroom, but not how to react when adults behaved disrespectfully to each other, especially when she herself was the target.

The cause of some of the overt hostility that she sensed toward her may have come from a source that meant

well. In a phone call to me just before the new school year was to begin in 1989, Sheila said:

Ralph told Sally and the other teachers how much they're going to learn from me.

Not until we looked at that again at the end of the study did Sheila and I realize the extent to which his praise of her to other teachers might have turned out to have been a set up for her, although Ralph had not meant it to be. It was hard to see it that way then, because, as Ralph told me when I interviewed him that September, he and his staff felt really ready to try teaching in the new way. In that conversation, he indicated that both the students and the teachers would be struggling to undo the habits of traditional learning and teaching. However, the centrality of the body of knowledge did not yet seem open for negotiation for any of the teachers but Sheila, who had evolved to letting it go only with great difficulty the previous March, as will be described fully in Chapter IV.

Letting Go of Ownership of Content and Process

Sheila had been discovering that letting go of total ownership of a classroom was the way to walk through her fear of not being a "good teacher." As early as March 7, 1989, she said to me in a phone conversation:

I'm letting them fumble a lot...I try to keep reminding myself that when you do things

kids aren't used to, you have to be patient. Besides giving instructions, I don't want to speak. The realization that there can be more than one answer is important. The bad part is I want to know what they're talking about.

But the process of creating a cooperative learning situation was a struggle against her own habits, even physically:

See, when you're there I'm reminded I need to move people so they can hear each other think. So sometimes I remember to do it. Like they even knew when we're gonna make this move. Sometimes I remember to do it and sometimes I really don't...

They should have moved their bodies so that they were talking to each other. That was good. I felt like I had a headache when they were done.

Even though the work of setting up the environment for this kind of interaction was new for Sheila, her basic commitment to allowing the students the freedom of their own ideas was never an issue. In the March 31, 1989 interview she understood that having students confront controversial issues put her at risk of a parent phone call. She said, "I'm willing to take that risk," but she felt that that position made her, as she said, "different from a lot of other teachers." Other differences were not so easy to accept. In April 1989, Sheila offered tentatively,

This semester the kids have done some really interesting things, and I think that I'm being influenced to take more risks and not really care if Ralph thinks--

That spring, as well, she was beginning to accept that students at Valley Central High School would not--and should not be expected to--be giving her the affirmations that she had so loved at her previous school:

Number one, they can't do it. They don't know how to do it. And number two, that's not why we're here.

She saw, as of May 16, 1989, that the other side of students' telling her how great she was that they made her responsible for their bad grades, or other consequences of their own actions. The connection of one kind of emotional distance with the other made sense to her, as she heard herself describe to me an interaction with a student who had said, "I'm suspended because of you."

I said, "It's not because of me. It's because of you." And I believed that. I'm not agonizing over it. I would have, in the past. And that is too tiring. So I've given up one thing for the other.

Still, at the end of August, 1989 in a phone conversation, she was struggling again to figure out an appropriate balance in the relationship she characteristically set up with her students:

The person I am is why I teach this way...I want kids to know who I am. Teachers model life. My personality is that I'm accessible.

I'm willing to check in, and call people up. I worry sometimes that I'm too accessible, because I think it hurts my credibility.

The credibility she longed for had to do with the traditional role of high school teachers, impressive in their very inaccessibility. Therefore, moving herself away from center stage had an immediate effect on her own view of herself. Sheila realized, in June, 1989, that before the work of that year, she had been teaching by the force of her personality, rather than by clearly setting goals and thinking through how to achieve them:

I just thought, "We're gonna do these things. It'll be fun." I didn't really think about what they would learn, necessarily. I just wanted them to experience a whole bunch of different things.

So I learned a lot of things about how to think about school that I didn't think about before. I just did stuff. I was a real spontaneous teacher....

This year I think my kids think they've learned things. They've had to learn about what they think, and in the past kids looked into what I thought, and they liked that.

I had a kid write me a note once that said, "Miss M., you know everything," but she knew nothing. She wasn't ever thinking about herself or what she thought at all, and I was liking that she thought I knew everything. I was too busy liking that.

I see them completely differently than in the past. There's some way they had some connection to me, like they were a part of me. Now I see them as themselves, and I can be proud of where they are and let them have that pride, let them own it. I don't have to own it.

Sheila had decided by July 1, 1989 that one of the things she wanted to work on the next year would be the development of student responsibility by making time for

people in groups to be able to say to each other, "I did all the work today, you guys, and I don't like that." Understanding that the imbalance of responsibility was the chief reason students disliked being in small groups, she was looking forward to taking that step toward improvement of cooperation. In her statement of confidence in her ability to do that, it is possible to hear a prefiguring of what was to trouble her so much the next fall--the fact that she never got around to helping students master those social skills:

I really feel confident I'm good at working with kids on their relationships with one another.

A lot of times I think I shouldn't be teaching English. I should be doing some sort of--I don't know--interpersonal stuff, something. That's what I'm good at...

I think it's worth a try to look at, have them process their own work in the group and struggle with that, because it's going to be very uncomfortable for them.

It's not uncomfortable for me. It doesn't bother me to have kids talk about how they feel or to be angry. That's ok....

One of the things I want them to know is you don't have to like each other to work well in a group. What you do is you have to respect each other. Everyone will have something to offer the group. No one should be a parasite, and how can we keep these things from happening?

"What are you going to do? Make a list and I'll come back and help you with it, but you figure it out." Because that's life, isn't it, Liz? [July 1, 1989]

Although feeling she had to prepare students for what they would face next was still an issue for Sheila in November of 1989, she was struggling to claim, even then, the value for students of a fully student-centered approach as a legitimate alternative to traditional approaches to that preparation. From a former colleague whose work was very much like her own, Sheila got excited by the radical idea of giving up a book half-way through. She had the courage to implement the idea although her discussion of it with me sounded as if she was working on convincing herself that what she was doing was good educational practice:

Whatever happens with The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter is what's going to happen, and I'm going to start on Monday and I'm just going to see where we go with it.

And if we decide half way through the book we're done, we want to stop reading it, that's what we'll do....that's the way I'm going to do it because that makes sense to me....I have to do what is going to be good for the class....

I need to be the kind of teacher that I know that I am. I don't even think of myself as a teacher when I think of myself that way. I just think of myself as a person engaged in learning with my students.

I sometimes make a lot of mistakes. Sometimes I do things really right. So when kids are done they think "wow! I really did this! This is great! I get something!"

I really had fun today and I was thinking, isn't this funny? When I just back off they're working happily along and I'm happy and we're not like creating any literary masterpieces, but so what?

They just did it. But I didn't really bother them. If they wanted my help they asked for it. But they were just working on it.

It's kind of funny, how I feel--when I back off they--they--I think they feel that it's ok to do it their own way, I guess is what I'm saying.

How Should Students Read?

The difference between himself and Sheila on the issue of literary vs. personal response to literature was something Ralph acknowledged in September of 1989. Neither of them, however, anticipated how pivotal a difference it would become during their collaboration. In describing one of their early team-taught classes, in which he and Sheila had shared their own response papers to model what they were asking their students to do, Ralph said:

I think what they found out is that they were asking the same questions that we were, which was interesting. The second thing that they found out is that people respond in different ways. Sheila responded quite differently than how I responded, except in basic ideas that we all could agree on....

Sheila tended to approach it from the feminist point of view, which was of interest to her, and also from the theme and development of theme.

I tended to approach it in relation to works that I have been teaching at the 12th grade level: to Faustus, Romeo and Juliet--so I was making connection with other works and how the theme was being carried through and how it reminded me of those themes.

Also I tended to respond to it in the development of allegory and the use of language, which tended to be my interest.

In spite of Sheila's conviction that reader response was better preparation for students' independent engagement with a piece of literature than the traditional literary criticism approach--collecting information for plot, character, setting, theme--the pull of Ralph's authority made her feel that she was "supposed to do it that way." [November 13, 1990] Whereas in our September conversation Ralph had expressed interest in what the students would come up with on their own, when I interviewed him again on November 13 he was talking about giving students guidelines: "These are important points you need to think about." Sheila still trusted that the students could generate their own "important points."

By September Sheila was working on herself to talk less, engage less, give the discussion over to the students, especially when there were several groups all reading different books. But Ralph was saying, "I have a feeling I'm going to be very lonely in there." Sheila had been at that stage of loneliness, of feeling left out and missing the conversation, many months before. She had dealt with her tendency to jump in, to fill up the silence, to dominate the talk. Now she saw herself facilitating students' talking to each other. Ralph had

not yet figured out how to share in the pleasure of intellectual exchange without being directly involved.

He said:

In the Great Books class I guess I had a vision of discussing what the philosophies are, about literature, about the great thinkers, or what makes a certain writer important, or that kind of thing. By each being individuals (and reading different books) that doesn't happen, and I can't generate a discussion. [November 13, 1989]

In his role as chair, apart from classroom teacher, however, Ralph noted that some of the other members of his department were even less comfortable than he was with the change. His strategy, with the teachers, was to let them discover for themselves what the meaning of their own discomfort was:

It's the one person that's had a problem all along with the power struggle between students and teachers. She feels very much the need to control. And what she has done is she's outlined everything for them, exactly what they're to know and so forth.

The consequences have been interesting, though. Out of her class--she started with 15 students--I had a request from three students to drop....And at this point we're just letting them change. Hopefully what will happen is that at the end of the quarter the teacher will realize that there's no one in the class except those students who like to memorize.

He was not yet willing to give that kind of discovery learning over to his students.

The difference that emerged out of the daily contact between Ralph and Sheila was that Sheila was

talking primarily about process, and Ralph, in terms of his classroom, at least, was saying very clearly that his interest was end products. The issue became that of having the seniors do a formal paper. Ralph's view was that the formal paper was of primary significance.

Sheila was more concerned, in mid-October, 1989, with what she perceived as the students not really sharing, once they had "collected information." She said:

To me, the formal paper is just one piece. But I really start to feel I'm not on the right track. Ralph says his groups are fantastic, and mine are not. I have a lot of anxiety. This morning, I had mega anxiety: what if they're right and I'm wrong?

Even if the other teachers were right and she was wrong, a further anxiety was that she felt she did not know how to do it well, either way. Ralph was giving worksheets to students in his section of their course [November 12, 1989], but Sheila said,

I don't know if I can decide what the kids need to know when they compare. His framework doesn't make sense to me. I would like them to define the framework. But they can't, yet--when they get together and talk about the book, they don't do anything.

I'm not sure what they're supposed to be doing in their groups. The way the course was set up made group work really hard. If I could slow it down--they could work with one other person, instead of large groups.

Distance vs. Engagement

It was December 1, 1989, when Sheila said to me in both despair and resignation, "I think the people I work

with are very traditional teachers." She meant that even if sometimes students talked with each other in their classrooms, most of the teachers were, and seemed comfortable with remaining, content-centered and teacher-centered. If the use of groups was a surface change rather than a deep change, her professional values were not fully shared. Once she could name that, it seemed, she could think about separating herself from the choices other teachers made, and focus on meeting her own standards. Living there daily was not easy for her:

I just feel like we're really different, and I know that they hired me because of those differences that I now feel sort of penalized for. I feel sort of penalized. Someone said to me after a faculty meeting, "Oh, you always rock the boat. Why don't you just shut up?"

She had thought a lot about just shutting up from early into her first year at Valley Central. As soon as she began to see that her style of directly engaging in difficult issues was not the norm, that her concerns were not the same as those expressed by most of the rest of the faculty, she realized that it would be a lot easier not to say what was on her mind, especially outside of the classroom. But it was inconsistent with her vision for her to retreat into the safety of the distancing academic posture, and it troubled her that so many of her colleagues seemed to do that.

The students were aware of the differences between Sheila and traditional teachers. They characterized one of the differences in physical terms, both metaphorically and actually:

first student: She really gets around to see us. She makes a point of that every single day.

Liz: And you feel she knows you pretty well? She's not off in her judgments?

first student: No.

second student: For someone to be able to, you heard her in class today. She knows exactly what everybody is reading. She knows where they are.

third student: Unlike some teachers, they just like stand up there and they teach, but they're standing far away.

second student: They're teaching everybody, not just you.

third student: Yeah, and you're just supposed to take it in, and stuff.

fourth student: and if you don't, you don't.

second student: If you need help or something she's not somebody you're afraid to ask. [December, 1989]

As Chapter II shows, Sheila worked most carefully to make the classroom exactly the kind of safe space the students were describing. She was giving students choices. She was managing the classroom in such a way that she didn't have to be combative with students or have them be in competition with each other. She thought carefully about whether or not it would be useful to

give a grade each time there was a set of papers. Usually, she just wrote comments, often personal response comments, especially on drafts. Students reported to me that they really appreciated how she read their papers. They felt she really heard them.

When the focus was on the students' proving that they knew the content, Sheila felt, there was no room for their dealing with text beyond a surface level. Proving knowledge was what Sheila rejected, for herself and for her students. She did not want to be "the expert," herself:

I could care less if kids think I know everything. I don't know everything. I don't even want to claim to know everything.
[December, 1989]

Nor did she want her students to have to try to be experts, or at least "get it right," in order to get a top grade. It troubled her that grades seemed to be the focus at Valley Central:

[The school] is not really committed to having kids think about things: it's having them get the right answers. And I think this is what some teachers despise about me, is that I don't know what the right answer is for interpretation of literature. [December, 1989]

Whatever it might mean for traditional teachers to be "prepared" for a class, for Sheila it meant:

having a comfort level when we do a book together, so I can be as aware as (the students) are, so I know how far to push something. I usually review the night before.

She would not be satisfied with having students merely "collect information" for themselves any more than she was with having them attend to a teacher who had collected information for them and was telling them how to think about it. Her aim was on a different level:

When you have the information, what are you going to do with it?...You collect the information and then you take an action on the information. [January 7, 1989]

What I noticed was, give them the opportunity to take the material, but let them make it make sense to them. The best stuff comes out. Instead of saying, "Do it this way." [July, 1989]

Giving Up the Need for Approval

At the very least, if they could not be models or even allies for her, Sheila had not expected her colleagues to undermine her teaching. But that was what she felt was sometimes happening. It got so that small interactions took on almost symbolic power. Although she did not yet feel she could directly say anything about her discomfort to the teacher in whose room she taught, that teacher's frequent coming in to water her plants or shuffle papers during Sheila's class felt like a devaluing of the work that was going on, however informal the interactions appeared. If Sheila had felt confident enough about her teaching, she would have spoken to the teacher and they would have understood each other. In fact, if she had felt confident, she

would not have minded anyone's coming and going, especially during the time when small groups were comfortably buzzing. But Sheila felt her position in the building to be so precarious, she did not even dare ask for the freedom she felt she needed from even that much exposure.

What Sheila was experiencing as reactions from her colleagues was quite predictable, according to the research, as was suggested in Chapter I and will be discussed in Chapter V. But Sheila did not have the benefit of a wider vantage point to buoy her up when she started working at Valley Central. Even if she had, her original expectations of her colleagues had been that they too would be actively engaged in "innovative teaching methods" (August, 1990). So she questioned herself, especially when things weren't working in the classroom as she had expected them to work. She said,

Ralph gives little quizzes, and it's funny, with my juniors, sometimes I feel like I should do that, because I know some don't read. [March 31, 1989]

That was her own disapproval of herself. What she also saw was active disapproval by other teachers of the ways that did work for her:

Those are the kinds of stories I tell because they make sense to kids. Kids understand that. They know what it would feel like to be left out of things. But I don't think the other teachers like that I do that. I'm positive that they don't, because they

have criticized that in other people. [March 31, 1989]

In the midst of a long section of our conversation in which she described the wonderful work her students were doing, she interrupted herself to say:

I'm worried that when they go to somebody else, they'll be asked to trace the plot line, and they won't be able to do that. [May 9, 1989]

What Sheila ultimately did to protect herself from becoming debilitated by the disapproval of her colleagues was to stop talking with them about what she was doing in her classroom. On December 30, 1989 she said to me on the phone:

I need to hang around with people who believe what I do is right--kids making all the connections themselves, not me telling them "the answers."

"Easy"

Sheila felt like an outcast at Valley Central High School during the 1988-89 school year. Frequently, she would say during that year, especially that fall, "It would just be easier to do it their way," "maybe I should...", "I would just like to fit in," "I don't know." Her doubts magnified in the fall of 1989 during the close collaboration she and Ralph had decided to do with their senior classes. Early in August, before the school year started, she wrote in her journal that she was already having anxiety dreams about school. While

she was eager to try out the exciting things they had planned together, and while she had felt a complete mutuality in that planning, her anxiety seemed to increase with the chronic worry, "Will I be good enough?" This time her interactions and her choices would be under the daily scrutiny of her chair, as well as subjected to my regular intrusion on her autonomy. With regard to me, she was afraid she would let me down. But the fear was more immediate with Ralph. As soon as the semester started he began to criticize their class of seniors, all of whom had been with her as juniors. As early as September 6, 1989, her journal cries out,

He says their writing skills are weak!
Should I take responsibility? Kids aren't
prepared! This makes me crazy!

She was very hard on herself that first week of school in 1989, knowing that she wasn't living up to her professional ideals for herself:

I talk too much. I say and tell too many answers. I don't know how to set it up so they do the work. I don't know how to set up the class so I am less important and they are the most important.

I want them to believe I am a good teacher. Sometimes their approval is really important to me. This is tiresome..

I talk too much and have a reputation for it....I feel like a terrible teacher, like I can't get it right, like I make too many mistakes. Is it true in other professions that people feel so inadequate? Some days I feel like I'll never get it right.

Within two weeks, an issue arose that escalated her doubts about herself. Teachers, especially Ralph, began telling her that the students thought she was easy. The suggestion was that the teachers also thought so, implying that an easy teacher is not a good teacher. How could she understand what was meant by "easy," and what she should do about it? She took it as deep criticism. Was she not rigorous, did the students not work as hard in her classes as they were expected to in other classes? Was it true? And was it bad? She tried to think it through in her journal:

Sometimes I feel outraged that my classes are perceived as ways out for kids. Is it so bad for a kid to feel good in a class? Does that mean they aren't working or learning?

By October 1 of 1989, Sheila's confusion had intensified. Ralph was still continually saying that the seniors she had taught the year before "can't write; they have no skills." She took his criticism as a personal attack on her teaching, and was feeling terribly vulnerable. What if it was true? In a phone call, she directly asked me for help of the sort that I could give:

It would be helpful for you to observe other teachers at Valley Central so I can test my perceptions. Maybe I'm doing it wrong. It comes back to me that I'm not giving them anything. The way I do it, when they're on to something, I say, "I think you're on to something."

I think--I don't know--I get nervous. What I think I want them to do when they read is think about what's going on in the story, starting with themselves....

Sometimes I feel uncomfortable, because [the students] feel they're not getting anything. I can live with it, but it makes me very nervous.

I want kids to feel challenged, stretched, but without pressure. They feel it's easy. They say, "I can relax." Maybe they should be scared and nervous like they are with other teachers.

It's not helpful to compare myself to others, but I care about how they perceive me. And I really care about how the kids see what they're learning. Ralph is already saying to me that I'm too easy. I felt defensive. I need for someone whose ego is not involved to give me feedback. The sooner you could come, the better.

Ten days later, Sheila was writing similarly despairing thoughts in her journal:

Someone walked into my 12th grade class and said (the kids were all in groups, talking loudly, excitedly, about books they were reading): "WHAT A ZOO!" I take these comments to heart, and I wonder whether or not it is a zoo-?? Is it possible to have co-operation in a competitive society?

Is it possible for kids to learn in new ways?

On October 12, she again expressed the contradiction she felt. Even though she had evidence that students could learn in new ways, she wondered if she was doing them a disservice. Should she disengage from constantly comparing herself to others, which was such a disabling direction for her? Should she, for the students' sake,

do it the "regular" way? Her self-doubt, as expressed in that journal entry, was extremely painful:

Can the old ways still work in new times? Can we say that having all students together is really beneficial? Can we say that in not giving them the answers they will find their own way? Was I barely functioning last year to teach kids? Did they learn anything? Why do they seem so regressed this year? Why does it matter so desperately what kids think?

Can I trust myself? Can I believe that what I do is good and right? Will "they" tell us in 10 years that all of this is BS, that it doesn't work this way, that we should do it like it was done in the beginning? I'm scared that because I don't project myself as the expert, that I end up having no credibility. I doubt myself and my intelligence....

And perhaps I must be satisfied to be a lonely voice, a lone voice, a different voice...in a different voice.

....It means changing the way adults and kids think about and "do" school. Is this possible?

...Can we really march to the sound of a different drummer, or is this just an illusion?

Four days later, I sat in as Sheila and Ralph "debriefed" about the course they were teaching together. They spoke about an English department meeting in which Sheila had felt criticized by some colleagues for using the reader response notebook. The other English teachers were saying that reader response did not work for them: that is, it did not get at the knowledge they wanted the students to gain. Sheila heard

an implicit criticism of the method. Again, she felt personally attacked:

What I felt was that I really believe in my heart that the response notebook is a tool, it's a good tool. But if it's misused it won't be as successful.

Still feeling shaky, she tried to check out her perceptions with Ralph. She had taken the risk of sharing her students' response notebooks with the department, fully expecting that everyone else would see, as she did, that they were beautiful products. It troubled her deeply that "they didn't appreciate them." It was hard for her to confront directly the reality that what she valued was not valued by her colleagues:

What I was concerned about was if my perceptions or my expectations are different, then--I was just concerned about it.

Days after my visit, she told me on the phone of the seniors she and Ralph were teaching together, and whom he thought of as unprepared,

When these kids came to me [as juniors], they all wrote the same thing.

My goal is to have them engaged. If that's my goal, then I'm successful. If my goal is to prepare them for something else, I'm not successful....

I value the product, too, but the way they do that is more important than what they end up with.

She could see that other people in the department were trying very hard to act upon their decision to practice cooperative learning, as they understood it.

And she knew that she herself was still so new at it that she could not provide them the support she knew they needed. Just after our cooperative learning workshop, Sheila spoke with admiration of Sally, the member of the English department who had had the most years of teaching:

I'm not sure she knows what to do with this group thing, but she really thinks a lot about it, and she's trying to figure out a way to have it be different. [April 25, 1989]

Sheila understood objectively that the others in the department were probably venting on her the frustration they were feeling when things that were so unfamiliar did not seem to go well in their classrooms. But it did not seem fair. She was vulnerable enough to feel "stupid" because the other English teachers "already know what they want the kids to find,...and I don't always know what I want them to find":

It gets confusing. I get confused about what my job is. I told my class how well they're doing, and Ralph said, "don't tell them." [April 25, 1989]

It seemed to be in regard to the issue of her close relationship with the students that she felt most deeply accused. It confused and hurt her when Ralph started saying that she was being like a mother with them. She heard a clear implication that in his conception of the role of teacher, "mothering" was inappropriate. For his part, he told her, he refused to be their parent; he

was not going to hold their hands. His statements made her very defensive, again, because she cherished the nurturing she did in the classroom. Her accessibility to them was what she felt made the space safe for them to grow. She recognized that she was asking students to do risky work, academically and socially. Thus she felt it was her job to be there alongside them as they did that work, encouraging them, believing in them, knowing when to nag them and when to leave them alone:

supporting them until they were sure enough to do it completely without her. Was that holding their hands? If so, why was hand-holding inappropriate in a high school?

The confusing relationship with Ralph and with her other colleagues in the department made Sheila so doubt her perceptions of her own teaching that she felt personally vulnerable to the criticism she heard in reaction to her teaching methods. During my October, 1989 visit to the school, I listened while Sheila and Ralph talked about the recent department meeting. He was trying to affirm how hard the mandated change toward heterogeneous grouping and cooperative learning felt to everyone in the department. She would acknowledge that, because it was also very difficult for her, but she wanted some recognition for what was, in fact, going on in the transforming classrooms:

Sheila: I would balk at a kid saying we're not doing anything. We're doing an enormous amount of work!

Ralph: Teachers perceive other teachers as doing nothing because they're not doing what they do. Even I used to think that way. It's part of not knowing, of never knowing what each other does....

Your perception of the tone at the meeting--we were exploring, but you thought we were criticizing you. It's easier for you to do group work. You're younger. We buy into it when we see it work.

But what was it about Sheila that made her "buy into it" without having seen it work? And if she was the only one doing it, how could she not take their comments personally, especially when it was true, even after so much effort and time, that much of what she wanted to do wasn't quite working yet for her, either? The difference seemed to be that Sheila was willing to struggle until it did work, perhaps because (as indicated in Chapter II) she believed that it could:

It was like, oh, god, well, what if they aren't reading? Maybe I should give quizzes. And then I thought, I can have them--if I'm worried about them there are things I can do in terms of writing.

Their notebooks certainly serve as one indicator. I don't know. It was just kind of funny. It was a weird feeling.

By November 5 of 1989, all of the criticism had begun to exhaust Sheila. What she told me on the phone sounded very much like what she had said the year before:

I really feel like I run the risk of becoming like the other people in the building, just to survive--give up the struggle, look the other way. I said to Ralph, "this is too hard."

When I went back to the school on November 13, Sheila had gone deeper into herself about the difference between what she was asking of her students as readers, and what the other members of the department were asking:

I'm really scared. I'm scared but I'm not giving them the guidelines, but I think they can say, "ok, let's look at the character....That's what I think is the reason why we read, and why we teach English, teach literature to kids.

I understand, however, that that is not why other people teach it.

And so that's my dilemma, because I don't want them to not be prepared to be literary, but I want them to engage as a human being with a novel that is presenting other human beings' lives.

"I Thought I Had To"

By the time she wrote in her journal on her October 17, 1989, Sheila was ready to cave in. The handwriting in that entry is tight and small, compared to the wild, swift, exploring, wide-ranging writing of the earlier entries. The lines look like a poem--determined, almost careful, and desperately sad:

I have decided that I am not a good teacher
 The top students don't like me
 They don't like groups
 They don't like heterogeneous groups
 They want to have Ralph lead them in great

philosophical discussion
 I feel ignorant and unable to get a class to
 do the kind of thinking that he can get
 them to do--
 I wish I could be more like Ralph--
 I am so worried about being a bad teacher
 I want kids to think I'm good and smart--what
 I think happens is that kids think I'm
 nice--but don't really learn much from
 me-
 This feels shitty.

Sheila told me on the phone [November 8, 1989] that she
 felt Ralph was blaming her "for our students not doing
 better." Now the issue was not just their writing
 skills, but that they "can't analyze a novel":

He blames me, and I blame me....I'm so
 confused. I feel he's telling me I have to do
 it his way or they won't learn anything.. I
 feel he's saying if I'm not like him I'm no
 good....I feel really bad--I had expected I
 would work with Ralph and with these kids.
 Kids say, "You'll learn so much from him
 because he knows everything."

So she began to require her students to do a formal
 essay, and to spend their groups collecting information
 on plot, character, setting, theme. But she was not
 happy:

I'm so frustrated, I sent a resume some-
 where, and they're not schools. [November 11,
 1989]

Nor were the students happy. When I visited on November
 10, she described the changes:

Sheila:...I haven't been fun with the
 seniors. I've been all business-like, and
 they're not used to that....So today I just
 relaxed with them. I think it was like
 everyone was breathing a sigh of relief.

Liz: "She's back."

Sheila: Yeah, and they've known it. They even said to me, "you're becoming just like him."

She could know that, but two days later my intervention helped her catch herself about to make photocopies for her class of a worksheet that Ralph had designed, for a book that his class was reading but hers was not!

The faculty's dominant attitude of mistrust of students was also affecting her. A week after my visit, she told me on the phone that she was afraid of using my suggestion that she put students into stage one jigsaw groups [Aronson, 1978]--checking in with others who had the same assignment, to make sure they felt prepared--before taking on the teaching task of the stage two jigsaw groups. Her fear was that students would just hitchhike. She saw only that outcome, which was of course possible. Because she was being drawn into the traditional mindset about student laziness, she did not look at the positive outcomes that normally she would have been the first to see: 1) that hitchhikers would at least have to perform in their second stage groups; 2) they would discover what it feels like when peers care to find out what you think and how you back it up; and 3) that with the preliminary step, individuals become "experts" partly by having the chance to check their perceptions with others, so careless reasoning does not go unchecked. She understood intellectually

that scuttling the first step allows the teacher to know who did the work and who did not, but it shortchanges the process of student thinking. Clearly her colleagues' traditional deep mistrust of students "getting away with something" was affecting her professional judgment.

As of a phone conversation on December 17, 1989, she was still thinking about giving up teaching, because she felt her integrity had been challenged, and she had her limits:

I'm worried that I'm becoming like the other teachers, focusing on unimportant things because that's what they're interested in. When I got together with my friend Sharon I realized how far I've moved from my own vision of teaching. It scares me.

I let them define me, and that's making me nuts. I'm discouraged by how I've succumbed to the pressure of the group. I don't feel I have enough touch with people who are doing right in their teaching....I have the fear I'll become like the place where I work....

I want to be accepted. I'm tired of being out there, all by myself. I want to fit in. That means I'll have to compromise. That may mean I have to leave the profession.

I have to live with the criticism, and I don't know if I'm strong enough. I don't want to be working against. It's really tiring. But I haven't succumbed to interpreting literature for kids.

Nor did she succumb to total despair. When I visited her at the school the next day, December 18, 1989, she was already understanding that what she had done, in

becoming someone other than herself, had not been right for kids, and she was deciding to reclaim her own way:

Sheila: I can redeem next semester. I mean, I can look forward to that and say, ok, what I really started to do, that's what--ok, what is the most important thing to me?

The most important thing to me is to have them begin to talk to one another, so how am I going to set that up? If that's my goal, how will I set that up?

And I can do that. I know how to do it. So that's what I want to focus on, instead of worrying that when they go to another teacher their skills won't be good enough and they'll be punished and I'll be punished.

They might be punished, but they're going to have to deal with it. And they will: they'll find a way to make it through, and they can blame me. If they want to blame me they will. I mean it's ok even.

...I felt like this year I had betrayed them.

Liz: By making them do the formal essay, or by not having prepared them?

Sheila: By making them do it.

Liz: So let me ask this. Why did you cave in and do it?

Sheila: Because I'm scared, because I was worried, and I thought I was supposed to.

The Need for Positive Feedback

What Sheila had needed all along was validation:

I really thought what my students were doing was good, but sometimes I'm just not sure. Like I would like for someone else to say, "This is good." [November 4, 1989]

In particular, that "someone else" from whom she needed affirmation was Ralph. But maybe he could not give it:

He should be boosting me up, because he's the chair, but I don't think he can, because he's struggling with it, himself. [November 4, 1989]

By our mid-November conversations, however, Sheila was beginning to accept two things: 1) that it was not Ralph's way to give praise, and 2) he was beginning to do some things her way in his own classroom, after watching her. That imitation might have to be enough affirmation for her.

She was beginning to claim her own ways of doing things, even though they were very different from his ways. She was not yet there in November, 1989:

Liz: But you're not trusting this way of--even after the kids came up with what they came up with today?

Sheila: I'm still scared. The whole thing makes me really nervous 'cause I think, See, the kids will talk to each other and the kids in his class will say, "We're doing this" and the kids in my class will say, "We're not doing that. Ms. M., the goof ball, she's not doing anything."

She was afraid of Ralph's saying of yet another class that she was not giving them what they needed. She could not handle that criticism, because part of her believed it was true.

At the end of that month, she was telling me on the phone that she had decided what she needed:

The less I talk with other people, the better. I don't want to engage with them--it keeps me sane. I'm avoiding setting myself up. I'm not going to feed into their negativity about the kids....

It would be really helpful if I had other people observing me.

All this time, however, it didn't occur to her to ask Ernest to be that supportive observer. When I came to visit on December 1, part of her was still tied in to the agenda set by traditional teachers:

I thought, this is really good. So I don't know. But I mean, if one of them were watching the lesson, I'm not sure they would see it that way.

I always think, well, I should teach grammar, and why aren't I teaching grammar? I just don't think it's that important. What I've read is that you have to use students' own writing to teach grammar.

Liz: So then why do you think you should be teaching grammar?

S: Well, because they're doing it. [laughs]) Kids like doing those exercises. They really think that's learning something.

There seemed to be no one in the building who was prepared to give positive feedback on the kind of teaching that valued such skills as learning to listen. As Sheila saw it, people seemed to be talking only about how great their own classes were. That was not helpful to a teacher who knew that her own classes were in process, but not yet "great." For the first year and a half, she allowed herself to be intimidated by their talk. Then, out of her own need to distance herself

from caring about what they said, she had begun to look at the realities and the feelings behind those postures. She also began to realize that the way the institution of schooling is set up, other teachers also needed, but never got, what she knew she needed but never got:

We're desperate for someone to say,
"You're doing a really good job," because no
one does. [March 5, 1990]

Ironically, once she started letting go of expecting encouragement for her work within the building, Sheila began to be aware that there might be unspoken support, though not in the way she had wished for it to appear. She told me in mid-December about a department meeting in which she had longed for someone to stand up with her in public. After the meeting, Jane, another English teacher, had quietly let her know that she agreed with the stands Sheila was taking and that she herself was experimenting with methods such as Sheila was described. Another source of support was my summary of her students' conversations with me that same week. From that she could hear that she was getting through to students with what she cared about, including having them feel that they would be well prepared for wherever they were going next.

It was obvious to both of us, however, that she was distressed, and that she was distancing from her former self and from her students. She was deliberately

forgetting about teaching as relationship. The students had noticed, and let her know. Some were frankly angry about her having turned traditional on them. Others saw perhaps more. Sheila reported that one student told her with some hostility as well as concern: "You don't smile as much this year." Sheila knew what the cause was: "I'm painfully aware of his [Ralph's] disapproval." It was hard for her to separate her teaching from her identity, hard not to take the criticism personally. But by early December, 1989 she was beginning to work on herself about that:

What I've been thinking is that if you need to speak on this issue or you need to do things a certain way, then accept that people aren't going to like it. That's a given, and you keep going.

One of the things that helped her, she told me on the phone in mid-December, was hearing herself back on the tape of one of our conversations. "I have to own what I am," she said. But it was not going to be easy:

I've been trying to change to be like other people. It would be easier. Sometimes I get tired. I want the conflict to be over. I always use other people as my point of reference, but sometimes those people aren't the best choices for me. They don't value what I value.

At the end of December, in another phone call, she said,

I let them [other faculty] set the terms, if I care about or worry about whether they like me. I have to learn not to do that.

She was still reacting, in early January, to the pressure of how other people were doing things:

I think Valley Central is making me feel like I ought to be a certain way, and I think I've been really influenced by that. I mean in [the previous teaching job], no one really cared about those kids.

So I didn't feel pressure. I only felt pressure to my students. I felt responsible for them, to make them feel good. That was my priority.

Here, I've been phobic about skills. But there, I didn't open a grammar book once in two years. But they gained confidence that they could do things, and that was really important to me.

Now I feel like I'm supposed to be doing all this other stuff and preparing them for this test....I mean I never really thought about that before. And then I didn't lose my confidence. I think when you lose your confidence, forget it.

At the end of January, 1990, there was a different tone in Sheila's description of how she perceived things:

When kids around here say I'm "easy," I really am coming to believe that what they mean is that I'm easy to be with...that I listen to what they say. They probably don't think that anything great is happening to them. But I see that it is.

Once she had decided for herself that "easy" meant "the pressure is off," she could accept being different from Ralph:

They're not doing worksheets...like Ralph's class, but that's ok. It's really ok. How they perceive it is going to be second to how I perceive it. He faults me for that. He

said, "Kids think you're easy, and you don't give them worksheets like I do."

And I said, "You're right. I'm going to give them directions on how I want them to go about reading something, and for some of the 9th graders I might have to give them directed questions, because they might struggle a lot with comprehension."

Besides that, that's all I need to do. They can do the rest of the work themselves, and if they think that that makes my class easier, that's fine. That's all well and good. That's the way that it goes." [January, 1990]

After that late January conversation, I heard only occasional references to how other people did things or how they reacted to her doing things. She appeared to have let go of needing the approval of others--any others. Certainly she had let go of what had almost been an obsession with peer approval, almost since the beginning of her teaching at Valley Central, but increasingly during her semester of team-teaching with Ralph. She expressed occasional worry about how her choices would be perceived, but mainly our conversations looked closely at whatever she was working on at the time in her particular classrooms. These conversations were fewer in number than during the fall semester of 1989, when she had initiated phone calls and extra meetings. With regard to Ralph, by the end of April, 1990, she had come to terms with the difference in their approaches:

He and I are a good balance, because he will give them all of that, and I guess for some of them they need it. But they will get it from him. I'm not worried.

And by June, 1990, she had decided to take his course at the university, because she knew there was still a lot she could learn from him.

Reclaiming What She Knows

December of 1989 had been a very low point for Sheila. She felt overwhelmed by the contradictions between what she'd been led to believe other teachers were doing and what she found them actually doing. She was tired of the struggle, feeling that she had so little "resistance to people's behaviors" right then:

Sheila: I know if they cut my job at the end of the year I wouldn't look for another teaching job, Liz. I know it. I just feel like I couldn't.

I don't know how long I can do it. I worry about that because I feel that I--I think that if I were stronger, I could do it.

Liz: What do you mean by "stronger"?

Sheila: If I could really say to myself, and believe, that what I do is fine. It might not be the best. It might not be the worst, but it's fine. This is the way I am. Instead of always fighting with myself.

I think that's just the tiring part, actually, I don't know. I'm not really sure about what to do about that piece, 'cause I think that's the piece that needs the most.

The other people aren't going to change. They're going to do things the way that they do them, and I'm the one that needs to say, "I

don't want to be like them." So I have to--I have to accept me.

By May, 1990, she had gotten there. In fact, she had begun to bounce back fast. By January, 7, 1990, once she was again teaching on her own, she was on her way to claiming her own values, working toward them, and feeling that she wanted to:

I would like a couple more years at Valley Central, because I feel like some of these things I want to try out and work on them a little more, just to see if in fact I believe they can work...

In the January 26 visit, four days into a new semester, with a new set of classes, she was really happy. "They get it!" I asked her about a certain group of three girls who sat in a line rather than face-to-face, and she described her thinking thus:

Well, Carol was one of the people that was having some trouble. I asked them if they would let her come work with them, and I figured let them do it the way that they want.

Even if they don't talk to each other or include Carol, just sitting with them she's with the group. Let's just see how it goes for today....

I'm a little nervous about it because one of the things that scares me the most about teaching is when kids feel hurt or bad in the classroom. On Tuesday people felt really badly, and I felt I needed to do a little bit of repairing there.

Of another class I noticed, "Look at how comfortable they are!" She replied with pleasure:

They're just really nice. See, that's what I find. I actually think that's my strong

suit. I have to remember always to work from it.

It's that I'm real easy for kids to be with. And so I can avoid any kind of conflict or ill feeling if I just work from that.

I've decided that I have to do this my way. It's the only way I'll be happy about it. Whatever anyone else thinks, let them think it.

What had changed was her focus:

I guess when I was busy worrying about whether Ralph was approving of me, I was kind of worrying about my relationship with him instead of my relationship with my students, which is really what I'm good at.

Like if I focus on how much I like them, even though I work hard, it's easy; it's fun! I have fun with them. But when I was worrying about that other stuff it made me so tense I felt like I wasn't really enjoying it as much. I do this 'cause I like them!

And they appeared to know that. Even when they were almost unanimously not enjoying the group work, they trusted Sheila, because they felt how much she cared for them. In fact, what may have been the most difficult part of knowing how Ralph disliked the senior class was not so much that she felt his criticism of them to be a direct criticism of her preparation of them, but that she liked them, and she wanted others to appreciate them as she did.

By March 5, 1990, Sheila seemed to be sure of her choices as she separated herself cleanly from the role of traditional teacher:

What I realize is that even though I might want to change the persona I can't. It doesn't work, because I want to enjoy the day. That's how I do it.

More often, now, she was planning to trust the students, and her structuring of activities, when she went into the classroom:

I'm just going to play it by ear, actually. Like with my 10th grade there's a bunch of different things I could do, but I'm just going to see what happens.

So it might be that they spend most of the time writing, which would be ok. So I don't know. We'll see how it goes.

The description above sounds different from the unplanned spontaneity that she said characterized her early teaching, though clearly that early experience prefigured this one. This time what happened in a class would not depend on her alone, but she was feeling comfortable rather than terrified about that fact. She still was saying "I don't know," but the tone was very different from the frequent "I don't know" that meant "I'm uncomfortable," or "Maybe I'm not sure," or "I don't know how," that characterized the March, 1989 dialogue (seven instances of "I don't know") and especially the April, 1989 dialogue (sixteen instances). In early May, "I don't know" appeared eight times, but it was more than balanced by "maybe" (fifteen instances), as in "maybe we could." "Maybe" appeared frequently again in the mid-May interviews, in connection

with "probably," "some possibilities," and "one way we could've done it...." Again on December 1, 1989, however, "I don't know" reappeared in the original, unsure tone (six instances in two pages), and again in the January 7 dialogue (five instances in four pages). In mid-February, she was saying "It's hard," twenty-seven times in forty-one pages! She was also saying, "So we just have to work at that." By the March 5, 1990 interview, she said "I don't know," or "I'm not sure yet," eight times, with the "yet" signaling movement toward optimism. In the same interview, "That's interesting!" appears nine times. She could wait:

I can shift around...I don't know. I'm not real sure yet. I'm going to wait and see what happens today. I do that a lot. I kind of wait and just feel out what the best thing might be.

For Sheila, the new semester's autonomy within her classes was partly responsible for her changed attitude. She had expected that would be so, and throughout the difficult fall semester she worked to remind herself that it would soon be over and she would get a chance to start anew, as herself:

I feel like I made a commitment...to having my class be the way I know that it can be, which is very comfortable, very easy, very happy, and not a lot of stress. Which I really think is very important for children.

Here, on March 20, 1990, she was claiming the word "easy" that previously she had so despised.

Jacob

Sometime during the difficult semester when Sheila was struggling against defining her own work in terms of how Ralph was teaching, she began to have conversations with Jacob, the seventh grade science teacher, who got to school as early as she did in the mornings to use the photocopy machine. Except for their mutual need to run off copies, Jacob and Sheila would not have had an opportunity to talk, even though they worked at the same school. The difference in departments, and in age levels that they taught, meant that there was no time built into a school day or year for them even to discover how much they could share professionally. As it turned out, their ideas about teaching separated both of them from their peers, exaggerating the isolation of teachers that is characteristic of schools [Lortie, 1975; Sarason, 1971].

What drew them to each other was that they both believed that students can construct the meanings within texts and within experiences, if the teacher takes the time to help them learn the skills for doing that. For Sheila, Jacob was the first person she had found in the building who did not have doubts about trusting kids that completely. Jacob's aim for his students was that they essentially behave like scientists: identifying problems, collaborating on setting criteria for making

decisions, and then experimenting with options for solutions, knowing that "not every problem is going to have an easy solution to it." [March 5, 1990] He did not want his students to be "constantly spitting back information on a knowledge level;" instead, he wanted them to "learn how to solve problems using each other's ideas.

One of the frustrations that he brought to discuss with Sheila was that his students

don't know how to ask each other questions that are relevant to their study....They know how to work in groups as far as completing the tasks. They say, Tell me what to do and I'll do it."
[March 5, 1990]

As Sheila had found, students knew how to "collect information," but needed practice in figuring out that they had to take that information somewhere and do something with it, and then practice in figuring out how to do that. Like Sheila, however, Jacob was willing to look at the struggle to get students to think as a process for which he was willing to give time and energy, moving back, himself, so that his role became watching and listening: "So it's going to be interesting to see what they do."

Sheila and Jacob reinforced each other's belief that the process of coming to understanding, not the reproduction of knowlege, was what should go on in a classroom. In resisting the notion of a sacred body of

knowledge that students should "get." Jacob was playing with ways to have them, instead, engage with texts in ways that are relevant to their lives, Sheila found an ally in Jacob, who had been essentially writing his own science materials ever since he started teaching in experiential ways. He talked to me about having presented to his department a curriculum that "cut the content in half," because he wanted to save time to "give kids an opportunity to process ideas."

Jacob and Sheila collaborated most effectively probably as a direct function of their being in different content areas. Because they were not feeling bound by a common "canon," their conversations focused, as Jacob told me, on:

kids, and learning, and our views of how kids learn and what kinds of learning situations we'd like to create in our classrooms.
[March 22, 1990]

Because of his contact with Sheila, Jacob felt, he was more conscious of, and now had strategies for, helping students to:

become a little bit more aware of what they're doing and why they're doing it, and why groups are important....I began realizing that I needed to do more on giving them some tools to be able to evaluate their performance and how they share ideas. She gave me some stuff from Johnson and Johnson....she helped me with that, just getting that organized and helping me put that together...

Jacob was grateful for her help. For her part, Sheila had told me that she felt she was learning from him:

I think he's probably really good at group problem-solving--better--I think that's something I can really learn from him, how you have a problem and you solve it as a group.
[March 5, 1990]

Not that he felt that he had already arrived at where he wanted to be with his classes. He saw himself still working to get there, seeing it as a process, as she did. Jacob was probably the only other person in the building who acknowledged to Sheila that he was in struggle. In the March 22 interview with me, after I had observed two of his classes, he used that kind of language:

Jacob: They don't understand that area that is between copying a paper and sharing ideas and happening to have the same information down and that's ok, as long as you're sharing...So that's the stuff I'm struggling with the kids that they've never learned. Maybe that's too much. I don't know.

Liz: Does it feel like too much?

J: (Pause) Um, some days it does. Some days it feels like they should be able to--it feels like I'm really wondering if this is maybe expecting too much. Maybe I need to break down the steps more....

My job now is to work with them individually and to work more as a facilitator....

They are very careful not to criticize each other's work. It's a real problem...They don't know how to challenge each other's thinking.

L: Without challenging the person.

J: Right, without challenging personally. And some people say that kids

that age can't do that, but I disagree. I disagree. I think kids can do that, but they need a model for doing that.

She admired him for his focus on his students, rather than on getting across a body of knowledge [April 22, 1990]. Clearly, for Sheila, Jacob's sense of his role as a teacher was, like hers, different from that of most of the other teachers in the building. The two of them also, consequently, shared a sense of themselves as outcasts, alienated from most of the other teachers in the building. But when I asked Jacob [March 22, 1990] whether he had felt some pressure to "do more content because that's what the 8th grade curriculum is," he had found his support in research:

Not at all. If anything, I've realized that what I'm doing is right on the money.

When I read the new College Board recommendations about secondary science, when I looked at American Association for the Advancement of Science Foundation, and I looked at the new national recommendations from the National Science Teachers Association, I realized that what I've been doing for the last five or six years is right on the money, and that what other people are doing is a disservice to kids.

He was also spending time in elementary school classrooms, watching, in some of them, excellent group work. So he had seen the process function, and that gave him support. Time spent in elementary classrooms reinforced the view he and Sheila shared, that a classroom should be a nurturing environment.

Nevertheless, like Sheila, he felt uncomfortable about his position at Valley Central, regardless of how grounded in research and solid practice he knew his work with students to be. Part of it had to do with his knowledge that his students would not have his kind of science classroom again at the school. The rest of the department was committed to content-acquisition. The other part was, as Sheila felt, the terrible loneliness of being, or feeling himself, so different from everyone else.

From her contact with Jacob, Sheila not only learning the kinds of things about group process work that she had hoped to learn from her more immediate peers in the English department, but she was also learning about herself from involvement in another person's struggle. Like Jacob, Sheila was outraged that some teachers were still in effect tracking their students in spite of the school's policy of equity. Perhaps from the perspective that his reactions offered her, however, she began to realize that it might not be useful to let oneself be so drawn into how other people in the building teach or do not teach. On March 22, 1990 she said to me:

Really, in the end, all you can do is what you do, and hope that what you do will make kids like whatever it is that they're doing.

"Humility"

It might be inferred from this chapter that, except for the principal's commitment and some first attempts by some of her colleagues, Sheila had found herself to be in an essentially traditional school. To some extent that was so. But the amount of changed consciousness that did exist, and out of which at least some initiatives were being taken, gave Sheila, her colleagues, and their students a significant amount of freedom.

The most obvious example in the English Department was that teachers invented new courses based on their own strengths and interests. Students were invited to choose from among ten to fifteen ten-week or twenty-week modules and electives for their grade levels, 9-12. The list of offerings reads like a exciting college course catalogue: title, a one- or two-paragraph description, how many credits and whether quarter- or semester-long. Sheila offered, and I observed, courses the titles of which ranged from, "A Walk on the Wild Side," "I'm Nobody, Who Are You?" and "Literature of Social Responsibility" to "Reader Response." Within those modules and electives, the decisions about readings and processes seemed to be entirely left up to the teacher who designed the course.

In the fall semester of 1989, Sheila team-taught with Ralph a senior elective they had designed together

called "Is a Picture Worth a Thousand Words?" Until then what one teacher was doing in her/his class had no structural basis for comparison with what another teacher was doing. Especially missing was the concept of "covering" certain "material." Nevertheless, as Sheila discovered, the English department had a tacit expectation that certain skills would have been taught. The basic discomfort that Sheila had with that expectation was that the skills that the other department members seemed to care about--ability to dissect a novel, ability to write a formal essay, and, for some teachers, ability to name parts of speech or define esoteric vocabulary words--were not skills that Sheila saw as priorities for high school students. It became an obstacle for Sheila that within the structure and rhetoric of innovation there still remained some traditional assumptions about what students should learn and how they should go about learning.

But as Sheila began to feel more confident about the work she had chosen to do, and, as Chapter IV will indicate, as she began to get regular supportive feedback from a researcher who shared her vision of a student-centered classroom, she began to let go of her need for approval from department members who were working differently from her. Over time, she began to see who in the building could be allies for her, with

what limitations, and whom she had to avoid, for the sake of her own well-being.

The first person she collaborated with was from outside the building. Rob, a filmmaker, had been hired as artist-in-residence for part of the spring semester, 1989, to have students create a documentary video in which they interviewed Vietnam veterans and resisters. Although Rob's direct collaboration was with a social studies teacher, there were two connections that allowed Sheila to become interested with the project: 1) most of the students who worked on the video from their Social Studies classes were also in her English classes; and 2) from her first encounter with Robbie in the faculty lounge, she found that they shared ways of thinking about both the process and the content he was dealing with. She became involved to such an extent that Rob included her name in the Vietnam video's final credits, and thereafter used her suggestions in his post-residency presentations and later residencies.

Sheila's recommendations to Rob were essentially a sharing of the ways in which she herself worked on projects with students. She suggested that he 1) have students keep journals and do freewriting after seeing films and after interviewing their subjects, and 2) have them get into small groups to brainstorm lists of interview questions and later to share what they had learned.

For the artist, these were transformative ways of operating with students in a school. Perhaps his willingness to risk doing it her way had to do with the fact that his conception matched her--a community effort, involving talking and listening. It helped that the product for which he was accountable was in a non-traditional form.

Watching another adult work with students in ways that she was working with some of those same students was perhaps the first direct affirmation of Sheila's teaching in that building. The collaboration with Rob may have given her the idea that team-teaching would work; thus the attempted collaboration later that year with Ralph.

Although Sheila's early and persistent feelings about her colleagues were characterized by defensiveness against their perceived criticism of her, she began, in that spring of 1989, to give some of them the benefit of the doubt. She responded as they opened up to her about their own struggle to do the cooperative learning work the department had decided to do. Because his room was always accessible to anyone who walked into the English office, to which it was attached, she could see that Ralph was engaged in the kinds of experimentation that the change required, learning as he went. She deeply respected that a person of his experience, stature, and

history of success within the traditional mode would be willing to try the uncomfortable new ways. Even in the midst of their conflict, during the fall 1989 semester, she could say, "I was thinking, he had it made, so it must be really hard." [October 18, 1989] From occasional informal observations, as well as from their conversations, she could see that Ralph and Sally, in particular, were trying, as she was, to do less and less of the talking in their classrooms. She appreciated Ralph's efforts to encourage the other teachers in the department to move away from the center. He obviously took the project seriously.

But that fall, during the period of her extreme vulnerability, she was only beginning to distinguish whom she could trust as colleagues from who might further damage her professional self-esteem. Jane was one person who increasingly became a colleague. When Sheila noticed the work Jane was doing for students in the Writing Lab, she was impressed. She also saw that other people working in nontraditional ways were generally undervalued in a traditional system:

Ernest thinks Jane is fantastic, but what I notice about our English department is that we don't value Jane. Jane gets kids to do things that no one else can get them to do.

And she's an important resource. She pretty much knows how each kid learns. She takes time to find that out, and she took time to explain to me...and when she told me that, I realized that I can work with his

process. It's not that difficult and he'll do fine in my class.

She would be a great resource for everybody to consult with, if they'd listen to her.
[November 10, 1989]

The relationship that Sheila was beginning to establish with Jane--seeing what specific help Jane could in fact give, and asking directly for it--seemed to be a new direction for Sheila. Knowing Jane's work, she had hoped initially that Jane would speak up publicly for her and with her in department meetings. She had hoped that Jane would share her own struggles rather than seeming to be so self-assured. Sheila was learning to accept that that was not Jane's way.

Seeing Jane as a resource occurred just after Sheila had finally made a phone call to Chris, who had resigned just before the fall semester, but whose teaching Sheila now knew to have been entirely student-centered. Why she had not sought out Chris's help during the whole year when they were both in the same department is a puzzle, understandable only in terms of the classic isolation of teachers from each other in a school building. Quite simply, they didn't have the same lunch periods or prep periods, and meetings were bound by pre-structured agendas. Sheila saw the connection. Just as it is in classrooms for students, schools are not set up for teachers to talk to each other about what they are working on or what they

believe [phone call, 12/18/89]. She did not even know, until she finally called Chris, that right within her own department had been a person who had overcome internal pressure to "cover the material" and had begun to give classroom problems back to the students. The deeper issue in that puzzle, however, was one of trust. Sheila had been hurt by exposing her vulnerability openly within the school building. She was unwilling to risk it again. But now she was creating a network of support outside the school--her friend Sharon, her former colleague Chris, me, and her own journal. Regarding that journal, she had made a new decision to focus on the positive:

I started to keep like a log at school. When I get a really good idea, I write it down. When something seems to go really well I write it down, just so I can keep track of the things that seem to work really well for a group, just to remind myself, really build a repertoire that I feel comfortable with.

There are things that I do that are successful. There are things.

Within a few weeks, by December 1, 1989, as she was beginning to disengage from frequent conversations with Ralph, she seemed to be having more frequent helpful conversations with Jane. On the issue of the students' calling her class "easy:"

I think Jane has been really helpful in having me understand what that means from a kid. She's really interesting because she said, "that's like the best thing a kid could say to you. If the kid feels the class is

easy, then it's set up so that that kid can learn."

By the end of January, 1990, Sheila began to feel a shift in attitude toward her. From many unexpected directions, she was being asked to be a mentor herself. She reported in a phone call [January 26, 1990] that Sally had asked her to be her peer coach in the program Ernest was hoping to start. Jacob and his friend in another department, Joe, invited her to observe their classes and give them feedback on how they managed discussions. She went, and then invited them into her classes, so they could observe other ways to do it [Sheila, Interview, January 26, 1990]. In our interview that same day, she talked about her ideas for Joe's class, realizing that she herself could be implicated in some aspects of her critique of his tendency to do most of the talking. Lois, who had been hired to take Chris's place, had come to Sheila for help with everything--teaching the modules and courses Chris had designed, setting up and managing cooperative groups, projects, even grading [Lois, Interview, January 26, 1990]. Although she perceived it otherwise, Ralph had seen, and continued to see, their conversations together as ways for him to figure out how to move through the difficulties he was having in his own classroom [Ralph, Interview, January 26, 1990].

Liz: [re: SAT's] Do you have the sense that with the kind of work that Sheila is doing, because it's not the traditional stand-up-and-lecture--all of that--that the kids will be ready?

Ernest: I don't have any fear about their not being ready... I have faith in...the methods that she utilizes...but as far as what it means to the kid later on, I think what she's doing is much more valuable....

She's able to engage all of her kids. She does a masterful job of it, I think....

[From parents and the School Committee] I just hear good things, and I know I hear from her colleagues in the building and her department head and other people that they are very pleased. Very pleased. [February 12, 1990]

His perception of his school, in fact, was that she was perfectly normal within it:

We're a non-traditional school in the sense of not teaching to tests. Since we're not a tracked school any longer there's been quite a change in approaches, a broader utilization of a variety of teaching models.

And I think that one of the things that we emphasize are the thinking skills, relying upon students to work out for themselves right answers.

There is no one right answer, and that frustrates a lot of kids who are looking for the teacher to give them the right answer, especially when you're dealing with interpretation of literature.

Sheila could have benefitted from hearing Ernest say all this, directly to her, long before that February, 1990 when he said it to me. But by the time he said it, she had already moved toward claiming her own strengths, and was surprised, even a little in awe, about the shift in attitude toward her on the part of

And I think that one of the things that we emphasize are the thinking skills, relying upon students to work out for themselves right answers.

There is no one right answer, and that frustrates a lot of kids who are looking for the teacher to give them the right answer, especially when you're dealing with interpretation of literature.

Sheila could have benefitted from hearing Ernest say all this, directly to her, long before that February, 1990 when he said it to me. But by the time he said it, she had already moved toward claiming her own strengths, and was surprised, even a little in awe, about the shift in attitude toward her on the part of many faculty. On March 5, 1990, she said:

I just want to say that it could be different next week, but I have noticed a change...at the last meeting I was very outspoken as usual and people came to me later to tell me how great it was, what I said, and that I kept saying it...

The shift seemed to be school-wide:

Jane said something interesting to me Friday night. She said, "If you didn't do it last year, this year you've sealed your reputation. Kids want to take courses just 'cause you're teaching them. It doesn't matter what it is."

Something happened. Something is starting to happen, and Ralph's being really great. I don't know what it is but it seems like the click in time is coming, so even though these kids are freaked out that we're reading this Hundredth Monkey book and they think it's absurd that you would think about disarming, they're still doing the reading.

They're doing the work, and they're doing the best work I've ever seen them do.

Part of a Community

Sheila thought the shift might have to do with the Women's History Month display she had created in the main lobby of the school. At one Friday evening basketball game, she took snapshots of students' mothers. She was at the basketball game, as usual, connecting her teaching to the rich context of community. She coordinated a successful teacher-parent dance. She organized the Celebration of Education fair. And within the faculty, she began to take action when she felt an intervention needed to happen for a child; she did not just wish others would take action. By that time, she had begun to include her own needs in her decisions about how to run things, consciously deciding to be less confrontational, and to avoid the faculty lounge, at times when she found herself feeling more vulnerable. She talked two weeks later about finding the balance between accessibility and distance with her students. It was in that interview that she said:

There reaches a point where a teacher who has been supported gains confidence. I don't need the confirmation from people in the building.

Now that she felt she didn't need their approval herself, she could affirm other teachers, especially those who were sensitive to troubled students, especially gentle men--the art teacher, and Jacob. She could

I don't think it's a profession where people feel good or smart or better....I think generally speaking, people struggle between low self esteem and needing to be the greatest....[April 27, 1990]

Once Sheila had decided to appreciate what her colleagues would do for her, it seemed that they began to do more. Perhaps Sheila had redefined "support" in broader terms. In a phone conversation a month later, Sheila told me she saw Jane as "a godsend," because Jane let her send students down to the writing lab all the time, and in there "there's a real writing atmosphere." But by then, the kind of affirmation that she recognized as more direct affirmation began to come to her. Ralph said to me, referring to Sheila and Jane in terms of the fear of budget cuts:

I can't afford to lose Sheila, because she's new and she's an innovator and I only have two people in my department that are innovators. If I lose them then I don't have anybody to help me go through change and progress as a department. So it's important that I keep her. [May 24, 1990]

Sheila felt it coming:

I think that Ralph really knows how valuable I am to him, and that he respects me. [June 10, 1990]

...if it's true that what you put out comes back to you, I'm reaping the benefits now, because--I'm just getting a lot back and in some ways it's like justice to me....what I think is that people see that I'm good: kids work for me and kids like me. They do good things, so why not recognize that? [May 24, 1990]

After the Education Fair that Sheila organized, both

of the fear of budget cuts:

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After the Education Fair that Sheila organized, both Ernest and the Superintendent of Schools wrote her personal letters. A parent on the parents' committee offered to write a letter saying how important she was to the school. The elementary school principal saw her on TV and wrote a letter thanking her for things she had said about how significant the work of teaching is, and for her urging that teaching needs to be honored by communities. Students were writing her letters. And the seniors invited her to speak for their Senior Chapel. From all this honoring of her work Sheila took the message, "I realize that I am doing my job here."

She was hearing extremely supportive words from the School Committee, about herself and the other teacher

who might have to be cut if the budget did not pass:

She told me on the phone:

One stood up in town meeting and said something about each of us, to make us real to the town. I wrote him a note: "In my professional life I've not been real to anyone but my students." [May 24, 1990]

When her car broke down and she needed to ask for rides, she realized that she did not resist allowing herself to rely on other people. She asked herself why it had been so hard for her, or for any of us, to ask each other for help [June 4, 1990]. Still, she criticized people for not thinking critically and for fearing external judgment. Her criticism had not changed in content, though it had in tone:

I feel like I'm being really harsh, but I feel the majority of people are trying to get through the day and have some sense of satisfaction, but not really look at the system, or look at who the system benefits, who it fails--to really confront people with their thinking. [June 10, 1990]

Nevertheless, she understood that her kind of work might make her a "burn-out candidate":

only because I feel like sometimes it's very hard to be responsible for everything all the time. That sometimes can be too much.

She had decided to be healthy, to achieve a clearer balance in her life, starting by trying to see the positive in things, including seeking feedback from people she had learned she could trust.

C H A P T E R I V

THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

If you work in isolation and you feel like you're an outcast, it helps someplace to be told you're doing ok.
[Sheila, Interview, December 18, 1989]

Introduction: Perspective

Chapter III has described the extent to which Sheila was feeling abandoned within the school. As a researcher who understood and shared her vision of teaching, and could extend her sense of what was possible within it, I found that my participation as support person was perceived by Sheila to be crucial to her sense of herself as a teacher. In one of the earliest post-observation conferences, November 22, 1988, only a little over three months into the school year, Sheila said to me, "If it weren't for you, I'd quit teaching." At the end of the two-year study, June 10, 1990, she was able to name what I had helped her achieve. She called it perspective.

Even after she took the risk of allowing me to watch her teach, two and a half months after we had begun to talk, it took her several more months to believe that I would not be evaluating her performance, that I would not be judging her as a teacher. In early September, 1988, when I proposed the observations and

offered the classroom-based feedback to supplement our informal conversations, she was unwilling to let me into her classroom. As she said on July 1, 1989, recalling how she had felt:

Sheila: I look to you (and my friend Sharon) as people who--I have this thing where I should be like you now, but I think, these are two women who've been teaching for years, many more years than I have, know more things than I do.

I have to tell myself that it's ok that we're not all the same. I think mentor people can be very intimidating...People that I know are good at what they do, who know a lot, those people I find a little bit intimidating.

Liz: ...How did you get over it?

Sheila: Well, I know that I really want to be a better teacher, and I really want to have help, and...I realize that you can help me, and that you weren't going to say I was bad or wrong.

You were just going to help me, and you were also very positive. You said a lot of really good things that I thought to myself, oh, there's some good things, too.

Her fear of my judgment appeared to diminish as visit after visit I offered feedback that affirmed what she was trying to do. when she asked, I asked questions, and offered specific suggestions from my own experience and from research that might help her manage assignments and tasks. I also offered metaphors that might help her reconceive her role. In particular, I recommended that she "jigsaw" [Aronson, 1978] when the amount of material she wanted to have students "cover" seemed overwhelming;

that she think of furniture and students in space the way a choreographer might; and that she visualize her own relationship to small interdependent groups as if she were a waitress, unobtrusive but alert and available, freeing herself from them so she could eavesdrop from a distance.

Problem-Solving Dialogue

Those suggestions were concentrated in the very early visits with her, November 1988 through May 1989, with some occurring in conversations during April vacation and in the summer of that year. Thereafter my active interventions seemed to be concentrated in the difficult fall semester of 1989. During those interventions I asked questions about how she had made particular decisions, and gave her, through my active listening and through dialogue, plenty of time to reflect aloud in my presence. The transcripts of those dialogues are predominantly Sheila's words, perhaps 80%. My comments reminded her of the power of her original vision by focusing on the positive things I saw actually happening in her classrooms.

The effect of the work we did together appeared to be that Sheila no longer showed signs of feeling intimidated by me. In later interviews she directly confirmed that change. From almost the beginning, but certainly by the spring of 1989, Sheila was introducing

me to her classes as a person who was going to help her become a better teacher. I came to see a connection between the safe space Sheila created within her classroom for her students to grow, and the safety and trust that grew for her within our research relationship. That connection will be discussed more fully at a later point in this chapter. It was clear that that trust was already in operation when I visited on January 17, 1989:

I have a lot of anxiety about this activity I've planned for using groups, but I'm going to do it anyway because you're here.

That she so valued our thinking together was evidenced by the fact that she sometimes restructured her activities for later classes in terms of my comments from earlier ones in the same day: about her own voice level when students were in groups, or how desks might be arranged, or what kind of guidelines might turn an assignment into one in which the students could generate, for themselves and with each other, the meanings of a piece of literature. She risked trying out things she had never thought of trying before, processing with me minute details about how they might go, and afterwards how they had gone and what she could do next.

The early April, 1989 dialogue is the only one in which my own comments approach 30-40% of the conversation. My function in this interview seemed to be to

recall her to her vision, to help counter her insecurity about how to let students find in a text what there was to find. She did not yet trust the group process, or her own skill in setting up activities that would get them into the work. How to get them to engage? She assigned me an observation task:

Sheila: Look at what the groups do, because I don't believe they can do it....I do believe, but I'm afraid that they're going to miss stuff.

Liz: So what if they miss stuff?

Sheila: I don't know. I feel like then I don't do my job.

That anxiety felt like a key one to me. I had heard it, as well, from many pre-service and in-service teachers. Within the process of our conversation that day, it occurred to me that although she had been working to move herself away from the center of her teaching, her focus was still content-centered. She still assumed a body of knowledge that she required herself to cover. I asked her if she wanted to take the leap from content-centered teaching to student-centered teaching. Through dialogue, we both came to a clearer commitment to the construction of new knowledge through personal engagement, and through students having each other to help them, with the teacher there to acknowledge that the work is hard, and that the process itself is most of the goal.

Sheila: I've always admitted to being-- I'm a guider. I do that, which doesn't allow them necessarily to have their own thoughts. I am very content-centered, I agree--content as I have decided it goes.

Liz: So maybe that last leap is to let go of whether they get everything that's gettable in the literary work, or in the textbook, and seeing what, as kids--9th grade, 10th grade, whatever they are--they can get.

Sheila: Ok, and then what do you do with what they get?

Liz: (laughs) What do you do with what they get?

Sheila: (Pause) I don't know. I don't know all the time.

Liz: (Pause) I think we've found the bottom line for you, Sheila.

Sheila: Yeah.

Liz: The feeling that "they won't get it unless I tell them."

Sheila: Yeah.

Liz: And you're not standing up there lecturing and telling them, but you're telling them in the questions.

Sheila: Yeah, I'm pretty much gearing how they work together. Yeah, I know.

Liz: And gearing how they look at the very work.

Sheila: Yeah, I am....Maybe I think that's what I'm supposed to be doing. I think that's it. Plus...I'm not really sure how to arrange an activity so that they're doing something....

I'm not convinced that they'll do anything. So maybe I have to see that they'll really be able to talk to one another....

Liz: So can we play with that, and see?

Sheila: (Pause, then with a changed voice) Ok, let's do this. There are, actually there are six poems....

She was ready to try to trust the students with only the text and each other, without her intervention: six groups and six Whitman poems, and the question, "What does the poet feel, and how do you know?"

Reflective Dialogue

Her agreeing to risk that total change in her curricular agenda seems to have been the pivotal decision of her teaching during our two-year professional relationship. The rest of that dialogue is her brainstorming, partly with me but mostly with herself, about how to set up the lesson around that assignment. As we were talking in her empty classroom, we overheard Ralph, next door, seeming to be lecturing to his class in the background. Sheila, in the immediacy of this brief dialogue, realized that she had been mistaking appearances for a much more complicated reality:

Sheila: See, he tells them everything they're supposed to know. But he doesn't think that he does. But maybe he isn't.

Liz: But you were thinking you weren't doing that, because they were sitting in groups.

Sheila: Because they were sitting in groups.

Once she could see her own deep-seated distrust of letting go of control over the content, she was able to talk about seeing what other of her habits or attitudes were getting in the way of her working toward more student-centeredness:

I think that I take over, so I'm worried that it won't work 'cause I take over, and probably that's always what happens. I'm a boss. I'm a big boss.

I am, I know, and I have trouble letting them struggle. I feel like they're not going to do anything. That's anxiety-making for me.

I mean I know in my brain that's the way to do it, but I'm reluctant to do it that way, 'cause I don't know what they'll come up with and then I don't necessarily know what to do with what they've come up with.

I'm confused...if I have to answer to people about the kids knowing certain stuff, I'm worried about that, and I feel like I'm held accountable....

Trying to decide what they do need to know is scary.

The important thing was that she was willing to try.

That willingness, she said, came from her having, right there with her while she tried it, a person who could offer immediate feedback, constant reassurance from the research, and the structured opportunity to hear herself talk it all through.

After the first try that day, I described the good things I had seen happening in the class: 1) her care to have the students move the desks into discrete groups, 2) her having validated what students said, 3) the

students having made interesting points and 3) their having sometimes even listened to each other. Those descriptions of what she herself had experienced in spite of her anxieties allowed her to believe, with a part of herself:

S: So you think if they practiced this enough I'll get better and they'll get better?

L: I do.

S: I do think what they were doing was good. I thought some of the things they were thinking of were good.

L: They were excellent.

S: But I do feel--that's not true. I was going to say that I feel I could have had the same responses in a larger group with me controlling it [laughs]. It probably is not true.

I think what I know that's true is that if they get in the habit of making their own meaning, that's the skill. Like if someone asks me, "What's the skill that you want kids to know?" I would want them to be able to read something and figure it out. So that's it."

Focusing on the Positive

That April, 1989 dialogue was the one in which she most directly asked for help with a process that felt new to her. Frequently she asked me, "You think...?" "Is it ok to...?" "Could they?" "Can I...?" and of herself and me, "What if...?" She and I worked through the "What If's" together with, "Ok, let's figure that out." Halfway through our brainstorming together, she

worried: "Wait 'till you see what happens!" Then she caught herself not trusting: "I'm not going to say that. That's not fair." I answered, "So let's see what happens." When she felt ready with the whole lesson, she summarized it for herself and for me, ending with, "Ok?" I laughed at that checking with me. So did she:

Sheila: Good thing it's the last period of the day.

Liz: Are you scared?

Sheila: Uh, I have anxiety about it. Yeah!

Liz: What do you think? What's the anxiety?

Sheila: I think it's worth trying. I don't know what we're going to be able to do. (Pause) So we'll find out.

Apart from specific suggestions followed by specific feedback, Sheila seemed to be wanting reassurance that I believed completely that students can struggle for meaning and find it for themselves. In that dialogue, as in many others, I gave her that reassurance. I urged her to claim her own genius. She was later able to name a hindrance to trusting this way of working, a way of thinking that she recognized in herself and identified as something most other teachers also are blocked by--the tendency to focus on the negative aspects of a class, while overlooking the positive. My role of describing those positive aspects, recalling them to her attention, turned out to be one of the most

important functions I served for Sheila. On May 9, 1989, part of the conversation after a class went like this:

Sheila: What I heard them doing was really good....See, I chose who they worked with. Maybe I shouldn't have done that....

Liz: Both of them learned something from having been with a partner who was active.

Sheila: See, the bad part is that these two aren't real movers either, so that was hard.

Liz: But they did move, and they did come up with some interesting stuff.

Sheila: I feel very comfortable letting them choose the pairs. I didn't today.

Liz: And of course they said, "You never let us choose the pairs." You handled that very nicely.

Sheila: Oh, I don't even remember that....

Liz: You can be really proud that they did so much with it ["The Lady and the Tiger"]

Sheila: Well, it was kind of a battle. I didn't know what to do. I thought maybe we should read the story together. You know, all through my mind I had all these ideas. You know, what should we do? Should I stop them?"

Then I decided, I'm just going to see what they do. I know the group and I know how they work.

Liz: I bet that was hard for you.

Sheila: Oh, God, I didn't know what to do! Plus I felt bad. I'm like, here you are, and they're not doing anything! [both laugh] They're doing nothing! But I'd like you to see that class again, because I like that class.

I think actually they're doing some very good work, and in some ways I feel the most willing to give up my control with them, as opposed to my other groups, because I think that I give up control but I don't always.

So with them I feel that I let them--I've tried to let them make their own meaning out of things the best, so it would be worth it maybe to see them again.

By the end of that school year, in mid-June of 1989, she had gained perspective about how far she had come through her own insecurity:

Sheila: This probably was my best year. I think it's finally because I feel I know how to do some things right....

I think a really fine teacher is rare. I think you fall into patterns of behavior that from the beginning are not correct, and you just keep doing those things over and over. But they're only working for the teacher...

I knew how to make the classroom work for me. I told kids what to do and they sit there and they do it and I walk around and it's easy. I can do that. I've done it, but it stops the kids from doing anything.

It's hard when you change the rules in the classroom. It's really hard. But you have to really know what you're doing....I think some things work on instinct, but I don't know, or you don't stick with it long enough.

Liz: Right. You don't trust it.

Sheila: Right. 'Cause I would try a group for like two weeks, and that would be enough--I couldn't take it--I had to switch back to doing it differently, because it seemed too crazy for me.

I couldn't take it. I didn't think anyone was getting anywhere. And they didn't trust each other, so they wouldn't listen to what each other said. I couldn't take that.

Plus, if you don't see anyone modeling it, you don't know....

Although I never modeled it for her, my reflecting back to her her own initial successes at student-centeredness seemed to be what she needed. It was the only feedback she was getting, because, as she told me in a phone call in July of 1989, there was no one at Valley Central who could model for her:

I can't really get the help I need at Valley Central. Ralph just assumes I'm good, and they all do, and that's no help. He tries to stay away from feedback, unless I ask him directly--maybe I'll do that--because he doesn't want teachers to feel they're being evaluated.

But he can't help me, anyway--he's struggling, he's new at this stuff himself.

Here Sheila confirmed that most teachers, including herself, assume that to have someone observe and give feedback is to open oneself up to evaluation. Her journal from two weeks before that phone conversation acknowledges that allowing me to come into her class every two weeks that year had required her to give up her autonomy. Our relationship had exposed and magnified the issues she had around her role as teacher. It was a risky choice, letting me into her room:

I guess autonomy gave me the space to make mistakes, so in some ways I could bear the disappointment, but more than that, I could deal with not knowing how to change to make it better.

Now, I am forced to confront what I see as my own inadequacies. This is frightening. It is also exciting.

Having Liz in class makes me really vulnerable. I want her to think I am good. I am afraid that she will see all of my weaknesses.

I'm not sure why I am so worried about this, but I am. I know that she won't criticize me or hurt me, but I think I'm afraid to let her down.

I think that often the anonymity of the classroom allows a teacher to believe that he/she is really doing fine, never really knowing for sure.

The knowing part is the hardest.[July 19, 1989]

That summer of 1989, I shared with Sheila some of the writing I had done, describing my own long awkward struggle toward student-centered teaching.¹ It helped her to know that it had not been at all easy for me, either, and that in many ways I too was still learning how to do it better.

My having already thought through some of the things she was thinking through, and my taking seriously the issues she took seriously, was another kind of help that she did not get at her school. For example, when she was deeply troubled that a series of 9th grade group stories had been full of violence against women, before she discussed it with me she had gone to the guidance office, and then to Ralph, for advice:

¹ Aaronsohn [1986]. See Appendix B.

Liz: What did they say?

Sheila: Nothing. They all--we all just sort of complained, that this was a problem. But there were no suggestions.

Then I felt like no one really knew what to do. It wasn't like they were not helpful; they just didn't know.

And I never would have thought of the idea of having the kids rewrite it from a woman's perspective!

Need for Support

As risky as it was to allow me to come into her classroom, Sheila had decided, by the time she wrote in her journal on September 18, 1989,

...support is the most important component in feeling like I can be successful at teaching in new ways. Alone, I would give up, become like everyone else, simply to be accepted.

However, my support of her was not enough to help her overcome the most persistent doubts, especially during the fall of 1989 when those doubts were persistently reinforced. I had suggested to Sheila in a phone call [October 1, 1989] that because of similar experiences I had had, it occurred to me that perhaps what her students meant by "easy" when they referred to her class was that they felt it to be non-threatening, a place where they could feel competent rather than afraid. But she did not come to believe that until she had heard it, and seen it, in many different ways--from Jane, from the students, and especially from her own long-term

assessment of the real rigor of what she was asking her students to do. She knew, already on October 20, 1989, that isolation-based fear was blocking her vision:

I'm convinced I'd become just like everyone else if there weren't people I respect saying, "this is what the research says is best for kids, and you have to keep trying it." I get afraid.

Not again until our November 13, 1989 dialogue was I as directive with Sheila as I had been in April of that year. The week before that visit, a message she had left on my phone machine reluctantly acknowledged that she was in need of what I was able to give her:

I was sort of hoping that you could call me tonight, Liz. I just need some infor--I need some support!

When we spoke on the phone again the day before my scheduled visit, she told me, "My self-esteem isn't strong. I just don't feel good about myself, and I don't know what to do." I asked her, "What do you want to do in your class?" and she began to design the method she preferred: "I want to stop the movie and let them talk. I don't want to give them worksheets." At Valley Central the next day, because of her intensified insecurities, I elaborated concrete strategies by which Sheila could find out whether the students saw that she was in fact giving them what they needed. This was the day she had been ready, in her panic for his approval, to give her students worksheets that Ralph had created

for his section of their course, even though the two sections were doing different book-film combinations.

I affirmed the way she had handled the viewing of The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter--rewinding to play a certain scene again, and having them talk about what they all saw, this time through, to help clear up a disagreement among the students:

Liz: Oh, that was wonderful! It was fantastic!

Sheila: I loved that! That was the best!

Liz: Because you were going back for evidence: "Let's look at the text"! And you can do that with a film, and that's what's possible with videotape. You can do that constantly: "Let's go back and see."

Sheila: And you think that's an ok way to do it?

Liz: I think that's the only way to do it. It's a model for how they should do it themselves, checking the facts.

I made specific suggestions that reinforced her choice:

Liz: I think I might have stopped the movie a whole lot sooner, to get some of those predictions and observations.

Sheila: Yeah, get them to do more predicting.

Finally, I pressed her to to declare her faith in her instincts, by declaring my own:

Liz: Can you trust that you can see the positive things that you are preparing them for?

Sheila: You're convinced that this is ok?

Liz: Absolutely.

Sheila: Given the fact that I get better at it.

Liz: Absolutely convinced. Absolutely convinced. I gave you my criticisms that had to do with accuracy in hearing their responses--

S: Right.

Liz: --and management of the class, and where you would stop the movie compared to where I would,

Sheila: Yeah.

Liz: where I'd stop the film for conversation or for them just to freewrite. But except in those terms, there is no way that what you are asking them to do is wrong for kids, and you can justify it completely to them, although they may not be able to understand it.

Because she was feeling so shaky, I reflected back to her what I had seen her accomplish in that class that she was so anxious to have accomplished, in terms that Ralph would recognize:

Liz: You didn't give them guiding questions? But you did give them guiding questions.

Sheila: Yes, but I did not put them on a worksheet.

Liz: But you didn't put it on a worksheet.

Sheila: And I'm not telling them, I did not tell them what to look for.

Liz: But you did tell them.

Sheila: They'll get it.

Liz: But you did. You asked them, "predict what the movie is going to be about."

You asked them for predictions, you told them to take down what they think is important. That's a guideline. You asked them for what's important. They told you. It got generated.

You did! You gave them very clear structure, absolutely clear structure. It just wasn't on a worksheet and you didn't use the terms "character," "plot," "setting," "theme," symbol"....

At the end of the semester, you can translate what you've done into the literary terms that will fit, because they were taught the concepts; you just didn't use those particular terms. You can teach them the other language, and then they'll be prepared.

And if students accused her of betraying them by not giving them what other classes were learning? She role-played her response:

Well, I guess I would tell them that what they think is the most important thing to me, so I need to start with what they think, and if it meant that they didn't get like somebody else's analysis, that they didn't get my analysis, I'd be willing to tell them we could have a meeting where I gave them my analysis.

Because they might not say it in the same way that I would say it or Ralph would say it, but they would still say it.

The transcript of our December 1, 1989 conversation is full of Sheila's acknowledgement of her need for support. She knew that she needed to share with a like-minded person what she was experiencing, learning, and struggling with in her classroom, and with whom she could share her anxieties about feeling criticized by most of her colleagues. There seemed to be no one in the school who shared her fundamental assumptions about

teaching and learning apart from Jacob, with whom she had only very recently begun to talk. Even that sharing was occasional and rushed. It seemed that everything else in the environment had been telling her she was teaching all wrong, and only I had been there to tell her, with specific evidence that she could not deny, she was doing fine.

In her previous job, she had had such support from her department chair. Not having it, especially not having it from Ralph, the English department chair at Valley Central, felt like a real deprivation to her. In the December 1, 1989 conversation, after an intense dialogue about whether it was personal about her or whether it was just not Ralph's way to praise anyone as directly she seemed to need it, she began to reach deeper for sources of support. She talked about her own high school teacher whom she had so greatly respected that she had wanted to become like her:

Sheila: I wanted to be Margaret Smith. To me she was a good woman. She was a mother, had ten children. Ran the school, was the headmistress, but also taught. And I thought, "she's a good woman." And all my life I wanted to be her....She knew me as a person. I guess I want to be like her.

Liz: Maybe you are. It sounds like you are.

Sheila: Yeah, I'm probably a lot like her.

Liz: So can you accept that you're wonderful too, like her?

Sheila: Like today I almost wanted to tell myself I was wonderful because I really thought what my students were doing was good, but sometimes I'm just not sure. Like I would like for someone else to say, "This is good."

Receiving the "Mothering" She Gives

The caring feedback, the "unconditional positive regard" that Sheila knew she herself needed, was exactly what she gave to her students. Her discovery that high schools are not generally set up to value or give time to nurturing caused her great distress. She and I discussed the situation in which she found herself, and her feelings about it. We wondered together about the extent to which nurturing behavior is understood to be a gendered activity in North American culture, and, therefore, the extent to which the devaluing of it amounts to a devaluing of what women do. My own initial research on high school teachers' reluctance to use cooperative learning confirmed her observations. I had found, among other factors, however benevolently rendered, a dominant set of characteristics: judging, hierarchy, focus on product and measurable achievement rather than on process, impatience with process and with relationship. All are traditionally male attributes in Western culture, and all are traits that seem to prevail in secondary schools [1988].²

² A fuller discussion of gender as it is represented in schooling appears in Chapter V.

Her frequent reference to it suggests that the most disturbing issue for Sheila of that late fall of 1989 had to do with how her identity as a woman was perceived by her colleagues. As Chapter III reports, and as Chapter V will analyze in greater depth, Ralph had told her more than once, in ways that she interpreted as disapproval, that she was treating her students as if she were their mother. She understood him to be saying that her nurturing attitude toward students was inconsistent with the role of a high school teacher. By December 18, 1989, her confusion and isolation around this pivotal issue were beginning to develop into an analysis of the consequences of the posture of academic distance characteristic of content-centered teaching:

Sheila: I guess, I--I need to not accept those criticisms for being a woman, because that's what I am, and I think--I mean I think other women in the building either become like the men or they're penalized. And there are probably other women who feel the same way.

But I think it's not ok for us to be women. I feel that way.

She got to that point in her thinking, Sheila claimed, because she had a person to give back to her the reality of what her own "mothering" of students looked like, and how it could be seen from both a research perspective and a personal perspective as better for students, even high school students:

Liz: Do you think a happier kid is better prepared for college, a kid who knows

his own voice and knows how to listen to other people?

Sheila: But in some ways it just reminds me of--I heard someone say about Tieneman Square: if you encourage someone to stand in front of a tank, what happens if they get killed?

In some ways I feel like I make kids angry, because I ask them to do something that is really difficult in our culture. It's not--I mean in some ways that's why they think I'm a little bizarre, 'cause I don't fit in here.

Liz: But it's like Dead Poets Society. The thing I was angry at that teacher in the film for was that he encouraged them and inspired them to stand up, but he wasn't there for them when they did.

But you are. You're on the phone with their parents, saying proud things about them.

You would be there with them at Tieneman Square. You'd be out in front and they know that. You're not asking them to do something you're not doing yourself.

Sheila: Yeah.

Liz: And that's the difference between you and the professor in Dead Poets Society.

Sheila: Yeah.

Liz: They were off on their own and they had no guidance, but you are right there with these kids. You're working with them in their study halls, you're with them on the phone, you're at their basketball games and dances, you give them books they'd like, and Jimi Hendrix posters and other presents, and cookies.

You think about them on weekends. You're their mom: you're right there. You're not going to let them down.

Three weeks before, I had told her some of the same things:

You love every one of the kids. You delight in them, you cherish them, and they grow. They grow incredibly.

It was taking her a while to believe that that was all right in a high school. She had begun to move toward believing what I was saying about mothering, because she had begun to trust our relationship:

Sheila: I need to believe that what will work will work, and you'll help me figure out ways to get groups to do things together.

I really appreciate your support. It's really important to me.

It's a sign of growth to me that I don't need to get the praise and love back from the kids. I'm ready to move to the next step: to know in myself that someday they'll appreciate.

It's hard to know if it's going ok.... Sometimes I don't know how to measure whether it's working. I've been asking the wrong people. You're just coming into my classroom to listen.

I want the classes to be discussion-based, so kids are really talking to each other. I have to set up tasks requiring them to talk and then do something....I just want you to know how important it is to have you tell me I'm on the right track.

Talking with you reminds me that it's ok not to be like everybody else. In fact, it's probably better. But it's hard. I think if you work in isolation and you feel like you're an outcast, it helps someplace to be told you're doing ok.

If you don't get that, like I find it really easy for me to make more out of something because I'm just talking it over in my own head. [December 18, 1989]

One of the best things I was able to give her that late fall was a transcript of her own words from before that difficult fall semester, to remind herself of her own vision. She said:

I need to be able to say to myself, like maybe if I play the tape, and just listen to my own self saying--because I started reading the document that you gave me, and I thought, "this is great!" I thought, "I said this? This is great!" [December 18, 1989]

A Mirror

Sheila felt strongly that it was my regular observation of her work, my creating a mirror for her, that was helping her grow:

...I know that a lot of folks are saying one thing but doing another, and I think that really scares me, that people could say they're doing something but not really do it, and maybe you don't even know you're not doing it until someone tells you.

Because if people aren't watching you, you'll never really know what you're doing.
[June, 1989]

The mirror my visits provided helped her see herself, and her students:

This year I really can see a marked improvement. But I let myself see it. I don't think in the past I let myself really watch that, stand back enough to watch them grow. This year I really can see it.... There's something neat in watching them come to that realization of what they can do.
[June, 1989]

This was a clearer sense for Sheila of what she was after. She knew she had more to learn, however, and was looking forward to another try:

Last year I think they did things, but it was sort of, I don't know if it ever fit into any sort of process of moving....(This year was) a little bit better. I think it was different. I think next year will be better. I think it's going to be a lot better. I hope.

The work was not only a matter of designing lessons and managing a new kind of classroom. The work, she understood as of July 1, 1989, was on her own attitudes about herself and other people:

But I get into that mindset: "Oh, if I'm not good at everything I'm terrible, I stink, I should quit." I used to do that. "Oh, I should quit! I'm horrible!"

This was my first year where I began to realize there are some things I do well, and there are some things I need help with, and people will help me if I ask them, but they won't try to get me. There are some people who will try to get you....

I like what I'm doing. We'll solve the problems, nothing is horrible, no one will be punished.

There are other things, however, that I'm not good at, and I've also been programmed. To have kids write in personas is a new thing for me, to get away from feeling like you have to write a formal essay, be formal about everything. I mean I felt like I had to teach kids that.

Well, I think [the formal essay] is one thing they can learn how to do, but it's not the only thing, and I also think when they're really thinking and really engaged is when they're writing either "I think this" or "I

think that," or they're a persona or they're acting something out....[June 16, 1989]

"Good Teacher" Redefined

Dialogues from the new semester which started in January, 1990 with new ten-week modules and semester courses, reveal the spiral nature of Sheila's development of confidence. They convey her relief in coming back to autonomy in her classes. They also show, however, that her sense of self had been so shaken by the challenges of the previous semester that she was still struggling to justify her own way of working as academically legitimate. Our support relationship, however, she said long afterwards, made the return of self a much easier one after this set-back than it had been originally, during the first academic year.

Our dialoguing worked on her identity as a teacher. The concern she still expressed on January 7, 1990 was about what she perceived as her students' reluctance to believe that her way of teaching was as valid as the traditional way that had been, as she said, ingrained in them. She claimed with dismay that her students had been programmed to recognize who was a "good" teacher:

In any school where I've worked, the teacher that sat at the desk and gave all the information was always thought of as the best teacher, because they knew everything. They appeared to know everything.

She knew that she did not fit that definition, and that she did not want to. But she did want to be considered a "good" teacher. Talking it all through as I listened and acknowledged, she sorted out contradictions. She knew, on the one hand, that it was still important to her to "fit in," and have the kind of solid reputation she perceived Ralph to have. She also knew, on the other hand, that she was already respected for being who she was, for teaching the way she taught:

But I know that people like Travis's parents love me because I let their kid be himself. He felt good enough to be himself. He felt good enough to do good things....

She also knew, and appreciated along with me in our conversation three weeks later, that there were things going on in her classroom for which she had reason to be proud:

Liz: [Bob] said very nicely to someone, "You're not listening to me."

Sheila: Isn't that fantastic?

Liz: He said, "Listen to what I'm saying," which he must have learned from you.

Sheila: I thought that was fantastic, and the way he did it was really appropriate.

Liz: Really gentle.

Sheila: But he was listening. And he said, "This is what I'm trying to say." I thought that was fantastic--I was sort of like, "Whoa, Bob is--this is not like just pushing someone out of his way. He's saying, 'This is the point that I want to make.'"

Liz: He didn't shout her down or anything, which would go along with what he used to say, that competition is inevitable... so I was really proud of you for that, because obviously you had modeled that.

Sheila: Well, something was going right....I'm happy so far.

By that interview on January 26, she was already feeling much more as if what was going on was what she had hoped would go on. Her self-assurance was so clear that I said:

Liz: You know why I love working with you? Whenever I ask you a question about why you chose to do something in your class, even a very small thing like how people are sitting together, you always have thought about it, and you always have a very very good reason for it [Sheila laughs].

Really, it's true. You're not just justifying. You're saying, "I thought about that. I noticed it and I decided not to make any changes in it for this reason."

Her response acknowledged growing competence in this pedagogy focused on the students and their needs:

Sheila: I think if someone asks me what is one of the most important teaching skills I'd say assessment. Like I have to really quickly assess: "ok, what's the deal here? What should I do? How far should I go?" and decide very quickly.

I could have said, "ok, I want you to sit this way," but it's not the right time for that now, and it could do some damage....I was aware of what was happening....

Her self-confidence was not yet there enough to keep her from being surprised when I acknowledged what I saw to be a shift in our relationship:

Liz: I want to tell you that there's no way that I would ask you to change anything, because I think I'm at the stage now with this stuff that I'm learning more from you...

Sheila: (gasps)

Liz: than you're learning from me.

Sheila: You're kidding! Really?

Liz: Um.

Sheila: I'm really surprised about that.

Liz: Why?

Sheila: Well, just because most of the things that I do now I didn't do three years ago. [February 12, 1990]

Without denying the compliment, she talked a great deal, through that interview, about how hard the transformation still was. This time, however, her reaction to its being "hard" was a hopeful, confident one: "we all have to practice." Nevertheless, by the end of that interview, she was still feeling isolated in the school, in spite of her pleasure with how things were going within her classroom. She said she was considering going back to graduate school:

If I was back at school I would be getting some other feedback. That would be really good because I really don't get any around here, and I've been noticing that that could be hard.

MentoringNo Investment

By the time of our March 20 conversation, Sheila had completely given up wishing that she could get feedback "around here." As she would say, "something clicked in" between March 5 and March 20. On March 5, when she said, "I think that you need somebody to check in with that says, 'You're all right. The way you're doing it is all right,'" she was still hoping to hear it from the Valley Central faculty or students:

I never hear someone say, "You know, it's all right." It would be really great if someone would say, "You know, Miss M., you're really kooky, but it's all right." [laughs]

She had almost given up that expectation, however, because she was getting, and allowing herself to accept as such, good support from her close friends in another state, Sharon and Ron:

When I get a little scared about the way that I do things, when I talk with them I feel recommitted, because I know other people: they are people who do the things that I do, even more so--even more so. [March 5, 1990]

Now, instead of longing for what people could not give her, Sheila had come to the conclusion that it had probably been useful, however hard, that the feedback she had gotten had been from someone outside the school, someone who "has no investment:"

So I definitely think something has changed. I think probably part of it is just getting comfortable, me growing up, but I

think that that happens by talking: I don't think it just happens by being introspective yourself.

I think you need to have someone to give you the feedback that has no investment, that has no need to say, "Well, I need you to be better." That has no investment. That can completely just say, "ok, this is what I saw," free from any association. I think that's critical....

And I just maybe think, looking enough at it--I mean I think that's what you provide, is a sort of a mirror, to look at it: "This is what was happening and this is what happened, this is what didn't happen, this seemed to be working, and how about this? I think because of that I've been willing to take more risks."
[March 20, 1990]

The Risk of Openness

When Sheila first allowed me to interview a broad selection of her students, in the spring of 1989, she was as eager as I was to discover their perceptions of the kind of work she was doing with them. The feedback I gave her after I had listened to the first three groups of three and four students made her feel that most of them were pleased with her methods. Further, she thought that the intense listening to, interest in and respect for their views that the interview process consisted of was a thing that should go on more often between adults and students, if only there were time.

Again in mid-December, 1989, Sheila still was not sure that her way of teaching was better for students than the traditional way. As indicated in Chapter III,

this was the semester in which she had felt she had to teach in the dominant way, and had done her best to play that role. Nevertheless, she was willing to keep trying what had begun to feel right to her the year before. I asked, "How will you know if it's good for them or not?"

She replied:

Well, maybe I could compare to what we do next semester. Maybe I could just use it as an experiment, just shift gears a little bit and see what happens. In some ways--this is going to sound really selfish--but sometimes I need to do what's better for me. [December 18, 1989]

Her students seemed, somehow, to understand that. When she was herself, she was more at ease with them, and they felt they learned more. It helped Sheila, I think, that I was able to summarize for her the gist of the interviews I had conducted with some of her students. They were all aware that in the class that she was team-teaching with Ralph, she was teaching like him, not like herself. One student from a different class with her said,

student: But when she's on her own, like in our class, it's different.

Liz: So she's freer with you?

student: Right.

In the spring of 1990, however, some seniors were feeling betrayed, as she had predicted, though not for the reasons she had assumed while she was managing her way through that difficult period. She had thought they

would be angry for her not preparing them, but their disappointment was actually over her change of personality, style, and expectations of them during the fall of 1989. They told me on March 5, 1990 what they felt: by becoming less authentic in her behavior, and especially by asking them to meet standards she herself did not really believe in, she had compromised their relationship with her.

But another residual anger was expressed as I met with a small group in the library conference room. It may have been protection of their previous world view. The students spoke of the class in which they had played a card game in which the decks had been stacked, as described in Chapter III. Sheila had used that lesson to have students experience for themselves a reality that many were refusing to consider--that Claude Brown's range of choices in Manchild in the Promised Land was probably narrower than their own, just by accident of birth.

Interestingly, in that small group, the points of view separated by gender. When some of the boys said to me of that class that they felt she had been trying to "sway" them to "her opinion," the girls in the group to note that, in fact, they had really come to the conclusion themselves that some people have the deck stacked against them in their lives. They asserted that

they had come to that understanding on their own, though of course out of the situation she had provided. The girls took on those boys' reluctance to accept the evidence of that game, provoking the boys' discomfort while defending Sheila:

boy: I don't like the book. I think it's bad because it makes you think like one way. It tries to sway your beliefs.

girl: I don't think the book tries to sway your beliefs. I just think it's that...

second girl: I think she's just trying to prove the point that this guy, he just wrote a book and he like tried to prove a point. He wrote a persuasive book and that's what she's trying to do. She's trying to get us to write a persuasive paper, so I think she kind of uses this as an example of how to write a persuasive paper. [December 18, 1989]

Since I had sat in on that class, I was able to report to them what I had seen and heard going on. My questioning and my referring them back to "the text"--the lesson itself--offered a certain corrective to distortions, encouraging the broader perspective that the experience itself had "swayed" them to consider uncomfortable possibilities.

Despite some students' defense of her academic intentions, and despite her understanding of all the reasons why others might have had leftover reasons to be angry at her, Sheila felt vulnerable, even attacked, when I summarized for her the feelings I had heard in the small groups. Her anger at my having served as a

catalyst for their expression of discontent shook our relationship. Her response made me feel that I had been insensitive, had intruded, had violated professional conduct, had overstepped. I had lost her trust. It was a very difficult few hours, during which I had to call into question and reconstruct the boundaries of my overlapping roles of researcher, mentor, friend, and advocate of student-centered teaching.

It was as if her initial fears about allowing me in had been confirmed. No one else in the building, she said, had put themselves in position of being so harshly and arbitrarily criticized by their students in the presence of an adult who listened so carefully and took them so seriously. Although the careful, serious attention to students' voices was what she advocated and had appreciated in the former interviews, this one, she felt, had gone too far.

If this had happened earlier, or within a more fragile relationship between us, especially one in which the power dynamic had been more unequal, that incident might have aborted the study, if not the friendship. Within the solid previous experience of trust and mutual growth through reflection, however, Sheila sorted through her feelings, and declared herself ready to continue.

Both of us were sobered by what the experience had taught us about the vulnerability of a teacher who is different from the norm. As teachers who perceive our jobs to be that of presenting underrepresented points of view, we both needed to use her students' criticisms as information. Even though the girls had challenged the boys' version of the reality they had all experienced together, the fact that those boys, perhaps speaking as well for some other students, held the opinions they held could not be dismissed. Sheila and I resumed our dialogue with the question for which we both needed a suitable answer: when our students ask us to give them "the other side," is it enough to tell them that they have been getting "the other side" all their lives, from all directions, on certain issues?

At this point, my own need to understand the complex dynamic of student reaction was as great as Sheila's:

Liz: They were feeling that you were loading the issue by having The Hundredth Monkey, by having so many different things on nuclear war. My feeling was that you're looking at a variety of sources, a multi-media approach....

But let me just say this. What the kids may be saying when they say, "She's trying to sway us to her point of view" confirms what you're saying--that they don't understand that when you read something or confront something, it's not trying to make you believe it; it's asking you to confront.

With all the reader response they're asked to do, they still feel that they have to get "the right answer" out of it....

Sheila's active response to the information I had shared was immediately to search for and distribute some pro-nuclear articles, to balance the other readings that they had told me were all one sided.

Before that incident, and again once we had worked it through, separately and together, my position of being there "with no investment," and especially with no power, meant that she was free to sort through her feelings about her students' reactions without having to worry about how I was hearing them or her. She could use me, even in a situation in which I had been a catalyst for knowledge that made her very uncomfortable, as a person with whom to figure out what to do about what she was learning. Nevertheless, the experience left her with unresolved disappointment about what she perceived to be her students' narrowness. She still wanted "a little more back":

Sheila: It gets harder the closer we get to the things that are difficult. They get really resentful, and I want to shake them and say, "I could be making you copy vocabulary and grammar exercises. Like wake up to what you're doing here. This is important. Get it. Get it now."

My intellect says to me, "Look. You know that half of them will never get it. The other half will someday be walking down the street and they'll say, 'Up. I get it.' That's what will happen. It won't happen now. It won't happen next year."

But part of me desires them to say, "You know, Miss M., it's really incredible that you let us go and say whatever we want about you to that lady. Wow. Gee, that must be hard."

Liz: What kind of maturity does it take to be able to say that?

Sheila: It takes incredible maturity.

Courage

Sheila understood from the outset that she was taking a risk in allowing me access to her classroom, to her thoughts, and, as described above, without her intervention, to her students. She could have discontinued our relationship at any time, if my presence had continued to distress her. As she described on July 1, 1989, she had started out feeling insecure about exposing her teaching to my scrutiny:

I felt intimidated thinking "this woman, she knows so many things. I'm just this little peon. What do I know? I want to be great, but I probably won't be, and that would be so disappointing."

I think the people you care about and respect, to feel like you've disappointed them, that's the fear.

In that conversation, she realized that her own fear of exposure was probably a common one for teachers:

We want to say, "I do process writing, I do cooperative learning," but we aren't really doing it. But we want to say that we are, because that's what we're supposed to be doing, but we don't know how.

And we're afraid, but we don't want to say, "I don't know how." I think this year

what I learned to say is, "I don't know how to do that. Will you show me?"

There's that fear of thinking, "ask for help? I shouldn't be. I'm a professional! Ask for help? What does that say?"

"I'll be uncovered that I don't know what I'm doing."

It took courage to allow me in in spite of that fear. It took the same kind of courage to accept my suggestions for more student-centered processes, in the face of her persistent feeling, expressed strongly in the two April interviews, that she would be seen as not doing her job if she operated a classroom "my way," as much as that appealed to her own vision of how students learn best:

I'm confused. You're not my boss. I hate to say that, but if I have to answer to people about the kids knowing certain stuff, I'm worried about that and I feel like I'm held accountable. [July 1, 1989]

She understood from her previous teaching jobs, as well as from the way things were done at Valley Central, that what she valued about students' productivity was not what was generally valued by other teachers or by parents. And so she was afraid. But she did it anyway. In very early September, 1989, she reported, "It's kind of scary when you're trying new things. I bit off all my fingernails, and I have diarrhea."

As she began to do the actual work, she put her anxious energy into creating lessons. The decisions she was asking the students to make within all her classes

involved them, as well as her, in significant risk-taking. For example, what if they chose their own groups?

I think what will happen this time is that, let's say five people pick their friends, and they're not working very well. That gives us an opportunity to look at the process, like to say, "How's it going? Why isn't it working?"

"Maybe it's not working because you're all buddies? Is that a problem? And if it's a problem, what are you going to do to solve it? Because this is your group."

So it might be a really good opportunity to have them work with that process. It could be a complete bomb, but that's a risk they took when they decided they wanted to choose. I think that's fair. [September 18, 1989]

Her willingness to let a content lesson "bomb" in order for the students to practice making effective choices seemed to have developed as a direct result of her April-May recognition that her focus on the importance of content was in contradiction with her faith in students. But what a risky use of time! She was not over the anxiety by September of 1989, even though she was working through it: "In the beginning I was really worried about it, but now I see that it's moving along." She was coming to terms with her fear of getting in trouble for getting rid of a textbook in favor of letting students choose their own readings:

In some ways it was scary because you think, "well, what if a kid reads all S.E. Hinton?" Well, what if they do?

I just read a great article in English Journal where it said, "If kids like it, it can't be literature." Well, why not? If you want them to read, why are you giving things that they hate?

That sounded pretty confident, but she was still in conflict about her role:

Sheila: It's really hard to let them struggle.

Liz: Why is it hard to have them struggle?

Sheila: Well, I just feel like--I feel like it's my job to help them. So if they're struggling, I'm not helping them, and I'm not supposed to do that. I'm supposed to be the helper person.

She spoke of her fundamental fear:

It's really hard to change your curriculum....I was unwilling to change my curriculum to meet Travis's needs. Therefore, he was failing. When I was willing to say, "I can change this criterion to meet his needs," he began to do beautifully.

And I think it's power and control, a lot of it, and it's fear. If you say "anything is possible," what if you can't control what they come up with? It's kind of scary.[September 18, 1989]

She recognized this fear in herself, but felt preceded in walking through fear. People she admired, she told me, were like giraffes--they stuck their necks out. She could do it, too.

It was not easy for her. She told me on the phone in November, 1989, "I'm still nervous about your being there when I'm not sure what I'm doing." That was a year after we had begun. She let me come anyway. When we

talked in specifics the next day about a class I had just observed, she was open to a suggestion: "We could try that. I mean that's a possibility." Nevertheless, despite the wonderful work she was seeing the students in her classes do, she was still concerned about her own accountability:

Liz: You didn't trust it. You were afraid.

Sheila: I'm still scared. The whole thing makes me really nervous because I think, see, the kids will talk to each other and the kids in [Ralph's] class will say, "We're doing this," and the kids in my class will say, "We're not doing that. Ms. M., the goof ball, she's not doing anything."

But she did it anyway.

"Whatever It Is Will Be OK"

The March 22, 1990 interview was the one in which Sheila most explicitly connected my mentoring to her changed feelings about her teaching. She had moved from being intimidated by me, from reluctance to allow me to watch her teach, through fear that she would let me down, through the vulnerability my presence caused, to eagerness for what she would learn from me. In the difficult fall of 1989, my role was to continue to believe in her when she could not believe in herself. In the period of transition from that hard time, I was her colleague, her friend, her listener--always her

listener. Now I was someone with whom to share whatever happened:

I guess in some ways it's confidence, because I guess I have decided that my agenda is legitimate. The things that are important to me are legitimate. And I think that comes from the feedback.

Like now I think, ok, you'll come up Thursday, and you'll see things, and you'll tell me what you see and what you think. But I already--I'm not afraid of it, at all. I already know that it will be ok. Do you know what I mean? I'm not worried about it.

I'm not worried that nothing will happen, because I know that something will, and whatever it is will be ok.

In that conversation Sheila noted the parallels between the way we were working together and the way she worked with her students: listening, validating, questioning, giving feedback, encouraging, telling them when they were "great." She said,

Well, I think that's exactly what you do when you teach writing, right?..."If that's what you want to say, ok! Just talk!" And I think for me--I mean, I don't know if this is true for other people, but I think it's hearing myself talk things through that makes it more clear, but doing it over and over again....

Just as she was asking students to let go of their traditional ways of thinking, seeing, operating, she had allowed me to suggest a way of teaching that terrified her. Just as she made herself accessible to her students as they practiced engaging with the readings rather than distancing from them and as they practiced

collaborating with and listening to each other, she appreciated that I had been and could be right there to help her as she fumbled with the new strategies for teaching:

Like I really think the critical moment for me was the Walt Whitman poems last year. Do you remember that? And you said, "ask them two things: "How does the poet feel, and how do you know?" From that moment I completely began to shift what I did.

The Importance of Continued Feedback for Reflection

The perspective that she felt our interactions had provided for her was not something she could "get" and then "have" permanently, with no further doubts about her teaching. When I came to visit on April 27, 1990, my role was again that of reflecting back to her the positive things that had happened during the classes I had observed. She recognized, but felt that she could not, by herself, change, her tendency to generalize unhappily about the whole class from the few who were not prepared or responding. My observing, reporting, and listening to her talk about that class, helped her focus with clearer perspective on the whole, and to see that it was, in fact, just a few students in a given class who were not involved. "Sometimes," she said, "I don't notice until you're here."

She had cautioned me before I observed a certain class that it had become a hard one for her. Afterwards, I opened the interview by asking:

Liz: Do you want to talk about why that class seemed so hard for you? Is that what you want to talk about?

Sheila: I don't know. Maybe I was wrong about that, because they were great today. I think what's hard is that there's a segment that isn't prepared.

I feel like when you work the way I do, everyone has to be prepared. If people aren't, it messes things up, because they're waiting for me to tell them and I can't work that--I mean I don't want to do that. I mean I will, but I don't want to. It seems really stupid.

So I have to really make them be ready and some of them won't, but the majority is, and the majority is really doing their thing, because today they were great. I'm not going to say this was the best class, but this is pretty much how they are.

I guess I sometimes don't notice how hard my students work, or how insightful they are.

So maybe one of the things that's good for me is to have someone come in and watch the classes, that I also am more, I look at them more. I'm more conscious of what they're doing and how I'm facilitating that, because I guess when you visit, that's sort of what I'm thinking about: what's happening in the classroom.

I guess I'm much more conscious of it because I know that's what we'll talk about, so I have to know. I think most days I go through the motions. We have the class but I don't really think about it...I mean if it didn't go great I'm pretty conscious of it.

But I'm probably more critical of how not good, I mean it's probably better than what I think....

Later in that same interview, I reported what I had seen in the class, validating her work:

Liz: ...you gave them time to try to say what they needed to say.

Sheila: Yeah.

Liz: In both cases another kid said, "What he's trying to say...", "What she's trying to say...." They really helped each other out--

Sheila: Yeah.

Liz: Because you had created some space.

Learning from Each Other

By fall of 1989, when I was in her classroom we seemed to be working together on the fine tuning of facilitating a cooperative learning situation. I commented after an early morning class on September 18 that when she was talking with small groups, her voice carried throughout the room. She said, "I'll practice with my voice in this class." And she did, catching and correcting the level of her voice as she worked around the room.

At the beginning of that new school year of 1989-90, Sheila was willing to live with the ambiguity of not knowing whether what she was trying would work. She was tampering with the most fundamental terms of school life--who talks in a classroom, where the chairs face, and whose ideas are considered to be important. It was not a comfortable position for her. What helped her

feel more comfortable was reading a text on cooperative learning that I had recommended, Learning Alone and Together [1975] by David and Roger Johnson. The reading reassured her: "They're kind of telling me it's ok":

And they even said that structuring the difference between cooperative, competitive and individual goals is really hard for teachers because we don't know how, we weren't taught.

So then I felt better. I thought, "It's ok that I don't know how to do it, 'cause no one taught me...."

So I do feel that I have to keep reading and looking at the difference between what's a cooperative group and what are just like people in a group together. That's a problem for me.

It was a problem with which she was willing to struggle, because she was already fairly sure that this process embodied her vision of what should happen in school. She had just not known how to go about it, by herself. But once she had begun, it was as if other rules were also open to question. Transforming the process of managing a classroom seemed to allow her, however tentatively at this point, to challenge the notion of a sacred body of knowledge:

I think what I like about the individual reading of reader response is that I'm finding books. I'm learning about books that kids really like, books that really hook kids in, that they can start and they finish all in one day because they can't put it down.

I think it opens the canon up. I know there's a literary canon, and I know there are books that are considered "great books."

I'm not convinced they include all of the great books or all the great thinkers, and I think this class is just opening my literary canon to the possibility of using books that might not necessarily be considered...

With all of the revolution in her thinking about and behavior within a classroom, however, Sheila had remained curiously unwilling to consider having the students move from their small groups into either a circle or a horseshoe for the full-class discussion. Many times I asked her about her insistence on having "home base" be structured in rows. I commented that when the students were in rows, she had felt obliged to repeat a lot of what the students in the front were saying, and that those people in front seemed to talk out, unaware that people behind them had their hands up. She acknowledged as problems the behaviors I described:

It's funny you said that because as I was standing there thinking this is a two-way conversation, I thought, oh, we shouldn't be doing it this way, but sometimes I'm not sure how something will go, so--I don't know, you know, I don't know how long it will take, you know, all those things, so I'm more hesitant...

In that interview, we spent several minutes (four pages of typed transcript) in dialogue about the issue of rows as opposed to alternative constructions. At several points in the conversation, she seemed to be as ready to try this simple change as she had been to try the more radical ones I had suggested over the months we had been talking. She offered:

It would also get them in the habit of talking more to one another, which is a problem. I might still have to repeat, because some people are soft spoken, but not as much. That's true. Yeah. That's a good idea.

Nevertheless, desks in rows before and after small groups, that day and for the rest of the year, seemed to be the one embodiment of control, of familiarity, that Sheila needed to hang on to. Her reasons suggested that this was a blocked place for her. She claimed she needed to save time, even though she acknowledged that the transition from groups to circle or horseshoe would take no longer than from groups to rows. She felt overwhelmed with the thought of moving back again to rows for the next class. She claimed rows facilitated her taking of attendance, but I noted that she didn't take attendance in most classes until she had given her instructions and the students were busily engaged in their groups, scattered all around the room. Rows, she finally admitted, were easier for her:

Sheila: Plus I think it's easier if you have a substitute. All those things, like I have to give a seating chart for Ralph, and I just think that's easier.

Liz: Ok. And also it's better for the janitor. Janitors always prefer rows.

Sheila: Well, at the end of the day I could always move them back like this. It's not like I couldn't do that. But it does facilitate certain things that I want to do, some of the time, not all of the time.

[September 18, 1989]

What those "certain things" were became clearer on February 12, 1989. A class for whom working in groups was a new experience had gotten away from her, and she needed to pull them back:

I didn't like the feel of the room. The rows helped me control it, get it back to where I'm comfortable, which is what I was doing, and I felt it was good at the end.

As she said to me in the late summer of 1990,

Furniture is important. You taught me that. Kids get the message. Some groups need that more than others. I like to start in rows, so I can set the guidelines.

What I have come to realize, over the many months that I watched Sheila teach, was that 1) my own bias on the issue of furniture got in the way of my seeing, for a long time, that 2) after that September dialogue, Sheila seemed to have solved most of the problems that rows generally create for teaching. In every one of my field notes thereafter, my map of classroom interaction indicates that the conversation seemed widely spread around to include almost everyone present. People sometimes turned around to speak to each other, but even when they did not, I noted, in class after class, a real attitude of listening to each other that I had not thought possible within the physical structure that has people facing the backs of each other's heads. I needed to remember that the significant conversations happen in

the small groups, and that when people get interested in each other's ideas, the attention to each other can carry over into the large group, no matter how the furniture is arranged.

At the end of August, 1990, when I asked Sheila about what I referred to as her holding on to a remnant of traditional teaching, she reminded me of what I already knew--that even when the desks are in a circle or a horseshoe, the class can be teacher-centered. Even when the teacher is in the back of the room, she said, "If I engage, they turn around and talk to me". Surface appearances are not guarantees.

She was therefore very much "in control" of the classes that she taught. But unlike a traditional teacher, she was asking that her students pay attention to their own thinking, to each other, and to the texts in front of them, as well as to her instructions. The control, the careful planning and organizing, the attention to dynamics of space and relationships as well as of time and text, existed for the sake of creating an environment in which students could find their own power.

Change in Attitude

Deep-seated issues kept arising as we worked. In November of 1989, still not sure whether the students could learn what they needed to learn in the situation

she was setting up, Sheila was able to sort out the different aspects of her doubt:

...they will make all the important points, I'm convinced of it, but they have to hear each other and they have to keep track of it.

As usual, she used our conversation as a way to create possibilities as she talked through the problem. What remained as an issue was her own desire to participate:

I love working with them. I want to admit that one of the things that happens when kids work in groups by themselves, I don't get any contact with them....

I felt like I didn't get to hear all these great ideas and they weren't telling me. They might be having them but I wasn't learning about them.

She accommodated to her need to "hear" in several ways, as I observed. One was to ask for writing about what they were learning from each other, as she had begun to do in September, 1989. Another was an intense tuning in, her entire body leaning, engaged in attentiveness, as she eavesdropped, from a respectful distance, on all the groups at once.

Again she confirmed the pivotal importance of the mentoring:

So I guess in some ways I think it's confidence, because I guess I have decided that my agenda is legitimate. And I think that comes from the feedback.

Like now I think, oh, Liz will come up Thursday, and she'll see things, and she'll tell me what she sees and what she thinks. But I already--I'm not afraid of it, at all. I already know that it will be ok.

Do you know what I mean? I'm not worried about it. I'm not worried that nothing will happen, because I know that something will, and whatever it is will be ok. [March 20, 1990]

The chance to reflect was the crucial difference:

I think it's hearing myself talk things through that makes it more clear, but doing it over and over again, I just know that I reached a point that I stepped over some line where I knew that it was--I felt in my gut, or my instinct, that this was going the way I want it to go. This feels good to me.

What I see my students doing is good work. They're thinking--and I'm talking 99% engagement here; I'm not talking 50, or 20. I'm talking high percentages....[March 20, 1990]

Her positive attitude about herself spilled over into seeing the good in other teachers. Working with them directly on the first Celebrate Education fair for the entire community, and then on hosting the conference on heterogeneous grouping, Sheila expanded the range of her contacts with people who cared as passionately as she did about the children. Of Sue she said, "Whatever she does, she does it right. I mean the kids come along." Even though she still perceived a contradiction between what some teachers talked about and what they were actually doing, her tone, now that she was comfortable with herself, consistently accepted herself as part of the faculty. The pronoun "I" began to be replaced by "we" as she talked about the struggle for change:

At least we're trying. We're a school that's trying and it's very hard. I mean it's not easy to change the way people have taught all their lives or to change the perception of what a school is. [March 20, 1990]

The same eager confidence, even excitement, about her students and her work carried through April, 1990. She was working harder than ever, but now the energy was consistently positive. After the school-hosted regional conference on heterogeneous grouping in mid-May, both Ralph and Ernest assured me that in spite of the budget cuts, Sheila would be rehired at the School Committee meeting. Ernest invited Sheila out to a special lunch that he had once a month, to honor students and teachers. She appeared on a video promoting heterogeneous grouping, and arguing passionately for teachers' work to be valued by the community. And she liked herself when she played the video back:

I'ts been a verifying week, that I'm really worth something. The video is me, my true self, sure of myself. For a long time I had lost my confidence. But I've begun to let go of the fear. In this last year I've felt all those things coming back!

For herself, as well as for her students, what she said to me on the phone on May 21 was true: "I'm watching what can happen when people let themselves be who they are." Wanting her students to feel as empowered as she now did, she saw it happening:

...that's what they're telling me: "You give me a sense of confidence in myself. I can do things."

Mentoring Is Like Student-Centered Teaching

As late as April and May of 1990, my roles continued to be actively listening while she talked fully through the issues she needed to talk about and focusing on the positive aspects of the classes I observed. We both began to see that those strategies were exactly the ones that she used in her own classes to empower her own students. The quality that she most appreciated in our relationship, that she now recognized as having helped her the most in her growth, she now named, and recognized as the quality that Ralph had caused her to doubt about her own teaching: nurturing.

Sheila had begun to realize, in our early March, 1990 conversation, that the kind of mentoring she now felt so supported by might not really be available in a school building, especially a secondary school. She was more sure of that when we spoke at the end of May. She gave two reasons. One, within the culture of a particular school, there are, "too many agendas,...issues and egos." My not being "invested" in what went on in the school made me fully available to her. Two, the structures of time, space, and relationships within a school do not allow for the kind of regular, knowledgeable affirmation of another that we enjoyed:

I don't think that happens for teachers at all. Improvement, reflection for improvement's sake--I don't think it is facilitated at all.

There's no time for feedback. There's no time for someone else to come into my room and talk to me about what I'm doing. It just doesn't happen in a school. [March 5, 1990]

Her conclusion was that the mentoring that had worked for her, and, she felt, would work for other teachers, had to come from someone who had no investment in the politics of the institution. Only then could a relationship be established that would be, as she felt it needed to be, "completely nurturing and affirming":

It can't be competitive or like any power struggle involved, because it won't work. I would have resented that. I would have hated that.

Did you notice how I shifted in terms of being nervous about your coming, and not being nervous? Like I reached the point where it was sort of like, well, whatever happens happens. It won't be bad.... [March 20, 1990]

Her title for me, she decided, was therapist/mentor:

But I think all teachers should be in therapy or something, working on themselves and dealing with their personal growth, because definitely you bring it all with you when you come into the classroom.

As a result of our work together, she claimed at the end of April, 1990:

I think this is the most confident and relaxed and comfortable I've ever been in my teaching, ever, in my whole life. The best and without any reservation. [April 27, 1990]

In that interview, she declared that she would not have been at that place without our mentoring relationship:

"That doesn't happen if you're all by yourself. Someone needs to tell you...." A month later, at the end of

I think someone who is very insightful, who can really see what's happening in a room, so a good assessor. A person who understands kids. A person who is a very good listener, has no agenda of their own, and can place themselves aside....Someone with a sincere interest to influence the profession in a positive way. [Sheila, May 24, 1990]

Effective mentoring would require direct observations as well as listening to the teacher, Sheila felt, because the nature of student-centered teaching is that a "good teacher" does not really exist apart from what actually occurs within a classroom [June 10, 1990]. She understood that her fears about not being a good teacher had been based on the traditional assumption that good teaching resided in the person of the teacher. Instead, she was saying, good teaching occurs in the interaction between student and student, student and text, and students and teachers:

It would be one thing if I just described to you what I'm doing. You wouldn't really know.

That's what always kills me about evaluations. Someone else writes--but they never--people say, "Well, I just know that you're a good teacher. I can just tell."

And I think that's all well and good, but you don't know what I do. You have never seen it happen, and I guess for me what that means is you never see what my students do when they're in the room.

And that's what I'd like for you to see.
[June 10, 1990]

C H A P T E R V

THE FINDINGS

Introduction

Chapters II, III and IV have documented the two-year struggle of one high school English teacher to overcome internal and external pressures as she grew to experience and then claim her own effectiveness as a student-centered teacher. Although she perceived many of her colleagues' comments and behavior as pressure to doubt her vision, her struggle was ultimately toward living her own definition of "good teaching."

The description of that struggle portrays the crucial function of a teacher educator's support for that teacher. The support was regular, personal, non-judgmental. It was on-site but not invested in the culture of a particular school. From my readings, and from my previous experience as a teacher and as a teacher educator, I had predicted the usefulness of such support. But it had not occurred to me how pivotal the relationship would be in the teacher's feeling empowered to choose her own direction in spite of all the pressures she felt. Nor had I foreseen the extent to which the process of the mentoring relationship would parallel the process of student-centered teaching.

This study found that it did make a difference in the confidence of the teacher in the study, in the

quality of her instruction, and in her satisfaction and others' satisfaction with student learning when the teacher received intensive personal support from a university teacher educator. It therefore suggests a need for reconceptualization of both teaching and teacher education. Otherwise, traditional pedagogies that disempower both students and teachers will inevitably continue to prevail, despite the overwhelming contraindication of research evidence and the good intentions of teacher educators.

My personal bias as researcher and advisor in this study was commitment to student-centered teaching. Thus my participation in Sheila's growth in this form of instruction was not simply that of witness and reliable recorder. My presence constituted a deliberate intervention that consisted almost entirely of active listening as Sheila talked through her experiences and her needs. My sharing of her vision allowed her to see me as a resource who could understand and extend her thinking, even as I was providing a vehicle for her reflection.

The work was not unrelievedly successful. Some of the role tensions I had anticipated--researcher, teacher educator, mentor, friend, advocate of student-centered teaching--were present. There were others that I had not predicted. For example, during a long initial period,

Sheila felt apprehensive that she could not live up to what she perceived to be my expectations of her. Although her doubts recurred periodically after that time, she ultimately came to trust that my intention was not to pressure her toward choices that felt inconsistent with her own vision.

Essentially, we had chosen each other as colleagues. I needed to observe a teacher who would be operating from the assumption that students, with each other, can and should generate their own learning. She needed a mentor for the student-centered and cooperative learning strategies she had decided to try. This case study, then, provides the connecting point between the theory and the practice of student-centered teaching.

Structure of the Chapter

Throughout the data, the theme of teaching as a nurturing relationship recurs most compellingly. This chapter will explore some of the aspects of that theme as it applies to both a teacher with her high school classes and to a teacher educator with one teacher. What emerges is that the attitudes and approaches that seem effective in supporting a student-centered teacher are in many ways the attitudes and approaches that are effective in conducting a student-centered classroom.¹

¹ The reader is referred to Chapter I, page 5 for operational definitions of "student-centered teaching" and "supporting."

The first part of this chapter will analyze the problem, and the necessity, of behaving in a nurturing manner within a conventional high school. The second part will suggest that if high school teachers are to be nurturers of students in their classrooms, they must receive the kind of regular support that hears, knows, validates, and helps them grow in their work.

Expectations

Not until Sheila began her new teaching job at Valley Central did she begin to understand that she had been hired for a responsibility beyond her own classes. She was to be in the vanguard of pedagogical innovations that would fully implement the heterogeneous grouping to which the school had committed itself. She was not confident that she was ready for that larger responsibility. She felt she needed help, herself, as she designed new ways of working with her classes. Her hiring interview had led her to expect full on-going colleague and administrative support. She felt abandoned when she realized that no one in the school seemed prepared to offer the positive feedback and extension of her own thinking she had anticipated. As the events over the ensuing two years suggest in retrospect, whatever she felt she lacked, she may herself have been the person in the school who had had the most practice in alternative pedagogies.

In her prior seven years of teaching experience, she had effectively relied on the force of her own dynamic personality in teaching, but had begun to see the possibilities of students' creativity when she trusted them with some of their own decisions. In the new position at Valley Central, she felt a mandate to search for concrete ways to move herself away from center stage and to focus instead on allowing the students to construct much of their own knowledge. At the same time, she felt isolated and frightened by having to be a model for veteran teachers who all seemed, to her, to be totally confident in what they were already doing. Sheila knew that she herself was struggling daily to figure out strategies and relationships within the classroom.

The Nurturing Classroom

Recapitulation of the Data

Sheila's movement toward claiming her own vision was difficult, and spiral rather than linear in its journey through doubt. Comparing herself unfavorably with the other teachers, she operated out of fear that she would not give students what other faculty felt students needed. Although at the beginning she felt self-protective rather than personally comfortable with students at Valley Central, she nevertheless was willing

to take pedagogical risks in the classroom. Increasingly, as well, she risked exposing her struggle to colleagues, starting with allowing me to watch her teach. When circumstances caused her to compare her work daily to the work of the most respected teacher in the building, she felt, for a time, compelled to try to be exactly like him in her own teaching. However, through intensive reflective dialogue, first with me, and then with a few other teachers, she reclaimed her own choices, even as she began to transform them.

Mothering

The dialogues and observations repeatedly show Sheila's conviction that without a teacher's careful cultivation of an environment safe for risk-taking, most students would not emerge from their habitual reluctance to share partly-formed ideas and partly-understood feelings with each other. But some faculty members at Valley Central, whose approval she felt she needed, seemed to disapprove of her attention to classroom climate, development of social skills, and actively following up on individual students. They referred to those behaviors as "mothering," warning Sheila that being too "nice" was not appropriate at the high school level. Her students would not be ready for whatever the tough real world would require of them.

English department members' response to Sheila's valued products of students' voices made her feel that the student work she treasured was not valued by anyone else at Valley Central. Colleagues made devaluing remarks about the class she had taught as juniors for what they supposedly could not do--in particular, the formal essay--as seniors. Sheila reacted on several levels to these perceived insults. Her initial reactions were personal. First was self-doubt. She had focused on teaching reader response writing, giving the formal essay less emphasis in her classes. Seeing that her choices were not considered legitimate within the English department, she felt that perhaps the other faculty members were right and she was wrong.

What followed the self-doubt was loneliness. She did not feel free to communicate her pleasure in her students' success with others in her profession. Finally, she felt professional frustration. If she was concentrating on student self-esteem as readers and writers while other teachers seemed to value success primarily in traditional academic achievement, how was the self-esteem she was nurturing to be sustained?

Sheila reported that although her colleagues wanted the best for their students as much as she did for hers, they routinely ignored, scoffed at, indulged, or seemed embarrassed by her enthusiasm for student-generated

insights. From what she could tell, her colleagues' methods, even for small groups, was to structure lessons which carefully defined the terms in which students should think about a text, lest they should miss something. Which pedagogy was more protective, more limiting of student empowerment?

The reflection the mentoring provided allowed Sheila to recognize that she, like her colleagues, was reluctant to allow students to struggle without her intervention at every step. She began to see that reluctance as a manifestation of her own insufficiently examined traditional assumptions about what students can do, and about the role of a teacher. Taking the risk of letting go of a certain amount of control of what and how students read and wrote was delayed by her feeling that she was not doing her job if she did not provide them with complete guidelines that would inevitably direct them to right answers. She felt guilty about not helping them enough.

It took her time and reflection to realize that "helping," identified as doing work for students, was one side of the traditional dualism. The other side was completely distancing and abandoning students after assigning them to produce a product. Sheila figured out that it was possible to protect students from the kind of failure that comes from confusion, self-doubt, and

isolation without "protecting" them from creative struggle. She learned to trust that students could generate their own knowledge, together and alone, once she designed lessons that were both clear enough and open enough to give them opportunity to do that. Within the first year of our working together, she decided that a teacher's holding onto control of the meaning of a text was the more protective, and therefore more disabling, approach to teaching English. Whereas other faculty may have defined "mothering" as creating learned helplessness, Sheila saw herself nurturing to empower.

Understanding that subtle but powerful distinction changed her perspective on being derided for mothering. In questioning traditional reliance on worksheets, end-of-chapter questions, conventional frameworks, and Cliff Notes, she was raising the question of what it meant to prepare students. Before she could ask other faculty to understand or share her vision, however, she had to trust completely that a teacher's belief in her students' capacities for self-direction and interdependence would, with practice, enable students to take much of the responsibility for their own and each other's learning.

It took many months of self-doubt and reflection before Sheila felt that what students referred to as "easy," meant that in her class students felt safe to

learn. By the end, she boldly claimed that her nurturing of students was appropriate in a high school. It meant caring about them enough not to set them up for failure and not to abandon them to a competitive environment. It was to be there with them, frequently checking in, until they felt able to struggle with the work of creating their own knowledge.

The relationship of connectedness that Sheila created with her students was the kind of relationship she herself had needed Ernest and Ralph to establish with her in her induction year at Valley Central. She needed them to trust that she could do it, not defining the work of helping as doing it for her, but being consistently available to give the support of interested, knowledgeable, honest feedback. To have expected that kind of support in an on-going way from a high school principal and department chair, however (especially without requesting it specifically), may have been to expect too much.

Perhaps the most troubling of the compelling themes within the data, then, is the extent to which nurturing is not valued in a high school. Sheila's experience at Valley Central confirms studies that characterize schools in general as places not organized for people to nurture each other, and high school classrooms in particular as content-centered environments in which

relationship is not valued [Callahan, 1962; Culley & Portuges, 1986; Grumet, 1988].

Sheila's case confirms aspects of the complex presentation by Madeline Grumet in Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching [1988], which asserts that schools as public places are the domains of men. According to Grumet, the purpose of schools is to socialize children to operate in male-identified ways that "disqualify ...relationship as the basis of knowing." [p. 19] While Grumet's gender analysis has its own rigidities, it is useful to look at the possibility that values and behaviors generally identified as male in Western society may underlie traditional pedagogies as I have described them in Chapter I, on page 16. Certain attributes of traditional teaching suggest the stereotypical role of the traditional Western/European father, as described by Alice Miller in For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence [1983]. These attributes included rule-giving, reward- and/or punishment-giving; being available only on his own terms; focusing on one thing at a time; being judgmental in a dualistic framework; hierarchical; action-oriented; objective, linear, rational; above all, in control.

Women who enter the male work world characteristically feel obliged to fall into a role they perceive they are supposed to assume [Belenky, et. al, 1986;

Grumet, 1988; Yeziarska, 1925; Culley & Portuges, 1985; Kram, 1985]. In schools, living up to that obligation is represented as disciplining children for the sake of silence, order and performance, vying for "the father's approval" [Grumet, 1988, p. 25], and "repudiating what we know as women." [Grumet, 1988, p.28].

The gender analysis is not peripheral to Sheila's experience. In fact, she was sometimes desperately aware of the dominant presence, voice, and influence of male teachers, even though the number of men and women on the faculty was about equal. Although she needed and wanted the collegueship others enjoyed in the faculty lounge, discomfort caused by what she felt were objectifying comments directed at her made her choose to endure that loss.

Gender was also an issue in her classrooms. She was troubled by what she observed to be fairly consistent socialized gender differences in student behavior: aggressiveness of boys, passivity of girls. Given the number and authority of male teachers in the building, she wanted the men to be positive role models, helping boys deal in appropriate ways with feelings, demonstrating in their own professional lives alternatives to aggression. The unavailability of that kind of modeling, she felt, made her attempts to build cooperative structures in the classroom more difficult.

More basically, there was a gender dimension to Sheila's confusion about the role that seemed to be required of her. Sheila's dilemma may be that of all reflective teachers, female or male, at the high school and college level. Is one required to behave in the dominant mode, presenting one's own versions of reality, or that of recognized experts, as if they were the only possible ways of reading a text? Internalizing the traditional pedagogy, whether they are comfortable with it or not, high school teachers generally assume that their credibility rests in their ability to provide rigorous courses in which they lecture, question, and test, focusing only on what is presumably objective, owning the knowledge and having mastery over both subject matter and students.

In her valuing of relationships rather than abstractions, clear-cut right answers, or judgments, Sheila eventually realized that she was in good company once she thought beyond the building of Valley Central Regional High School. When in one despairing journal entry she found herself using Carol Gilligan's phrase, "in a different voice," she repeated it meditatively, as if reminded of the power of women's separate way of knowing. Further, Adrienne Rich's words from On Lies, Secrets, and Silence affirmed her inclinations:

To think like a woman in a man's world
means thinking critically, refusing to accept

the givens, making connections between facts and ideas which men have left unconnected.

It means remembering that every mind resides in a body; remaining accountable to the female bodies in which we live; constantly retesting given hypotheses against lived experience.... [1978, p. 245].

The heightened contradiction women teachers face, as described in a collaborative article, "The Politics of Nurturance," describes Sheila's confusion of identity at Valley Central:

As mothers, we are expected to nurture; as professionals, we are required to compete....In our culture, the role of nurturer and intellectual have been separated not just by gender, but by function; to try to recombine them is to create confusion.... [Culley, Diamond, Edwards, Lennox, Portuges, 1979, pp. 12-13]

It was helpful to Shelia to know that feeling pressured to transmit information and push passion out of the classroom was a dilemma she was not unique in experiencing. I was able to inform her that most secondary student teachers and new teachers, both male and female, report that subtle internal and contextual pressures cause them to feel obliged to behave in ways that do not represent their own best instincts with children. In order to be taken seriously, they feel obliged to learn "to adopt a stern, officious manner in the classroom." [Golden, p. 134]. They learn early that a "good teacher" succeeds there "only to the degree that she

suspends nurturance and adopts control." [Grumet, 1988, p. 50]

Defining "Nurturing"

By the time she gave a guest presentation to a university class I was teaching, "Adolescent in the Secondary School" on February 14, 1990, Sheila had resolved the contradiction for herself, choosing to claim the legitimacy of teachers' nurturing, even at the high school level:

The environment of a high school can be overwhelming. My job is to make that adaptation easy. No stress, no pressure: he's ready to learn....

If you're an elementary teacher you're allowed to love your students. In a high school that's not accepted. You can't create a motherly environment. But I feel to invite kids to learn means to nurture learning.

They need love and support just as we do...Unfortunately, in high school, we're not encouraged to love our students.

Prepared by more than a year of her colleagues' reactions, Sheila was not surprised when some of the pre-service teachers in that class, themselves products of traditional education, expressed discomfort with thinking of high school teaching in terms of mothering. Like the teachers at Valley Central who had first used the term to describe Sheila, these teacher education students identified "mothering" high school students as "babying" them.

In response, Sheila tried to clarify by stressing her more positive understanding of the term "mothering." The main thing, she said, is that the classroom situation should not be authoritarian, but neither would it inevitably become anarchical. Healthy mother love, Sheila said, creates an environment that is safe for learning. The mothering she described was a relationship of unconditional acceptance of her students as people. It was the environment in which they could become empowered by developing their capacities for responsibility and growth.

Nurturing as defined here is not necessarily a gendered activity, although it has usually been identified with women. Nor is there a necessarily gendered quality to traditionally distancing classroom management. Women as well as men in high school settings seem to take on teacher-centeredness and content-centeredness as if they were playing a preordained role. That role, at its worst, ignores the students except in terms of their responsiveness to teachers' agendas, and to the authority of the text. In the best of traditional classrooms, the teacher is a performer who entertains the students with such presence and personality that the text comes alive for the students, who are themselves essentially passive in their own preordained role as audience.

How Teachers RelateNeeding to "Play It Safe"

Carl Rogers' person-centered approach to relationships is associated with the best of mothering, whichever parent is doing it. Person-centeredness allows the agenda to be mutually negotiated, in an on-going, process-oriented manner [Rogers, 1951]. To do this kind of work, as teacher or parent, the adult him/herself needs to be a psychologically healthy person. Unfortunately, as Sheila observed many times during the study, many teachers, including herself, are themselves sometimes insecure, fearful, disempowered people, worried that the next teacher will judge them deficient if their students do not perform in certain traditionally expected ways. Sheila's own experience of colleague judgment confirmed her observation. The difference for Sheila was that she was able to call upon courage, vision, and support to emerge from that disapproval a stronger advocate for the choices she had made.

My intense focus on Sheila within her context at Valley Central Regional High School provided for me a perspective on the troubling question of teachers' needing to "play it safe." She and I looked together at the adult behaviors that distressed her as responses to attitudes learned in the kind of traditional schooling

from which she was attempting to wean herself and her students. Sheila's separation from attacks on her work came from professional reflection on this connection. If she could not change these teachers, she might redirect the next generation of teachers and parents. She began to see, long-range, that what students internalize about relationships within competitive or individualistic classrooms can determine how those students, as adults, will feel about whether they can trust and learn from others.

Sheila and I concluded that in addition to a deep-seated classroom-based fear of disapproval by peers, the judgment that teachers are generally afraid of is the judgment they expect from a supervisor. The pattern was set in student days, when in that role they were fearful of the judgment of their own teachers. In terms of teachers' willingness to risk doing or even approving of Sheila's approach to teaching, we considered that the very unpredictability of classrooms that are student-centered, interactive, cooperative, mutually supportive makes hers an uncertain and therefore dangerous way to work, especially for a teacher who is wary of the judgment of an authority figure.

It became helpful for us to keep coming back to the importance of her student-centered work for the next generation of teachers. We talked about seeing that

perhaps many people who become teachers may have learned early to play it safe, paralyzed by "What if's" left over from their own schooling. They may have been conditioned, through one-right-answer thinking, to believe "if someone else is right, I am wrong." Sheila could see that many of her colleagues probably had had teachers who seemed all-knowing, who never risked sharing their thinking or conveying their uncertainty. This led them to assume that teachers had to know everything, or else pretend to know everything, to keep the respect of their own students and colleagues [Floden, 1988]. Operating from those assumptions, Sheila realized, may have accounted for their posturing that so alienated her from some of her colleagues.

That perspective helped Sheila to see her situation in the larger context presented by educational studies, which indicate that most teachers have been conditioned by years of participation to behave in the traditional ways. Even those who choose alternative pedagogy sometimes relapse into traditional behavior when they feel fatigued, preoccupied, or threatened. As Professor Robert J. Bezucha reported in "Feminist pedagogy as a subversive activity" [1980]:

I became so nervous about entering a new realm that I unconsciously slipped into one of the most comfortable postures of 'male' pedagogy: at the moment I sat down in front of the students I became an expert in the field. [1985, p. 86]

Changing the rules about classroom relationships at the high school or college level is not easy for teachers or for students. Bezucha continues:

The second session rapidly degenerated into a power struggle between me and several male members of my seminar. [1985, p. 88]

Ultimately, some teachers decide, the effort is worth it, for men as well as for women:

I know I became (for myself) a better and (for my students) a more effective teacher after I started to surrender the mantle of 'male' authority in the classroom. [1985, p. 92]

The struggle is against internal as well as external forces pressuring a teacher to behave in certain ways.

The Factory Model

As clearly as the male-identified role of a teacher might account for the loss of self for both teacher and student, the sense of the school as factory or business may be the more oppressive assumption. While Grumet attributes to maleness the fact that school is "dominated by kits and dittos, increasingly mechanized and impersonal" such that

most of our classrooms cannot sustain human relationships of sufficient intimacy to support the risks, the trust, and the expression that learning requires." [1988, p. 56]

Other studies attribute the oppression Grumet describes to the way schools imitate economic structures [Callahan, 1962; Bowles & Gintis, 1976]. Factories,

like most high schools, above all value product over both human being and process, make little or no space for caring relationships or even genuine conversation, and reward speed and efficiency over reflectiveness and the necessary messiness of creativity. In the factory situation, workers are always aware that, as they engage in tasks chosen by someone other than themselves, someone with power to judge and discipline is always watching suspiciously [Sennett and Cobb, 1972]. Given the opportunity, students speak eloquently about feeling as if they are on an assembly line during the whole of their schooling, particularly in high school.

As a result of many years of regularized socialization by these two forces, patriarchy and "the cult of efficiency" [Callahan, 1962], it is not surprising that most teachers doubt the appropriateness of mothering for a secondary school environment. Sheila herself, however, had experienced at least one nurturing high school teacher, who had taken time to get to know and care about her students as individuals. This teacher had encouraged students to dare to question, to speak out, to listen to themselves and each other as well as to her, and to read and think divergently. Sheila talked about this teacher throughout the two years of this study, indicating that she saw herself following her example. As indicated in Chapter II, when

she spoke of herself as being a model for her students, her reference point was Mrs. Smith, who had modeled for her the courage and caring that she now found in herself and offered to her students.

Because Mrs. Smith represented to Sheila what a teacher should be, one of Sheila's inevitable expectations had been that she was entering a profession peopled by teachers like Mrs. Smith. Her dismay at finding herself to be someone she saw as the only teacher who was willing to be a giraffe--to stick her neck out--did not diminish when we talked about the troubling possibility that absence of courage is a pattern of behavior sometimes characteristic of traditional teachers. Only with great effort, as she saw her students begin to trust themselves, each other, and her, was she able to let go of wishing that teachers as a group would show more courage. It was then that she could be satisfied to think of herself as an agent for influencing the attitudes and behavior of the next generation of teachers: the habits of trust that they would develop in her classrooms would provide the basis for courage as well as mutual responsibility.

Sheila could let go of her unrealistic expectations for her colleagues when she realized that most teachers had themselves been students in predominantly traditional classrooms. They may not have experienced the

mutual respect, responsibility, confidence, and sense of community which are more easily developed in a student-centered classroom. Lacking those essentials, she came to understand through her own experience that time and support are needed if teachers are to envision new roles along with new structures for themselves and their classrooms.

In the nurturing role, a teacher would respond to students and their work in ways that would be personal for both student and teacher. However, Sheila sensed an ethic of academic distance at Valley Central. She told me many times the first year that she had been afraid to open the year the way she had done it in all her previous teaching jobs. Closing the door the first day, she had told each class, "For this hour, you are the most important people in my life." [March 14, 1989] She meant it. But she could not, at first, dare say it at Valley Central.

Once she recognized in herself the debilitating effect of fear, Sheila felt even more strongly that her role required her to create a safe community within her classroom. If students were to take the intellectual risks they needed to take, it would be necessary for them to feel responsibility without the terror of failing. School, she said, should be where students "take all their risks." [March 14, 1989] To do that,

she felt, she herself had to take the risk of being close with them: "To create a human environment, you have to be human." [March 14, 1989] But until she herself felt safer within the school, she felt constrained to operate within more reserved boundaries than those she had established in her teaching prior to Valley Central. In a way, however, it was just that much separation of herself that allowed her to encourage her students to establish their primary relationships with each other, rather than with her.

Teaching as a relationship was something that Ernest, the principal at Valley Central, recognized in other terms. He told me in February, 1989 that he was grateful to observe the nurturing approach of special education teachers. Unlike most of those other members of the faculty he termed "academic" faculty, special educators perceived their role as focusing not on texts but on the children. From that perspective, they had argued for heterogeneous grouping in the school.

The freedom of a special education teacher to focus on children rather than on content is partly a function of what Sheila had cynically observed, that no one really expects much of those children, so the pressure to produce a quality-controlled product is off. Nevertheless, both Sheila and Ernest saw in special Education

classrooms attributes that proponents of student-centered teaching would welcome for their students:

Touch comes back and the look is differentI've seen many gentle women in the past few weeks as I visited these schools. They seem more like mothers than teachers; they don't seem to have sold out to the patriarchal structure, and they fight it with impressive energy. [Grumet, 1988, p. 104]

According to tradition, on the other hand, "regular" high school teachers are supposed to be "tough."

Relieving the classroom of pressure, being personally gentle, supportive, attentive to students' needs is seen as being "easy."

Carl Rogers says that other teachers are threatened when a teacher is a real person in her classroom [1983, p.10]. People who consider themselves to be rigorously academic may be so distanced from their own emotions in public that they feel terribly uncomfortable in situations in which another teacher has removed the professional mask. Both pre-service and practicing teachers often say that they fear they will lose the students' respect, or lose control, if they allow for the unpredictability of feelings. As Rogers says, the non-traditional structure of a student-centered classroom looks like chaos until the viewer can find the pattern [1983, p.9].

Until a personal world view allows for alternative patterns, people raised with traditional expectations

tend to be threatened by the chaos they think they are seeing. The unspoken ethic of control, however benign, at Valley Central Regional High School, felt like pressure on Sheila to play a role in spite of her instincts to be herself. She resisted that pressure, but not without cost:

I'm going to touch kids. I'm going to whisper in their ear. I am willing to buy them presents, because that's the way that I am. It's the way that I am as a teacher, it's the way that I am as a person, and I feel like I--I almost feel sometimes like I'm supposed to walk in the building and leave my person elsewhere, and be this other thing. [December 18, 1989]

The shift in faculty consciousness about Sheila that she began to sense in the spring of 1990 may have been a direct result of Sheila's clear decision to be herself, a nurturing woman. As a manifestation of that decision, her bold celebration of the womanliness of all the women in the building and in the community drew people to the Women's History Month display she created for them. Simple but direct, including photographs of students' mothers as well as of women in history, it was an unashamed presentation of the rich, complex identity of women. For at least that moment, it seemed to empower some of the girls and women both personally and in their work, giving them back a positive image of themselves. At the same time, the display, and the girls' and women's reaction to it, seemed to cause some of the men

and boys to back off from their ridicule. Finally, it seemed to give new credibility to the things Sheila was saying and doing in the school. Somehow, after that display went up, it became clear that Sheila's position had been transformed from that of outcast to that of mentor.

It's OK to Be a Mother

Sheila's regained confidence in her own choices as a teacher had been buoyed by my reporting of results of research studies on student-centered learning [see Appendix B] and in particular some of the intensive recent scholarship on how women learn [Rich, 1979; Belenky, et al., 1986; Culley et al., 1985]. Feminist scholars are at the forefront in reporting the need for students to construct and interpret knowledge and for teachers to "replace a search for one universal truth or explanation with a search for shared meanings." [Mahar, 1985, p. 34] This scholarship appealed to Sheila. Like her, the feminist scholars call into question the role of teacher as expert and imparter of a received body of knowledge. They prefer to encourage student interaction and cooperation as ways for students to understand the meaning of their own lived experience as a valid part of any text. Feminist teaching is student-centered, requiring a transformed role for the teacher.

The alternative pedagogy advocated by teachers grounded in feminist thinking acknowledges and offers a correction to a reality that had distressed Sheila deeply: the traditional passivity of students, particularly girls. In terms of content, this scholarship recognizes the richness and legitimacy of the lived stories of both teachers and students. It validates what Sheila had learned to trust. Just as important, in terms of process, women scholars openly call for mutually respectful conversation, or dialogue, instead of debate [Raymond, 1979; Rifkin, 1985]. Sheila found affirmation of her own discoveries in hearing what male as well as female professors, trying the new methodology, realized: the teacher needs to be a person with students, because, as she herself found:

Keeping cool and in control, which is how I would like to be, prevents the hardest and most authentic questions from coming to the surface. [Snoek, 1985].

The range of advice given by contributors to Gendered Subjects: The Dynamics of Feminist Teaching [Culley & Portuges, 1985], meant primarily for teachers of sometimes non-traditional women students in college Women's Studies classes, applies as well to Sheila's work with high school students. It also sounds like the way an ideal mother constructs her daily life with her children. If Sheila and the contributors to Gendered

Subjects had collaborated on a list of things to do in a classroom, this is how it might read:

- * make the material, and yourself, real and accessible, while maintaining "firm enough ego boundaries" [Portuges, 1985, p. 184] to work through the problems texts offer;
- * listen to the students;
- * stay unobtrusively available while they learn to listen to each other;
- * be careful not to reproduce structures that humiliated them in the past;
- * move the furniture to allow for interaction, and join them where they are;
- * do not let anyone dominate, or let anyone get marginalized;
- * make engagement with texts personal and concrete rather than abstract;
- * do not rush them: focus on process rather than on product, and give it time, even when it is not working well.
- * allow them to make choices and to set their own agendas within the framework of your larger vision, which has to be their growth rather than your ego;
- * cultivate tolerance for ambiguity;

- * help them learn what they need to learn in order to operate in the world.
- * help them challenge illegitimate authority without losing their grounding, by designing ways for them to look for connectedness.
- * allow them to develop and appreciate their own voices;
- * let their own lives, and yours, be at least part of the text that is studied.

The writers in Gendered Subjects acknowledge that carrying theory into practice is by no means easy. Almost every writer in it describes the struggle against traditional upbringing. Many of the articles indicate how much teachers trying to focus on students rather than on subject matter relied on the support of other feminist teachers. What was difficult for Sheila in the beginning was that despite many influences for student-centeredness from outside the school, these were not as powerful as the pressure of colleagues and structures. One teacher told her angrily, "The research is wrong!" when she attempted to defend her use of cooperative learning. Most other teachers were less dramatic in their cynicism, but the tone of disapproval that seemed to surround her directly felt overwhelming. Nevertheless, over time, voices from outside her day-to-day

adult interactions at Valley Central supported the undeniable evidence of increasingly successful learning and community within her classroom. These voices reinforced her conscious decision to avoid her detractors and concentrate on working well with her students. On December 17, 1989, she decided,

Maybe I just have to accept that I'm a mother--that's who I am--even if the men hate it.

Gaining Perspective: Revising Expectations

The Relationship with a Mentor

At the end of the two year study, Sheila concluded that my active presence with her had helped her gain perspective about her teaching at Valley Central Regional High School. As Chapter IV describes, our relationship allowed her to focus on the many positive things that were going on in her classrooms, rather than on the few things that dissatisfied or frustrated her.

Although that shift in focus took time and work, the perspective on her classes was easier for her than developing a new attitude toward her colleagues in the building. Our conversations were helpful to Sheila as she revised her expectations. We speculated that some of the behaviors of her fellow teachers that confused, offended, disappointed, and even angered her might

usefully be thought of as predictable outcomes of their own traditional schooling.

Within that analysis, she was able to consider in a new light the patterns of individualism, isolation, product-orientation, and even competition and defensiveness that interfered with the development of the more nurturing and collaborative behaviors she yearned for within the faculty. It was helpful to think in terms of the absence of habits of collaboration among adults. This perspective strongly affirmed for her that the change she sought would be represented in the generation of students now experiencing student-centered teaching.

What Sheila came to decide through her own experience is confirmed by literature on induction and staff development. Grant and Zeichner [1981] found that the teachers they studied, like Sheila, "wanted more in-school assistance from the principal or other persons in leadership roles" [p. 106], although they wanted that help apart from evaluation [109]. Generally, however, the direct classroom assistance from colleagues which induction-year teachers reported wanting more than any other staff-development is neither requested nor offered, perhaps because, as Grant and Zeichner observed, new teachers do not want to risk appearing incompetent, and veteran teachers do not want to interfere [1981, p. 109].

The importance of outsider as opposed to insider intervention is emphasized in a study by Ruddick [1987]. The mentor should not have "institutional power" over the teacher [Katz, 1974; Ruddick, 1987, p. 135]. Ruddick's idea of "collaborative interpretation," or "partnership supervision," is a form of contact with a "sympathetic outsider...prepared to visit [the teacher] on [her] own terms." [1987, p. 136] The value of the interaction between teacher and teacher educator is that it keeps teachers connected to "the emerging knowledge base," seeing theory and practice in terms of each other [1978, p. 138]. Ruddick, who experimented with teacher-teacher partnerships within a school, found, as Sheila understood from experience, that within a faculty there are problems of anxiety about invasion of each other's professional space, and about equating asking for help with admitting failure [1987, p. 140]. Although teachers do network and learn from each other informally, the formalization of peer relationships raises sometimes threatening issues of turf and vulnerability. The process Ruddick advises as less problematic offers the extra advantage of bridging the gap between school teacher and university academic. It serves to minimize professional suspicion by developing "a sense of shared professional concerns." [1987, p. 140]

Sheila gave up her expectation that the mentoring she sought should be available within the building as she came to recognize the greater value of an outsider who could look at her classroom with no investment in the politics of the building. However, my presence for her was a luxury that does not generally exist for classroom teachers. The literature indicates that outside help is not available to induction-year teachers from the places that should have the greatest interest in and expertise about teaching. Grant and Zeichner report:

Consistent with the literature on induction was the finding that these teachers had little or no contact with university personnel except for the few teachers enrolled in graduate degree programs.

The university clearly had made little effort to systematically follow up their graduates to offer support during their first year.

And most of the graduates apparently had not sought contact. It is significant that only two teachers of the 72 mentioned having any interaction with university personnel regarding their teaching [1981, p. 108].

Thus it is no wonder that, as suggested by Wells [1984] and reinforced by Tabachnick and Zeichner [1985], the absence of follow-up support by teacher educators results in predictable consequences for progressive and innovative teachers, who quickly become socialized to "the real world" of rather conservative perspectives that they find within the schools. Unless teachers are

very secure, in order to survive in that context either they conform, internalizing the values of the culture or, disappointed and frustrated, they leave teaching. As Chapters III and IV have described, Sheila was vacillating between these two choices until she gained the perspective provided by the mentoring.

Who Should Mentor? There was another basis upon which it was important that Sheila give up expecting her department chair to be the mentor she needed within the building. According to much of the research on mentoring, there are serious problems when the mentor is male and the mentee is a woman [Bottoms, 1982; Glover, 1986; Kram, 1985]. One of the problems noted by the research is that frequently when the mentor is male, the tendency is for both to fall into unconscious patterns that "have women feeling incompetent or men feeling overly responsible." [Kram, 1985, p. 109] In some situations, the protegee

continues to work out issues and themes begun in her relationship with her father: the need to establish an ego-ideal, processes of attachment/separation, and oedipal issues of competition and assertion." [Glover, 1986, in Gray and Gray, 1986, p. 9]

Watkins [1980] and Kram [1985] raise the question of whether the male-female mentoring situation supports patriarchal atmospheres and hierarchical structures. Sheila's feeling that she had to become Ralph certainly

suggests that it might, as did her strong feeling that the high school was a building in which male values tended to dominate.

Even though the model was not originally based on educational situations, the male-dominant standard for both the stages of development and the assessment of needs and social interaction patterns within mentoring relationships [Levinson, 1978] accounts for some of the disappointment Sheila experienced in the mentoring she did get within the building. Acknowledging that mentoring becomes a very close relationship, the Levinson model asserts that the relationship usually "ends with strong conflict and bad feelings" at the point of separation, when the person being mentored takes a direction different from that of the mentor [Gray & Gray, p. 159]. As the relationship established in this study indicates, however, there is another possibility, which also appears in the mentoring literature. As a corrective to include the experience of women, Kram indicates that the final phase can be redefinition rather than rejection and anger [1985] as a reaction to the inevitable separation stage.

In the case of Sheila and me, the redefinition of the relationship occurred well before the separation. By early spring, 1990, the focus had clearly shifted from her learning from me to my learning from her. The

reflection upon her work that my presence provided continued to be valuable for her, especially as she practiced the student-centered strategies and as she disengaged from her need for approval. The occasions on which I offered direct suggestions for classroom work diminished significantly and we moved much closer to a peer relationship.

From Sheila I was collecting rich examples of possibilities within a student-centered high school English class, as described in earlier chapters. I was also learning that the role of the student-centered teacher is an excellent model for the role of the teacher-centered teacher educator. All this enriched my own preparation of teachers. The two-year experience allowed me to see my relationship with Sheila and hers with her students as nurturing, "helping relationships" characterized by attributes and behaviors advocated by Rogers [1951] and outlined by Combs and Avila [1985, pp. 17-23]:

- * empathy--caring and understanding how things look from a student's point of view
- * believing that students are able
- * building positive self-esteem
- * facilitating, not manipulating
- * concern with holistic rather than minute goals, clear about what is important
- * using creative, problem-solving techniques determined by a multitude of factors

- * authenticity--sharing themselves rather than acting roles.

In the mentoring process, as in client-centered therapy, being heard without judgment allows the person to "listen with acceptance to herself, thus reducing the power others have over her." [Rogers, 1977, p. 12]

Within Schools?

Patient listening and accepting without judging, the most important attributes of an effective helper, may be the most difficult to achieve for people socialized in traditional schooling, in which the usual task of the teacher is understood to be that of getting across a lesson by lecturing, assigning, evaluating, rewarding, punishing, controlling [Combs & Avila, 1985, p. 87, 157; Rogers, 1958, 1977;]. Like factories and businesses, schools, oriented toward individual achievement, provide no time for "the luxury of relationships, or people-development," [Kram, 1985, p.157]. Although much of the mentoring literature recommends developing multiple peer relationships instead of trying to find one senior mentor [Gray and Gray, p. 98], Sheila understood that the structure of a school day, teacher role-habits, and early-ingrained competition among peers are drawbacks to healthy peer-mentoring [Kram, 1985]. She told me on January 15, 1990,

No one at Valley Central will tell each other they did well. They just say how great they are. I realize now that I'm not going to find a mentor there. I accept that now.

Sheila could accept that reality because she was beginning to understand peer competition in the context of the work she was trying to do with students. She saw the importance of teaching students to appreciate each other and not shout each other down. She determined to see as her primary agenda the encouraging of relationships and problem-solving as ways to help students practice interpersonal skills of respectful listening, authentic self-disclosure, and conflict-management [Kram, 1985, p. 143]. She was determined that the people she encountered in her classes would become adults who had developed these skills for their own lives.

Trusting Students

Watching Sheila struggle against what she perceived to be the expectations of other teachers reinforced impressions from my own teaching and supervision of student teachers. I was discovering that when teachers hold onto traditional assumptions it may be out of a profound distrust of students' abilities. That is to say, in some unconscious ways they may distrust their own and their peers' abilities, as well. In an earlier study [Aaronsohn, 1988], I learned that believing "kids

can't..." is one of the most deeply ingrained habits of mind that teachers bring with them from their own traditional schooling.

Sheila and her colleagues were by no means the only teachers so affected. Pre-service teacher education students in my classes at the university wrote frequently about their own not having been trusted to learn without the teacher, and their consequent distrust of their own students' abilities. Their most common impulse was, like Sheila's early impulse, to jump in and "help"--that is, do it for them--when students were not "getting it" right away.

From freewrites written and collected in a series of such classes, I have gathered data that suggests the stages of pre-service teachers' readiness to think about student-centered teaching. Like many of the teachers at Valley Central, one young man remembered, and seemed to accept uncritically as aspects of the role he was to take on, the control and hurriedness of his own teachers' agendas:

In a high school classroom it is oftentimes much easier for a teacher to make meaning for the students, because it usually saves time and prevents a situation wherein the teacher may lose control of the discussion....Like many other things in life, most times it's easier to do it yourself.

Another was less sure that his own schooling had served him well. He was willing to think more deeply about the

effect of that traditional agenda when a peer, teaching a practice lesson, interfered with student learning. In response to his experience of the peer-taught lesson he wrote:

Ray didn't let us figure stuff out in our groups. He didn't give us time to get out of our confusion.

Through conducting cooperative learning mini-lessons, many other pre-service teachers wrote that they had learned something important about their own impulses to protect students from struggle. Essentially, they were learning in 1986-1989 what Sheila was later to conclude:

-- They [peers as students] had questions and it was faster for me to answer them rather than letting them work it out for themselves. Across the room I did notice that those students I didn't get to still finished the assignment.

This proved to me that if I let the students work on their own, they can help one another and teach one another what is to be done.

-- It took a lot of trust to be able to do this; it was a real exercise for me not to feed you more cues!

-- This was tough. The immediate thing is to jump in and say something.

-- I had a tremendous urge to jump in and get the group working together, but I didn't let my anxiety get the best of me, and I let the class run its course. And to my amazement everyone settled down and began working on the topic....

I learned that teachers' distrust of high school students was not just distrust of their academic

abilities. Perhaps even more, they distrusted their responsibility. Many pre-service and practicing teachers, hearing about forms of student-centered learning, assume that elementary and secondary students who are not regimented will automatically become chaotic. Their reports indicated that such assumptions are based on their own schooling experience, in which regimentation and chaos were the only two alternatives. Operating on that duality and unwilling to experiment to see if their assumptions were valid, novice teachers can be cynical about cooperative learning. One of the teacher education students who was convinced that kids cannot be trusted revealed why he felt that way:

This theory sounds good on paper but in practice it has its realistic shortcomingsdiscussion-oriented classes work well on the collegiate level but to hold one at the high school or elementary level could prove disastrous.

Perhaps this view reflects my own "classic" educational upbringing but I feel that unless kids are raised on discussion-oriented classes, they may try to use it to their advantage in a negative way and only misbehave.....

Reflection on Student Powerlessness

The comments of the pre-service teacher quoted above, on his way to becoming a teacher and still operating on original narrow assumptions, reflect the profound powerlessness of students trapped in traditional classrooms. This same young man, a college

senior, wrote finally, "a kid doesn't have many options open to him or her when they try to battle the system." What Sheila was wrestling with was the extent to which people carry those feelings of powerlessness--and perhaps also the instinct to assume power over students when they are the ones in charge--when they become teachers themselves.

My visits to elementary and high schools suggest that the feeling of student powerlessness, and teacher power over students, begins early. Teachers of open first or second grades report that children come from traditional kindergarten or first grades knowing exactly what is expected of them in terms of limits to motion, talk, and initiative. They internalize early the consequences of "getting out of line," either on paper or in their behavior. They also come knowing what "real work" is. By the time such early-trained children get to high school, unless they've had an unusual series of open teachers along the way, they are uncomfortable with changes in the ordering of space in the classroom, and extremely uncomfortable with permission to talk to each other. Some may remember circles and small groups from elementary school, and thus associate those seating arrangements with "baby stuff." Some others, successful in the traditional system, demand that things go back to the way they were, or, unsuccessful in the traditional

system, experience the unfamiliar freedom as license.

My experience, and that of many student teachers I have observed in their placements, is that, under the best of circumstances, it may take at least six weeks for a teacher committed to student-centered teaching to bring a class through a full transition from a teacher-centered to a student-centered classroom. As I watched Sheila over the two years, I realized that, like a gardener, the student-centered teacher prepares a rich basic environment, settles the seedlings carefully, goes up and down among the plants to make sure they are not being crowded, and re-stirs the soil. Otherwise, warily watching the sky, she has to just let natural processes work.

The Agenda of Empowerment: Mine and Sheila's

What I learned as a researcher is that a teacher's choosing and then learning to be student-centered in her classroom is not a linear process. Sheila had been offered what seemed to be optimum conditions for success:

- * having been hired to do exactly that kind of teaching in a small community school that had decided, with the encouragement of the school committee, to work toward heterogeneous grouping;

- * administrative consciousness of the value of student-centeredness for students, and commitment to trying to create it;
- * some personal experience as a student in such a classroom as a balance to years of disempowering traditional schooling;
- * enough years of experience with adolescents to be sure of her own delight in them, belief in their abilities, and assurance of their comfort with her;
- * capacity for unrelenting hard work, for astonishingly clear organization, and for using resources imaginatively;
- * a spiritual and political commitment to the growth of students for their own sakes, but also for the sake of a transformed world;
- * strong academic and practical grounding in English, in curriculum development, and in special education.

Still, with all these advantages, the internal and external pressures within the school drained Sheila of her confidence.

Many conversations, particularly in the last three months of the data gathering, made clear to me Sheila's feeling about the mentoring she received. She was convinced that without the regular, continuous, long-

term reassurance of a mentor who had read about, understood, and personally deeply believed in the empowerment of students and in the integrity of her efforts in that direction, she would not have survived at Valley Central Regional High School. Worse, she claimed, had she survived, it would have been as a very different kind of teacher. Even with my support, the process of confidence-building was a spiral over the course of two years, and her growth through it and need for occasional reassertions of it continued past the research schedule.

Willingness to Struggle

Sheila recognized that movement to the next stage of development requires conflict--the struggle of contradictions, or cognitive dissonance--[Adams & Horton, 1975; Anyon, 1979; Kohlberg & Liston, 1972]. Therefore she was willing to engage in the difficult challenge of introspection and risk-taking encouraged by the researcher/mentor. Even as she was asking of students that they be courageous, reflective, personal, analytical, self-critical and self-affirming, she had come to ask the same of herself.

The work I was encouraging her to do was undoubtedly threatening to many of Sheila's colleagues. Much thinking on education challenges practicing teachers to think of their role as different from the

traditional one of transmitting a body of knowledge to receptive students. Kohlberg recalls both Dewey and Piaget in arguing that development, not acquisition of knowledge, is the aim of education [1972, p. 486]. Moreover, the achievement of development as an aim requires that teachers allow the kinds of experiences that will create enough discomfort with their unexamined positions to require students to reach beyond them:

The fact that only about half of the adult American population fully reaches Piaget's stage of formal operational reasoning and only 5% reach the highest moral stage demonstrates that natural or universal forms of development are not inevitable but depend on experience. [Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 486-7]

In paraphrasing Dewey's definition of the democratic end for all humans, Kohlberg describes the kind of outcome Sheila was after and the approaches that Sheila was bold enough to stand for:

Nothing less than democratic education will prepare free people for factual and moral choices which they will inevitably confront in society. The democratic educator must be guided by a set of psychological and ethical principles which he openly presents to his students, inviting criticism as well as understanding. [Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972, p. 494]

Zeichner and Liston describe a teacher education program which emphasized

the preparation of teachers who are both willing and able to reflect on the origins, purposes, and consequences of their actions, as well as on the material and ideological constraints and encouragements embedded in the

classroom, school, and societal contexts in which they work.

These goals are directed toward enabling student teachers to develop the pedagogical habits and skills necessary for self-directed growth and toward preparing them, individually and collectively, to participate as full partners in the making of educational policies. Underlying these goals is a metaphor of liberation. [1987, p. 23]

The outcome they envisioned was the achievement of the highest level of teacher development for the teachers they prepared:

The teacher as technician would be concerned primarily with the successful accomplishment of ends decided by others. The craftsman teacher would consider the educational justification for classroom actions and how well the educational goals are being accomplished.

The teacher as moral craftsman would also be concerned with the moral and ethical implications of his or her actions and with the moral and ethical implications of particular institutional arrangements. [1972, p. 27]

These were the aims that Sheila had for her students. Her methods mirrored what she advocated. They were inquiry-oriented methods consciously designed to provide opportunities for independent decision-making, collaborative authority relations, rewarding of initiative and critical thought [Zeichner & Liston, 1972, p. 28].

I will admit that my admiration of Sheila was the lens through which I saw her professionally. I know that I was impressed when she took the difficult route which, she and I both believed, would help students develop

responsibility, voice, self-esteem, and pleasure in reading and writing beyond academic achievement or external judgment. It would have been easy for her to use her authority as teacher to silence students who asserted a presumed superiority of argument by shouting down anyone who disagreed with them. Instead, she chose the much slower, harder and more complex path of getting them to see that their real power came from having carefully considered the complexities of a text. Beyond that, she wanted them to see that it was a power within themselves, after all, not a power over anyone else that made them strong.

For a long time the voice of her university researcher-advisor-mentor seemed to be the only voice reinforcing her sense of teaching as a moral and ethical encounter. In the absence of any currently existing formal structure for helping practicing teachers to see their work in the larger context, the combined research and mentoring relationship served as that structure for her, and for me. Sheila had not experienced that kind of reflective feedback in her student teaching or in her previous positions, although she had enjoyed a close professional relationship with the principal of the school where she had taught for the two years before she joined the faculty at Valley Central.

Hearing that well-respected researchers advocate teachers' being encouraged to view all knowledge and context as problematic [Zeichner, 1987] gave Sheila some solid ground, beyond her own belief system and her own experience. She could challenge colleagues who frequently urged her to "lighten up" about issues she chose to take very seriously, such as instances of sexism and racism within the school or in the larger world. She reported an undercurrent of being considered "wacko" by both some students and some faculty, because she questioned, sometimes passionately, realities that most others in her school did not question.

Being the only one in her school who felt and behaved as she did isolated Sheila within her building, at least as she saw herself. My regular presence alone did not reassure her that her ideas were not too unrealistic for a high school. Associating with me removed her yet further from her peers because university-based researchers are suspect in secondary schools. She felt drawn by the pervasive argument that the "real world" of the public school is not ready for the fantasies spun in universities and reported in journals that high school teachers characteristically do not read. Once the idea of cooperative learning became popularized in journals usually read by practicing teachers, more serious attention began to be paid to its

possibilities at Valley Central. Credibility for the concept of cooperative learning and my initial workshop on that topic in May of 1989, along with the regularity and persistence of my visits to Sheila, gave an increasing measure of authenticity to my support for the work she was doing.

Reconceptualizing the Role of the Teacher Educator

Zeichner and Liston's 1972 findings confirm what I have suspected from my own pre-service teaching and student teacher supervision: it may not be possible to create a Sheila through a traditionally based teacher education program, but it is possible to cultivate, support and sustain one within a non-traditional teacher education program [1972]. It might take more time, energy, and group support to bring to student-centeredness a teacher who did not start out with most of the professional and personal characteristics Sheila possessed, as listed above. It took unusual will, imagination, intelligence, and sense of self for Sheila to begin to take the risk of letting go from within and resisting from without the more familiar, more comfortable systems in which she had been trained and which predominated around her.

It is tempting to be modest about the findings of this case study, and conclude that Sheila was a very special person and the mentoring was a very special

situation. I could cautiously deny that all prospective or practicing teachers who choose to can, with the kind of mentoring and advising that the research describes, become the kind of fully evolved student-centered teacher that I found Sheila to be well before the end of the study. While I am describing an exceptionally thoughtful, imaginative, energetic and courageous teacher, I must also assert that just as student-centered teaching brings out the capacity for responsibility, creativity, independent thought and full development in even the most unlikely students, the teacher-centered mentoring this dissertation describes can bring out the positive attributes of most teachers. In both cases, the crucial factor is the process of empowerment through support.

At very least, the study allows me to conclude that teachers who have the basic inner qualities to be drawn to doing this kind of work require, deserve, and can flourish with very careful, deliberate nurturing [Adams, 1972]. And there are many such teachers. It is my contention that the absence of such support has been the reason why there are so few student-centered teachers in our public schools. If such support were to be given to every teacher so identified, the shift toward a fully liberatory education might very well take place.

The findings of this case study strongly point to the value of an outside advisor's intervention in support of a high school teacher's struggle to become a better student-centered teacher. Sheila herself put it more strongly. Without that support, she would not have continued teaching. To take that conclusion seriously would require re-conceptualizing the role of those teacher educators whose aim is:

to create a cadre of teachers who think of teaching as intellectual work--work that involves them in transforming knowledge about teaching as well as creating it through inquiry into practice. [Neufeld, 1990, p.21].

As teacher educators visit high schools looking for cooperating teachers who will model best practices, they find 1) that there is very little student-centered teaching going on within high schools, and 2) as a direct result of the first factor, actual teaching within high schools has a conservative impact on new teachers, regardless of their in-coming predispositions, ideals, or pre-service training [Aaronsohn, 1988; Feinman-Nemser & Buchman, 1983; Zeichner, 1985]. Teacher educators are frustrated by the contradiction between what we send student teachers out to do and what they actually find themselves doing under the influence of cooperating teachers, who frequently reinforce their own internalized traditional assumptions.

That contradiction may in part account for some of the backlash against teacher preparation programs. In research studies, in popular accounts of how presumably useless pre-service programs are, as well as in deeply ingrained attitudes of many practicing teachers, it is assumed that the progressive university is out of touch with "the real world." University teacher certification programs are characterized as having a love affair with "unrealistic" theories about engaging the students in text and in interaction, and as believing that a body of knowledge is less important than student construction of their own meaning. The real world of high schools is understood to be a place where the teachers, "in the trenches," pit themselves daily against reluctant students who resist being filled with certain required bodies of knowledge, as well as against systems that interfere with good teaching, but over which teachers are powerless. It seems to me that the business of preparing more people to be socialized into accepting that "real world" as normal and necessary is an illegitimate one.

On the other hand, as Sheila's experience indicates, it is unfair to send out pre-service and new teachers with the expectation that their students and colleagues in those high schools will welcome transformative student-centered teaching. Such expectations

set them up for the kind of disillusionment that inevitably leads them to decide that "the research is wrong" and that the traditional ways are the only ways that work with their particular students, or even with any high school students.

Until there is a newly conceptualized role for teacher educators, it is likely that the schools will swallow up temporarily idealistic new teachers. This is especially probable as standardized teacher competency tests push education programs to pre-socialize pre-service teachers to the way things already are in the schools. Combs and Avila advise an alternative approach which pre-service teachers are likely to resist, because it is unfamiliar, but which my experience with Sheila confirms as necessary:

If the belief systems of helpers are as crucial to effective practice as research suggests, then the training of professional helpers must be approached as a process in personal becoming.

The goal of training must be on the personal development of aspiring helpers' belief systems, including at the very least the development of sensitivity, a phenomenological approach to understanding human beings, clarification of personal and professional goals and purposes, acquisition of positive self-concepts, and high levels of personal authenticity.

...Finally, for those who are already professional helpers, these concepts mean that the process of becoming a helper is never complete. It is a continuous, lifelong, never-ending process of exploring and refining one's personal system of beliefs. [1985, p. 26]

Who Nurtures the Nurturer?

But where and how will teachers participate in this kind of reflection? As Zeichner and Liston point out:

Most schools do not actively encourage teachers to engage in the kinds of practices that our student teaching program seeks to promote.

To some extent we may be preparing student teachers for a teaching role that does not now exist, or does not have the sanction of the institutions in which teachers now work. [1987, p. 44]

Their point is reinforced by the observation of Zeichner and Liston's colleague:

We cannot improve teacher education in isolation from the conduct of schooling. Improved teachers must go into existing schools. [Clements, 1974, p. 164, quoted in Zeichner & Liston, 1987, p. 44]

Zeichner and Liston continue:

More material and moral support must be given to the supervisors and teachers who work with our students....

And we need to work more closely with our colleagues outside of the School of Education so as to provide a greater continuity of experience for our students and the kinds of institutional support and structure which are consistent with our pedagogical goals. [1987, p. 44]

They call for "strategies which seek to alter factors outside of the program's boundaries" [Zeichner and Liston, 1987, p. 45], strategies that will encourage newly placed and veteran teachers to see themselves as agents of social change, rather than as insignificant

functionaries within overwhelming and inevitable systems.

This is a revolutionary call [Cagan, 1978; Rogers, 1977]. It asks of teachers, administrators, and students that they consider challenging the notions of rugged individualism that isolate people from each other [Cagan, 1978; Freire, 1968]. As Combs discovered,

Open system teaching is not easy....
Closed system methods are...so common in our society that they become ingrained in the experience of almost everyone.

This raises a problem for teachers using open system thinking. Because such methods are "different,"...and especially because students are given much freedom of choice and action, outside observers often become fearful that 'things will get out of hand,' and students will not really learn under such conditions.

Such fears may then be expressed in a wide range of opposition, from outspoken disapproval to outright condemnation. Such reactions can be painful experiences for the innovators. [1982, p. 150]

Usually, therefore, nothing changes. Ultimately, teachers give up the innovation, or they give up teaching.

As a result of generations of that kind of cycle, teachers continue to be products of traditional schooling, trained to expect proper behavior and right answers from themselves and their students. Coming with such narrow priorities, they have trouble making sense of new activities, or of new frameworks [Bussis, 1976].

They are, understandably, confused by the combination of messages they hear. Teacher educators speak of the whole child who is active and interactive. They speak of students making meaning within a complex social and political context. The culture of the high school, however, expects teachers to produce school-appropriate social and academic achievement, represented essentially by student individualism and respect for the sole authority of teacher and text.

A series of further questions arises from these contradictions. Who is there in the schools to help novice teachers retain the kind of perspective that will allow them to integrate the two agendas? Or, if that is not possible, who is there to help teachers make a confident choice to work against the tide, toward an environment that respects human dignity, cooperative effort, and caring for others? [Combs, 1982] Who is there in the schools to help teachers, along with their students, "learn to act and speak for themselves, help them gain control over the decisions affecting their daily lives"? [Adams, 1972, p. 502] Who is there to say it is good teaching to work this other way?

Implications For Teacher Educators

This study provides a description of an instance in which it is clear that regular, positive, non-evaluative concrete feedback and opportunity for reflection

supported a teacher through her struggle to sustain a vision that student-centered teaching can work, and that students feel that they learn best when they construct their own knowledge. We know that not only by the report of the researcher but by the direct words of the teacher, her principal, some of her colleagues, and some of her students.

Sheila is not the only high school teacher who needs, deserves, and would profit from the kind of support that this case study provided. In fact, the work of supporting Sheila, even in her traditional context, was relatively easy, compared to the work of encouraging pre-service student teachers to persist in thinking of designing and implementing student-centered practices. From my observation of student teachers in their placements, from my conversations with them before and after those observations, and from my collection of pre-service teacher writings, I learned that many student teachers feel trapped between student-validated university ideals, and the dominant traditional internal and external "institutional realities." Mark wrote,

I found myself lecturing to make sure I covered as much information as possible. I felt I was being remiss in my duties if I didn't cover every agency that FDR ever created. The students were bored by this but I felt they had to have it.

But they liked the group-oriented projects the best. I should have used more of those. They liked the way I was involved with

them, related to them, genuinely cared about them. [1988]

Even if they embrace the concept in theory, most pre-service or induction year teachers, unlike Sheila, will have never thought in terms of alternative pedagogy. Part of the reason is that it is unlikely that they will have experienced such learning themselves, except for a course or two within the teacher education program. Those courses might inspire, but can not sustain novice teachers, who, this dissertation asserts, also need a program of consistent, nurturing follow-up support.

Another student teacher, Al, spoke of a struggle, mostly within himself, that he had not anticipated until he was actually teaching:

Do I believe in cooperative learning?
Will they talk to each other? What if the text doesn't raise any questions? Where do they find answers?

The other teachers are dentists--answer pullers! How do I exist in their system?

She evaluated me on how I controlled the class--on who was off task. She focused on one group that was negative. How am I going to make the school people happy? Give multiple choice tests?

I'm stuck for ideas for cooperative projects, and I have [my university history professor] on my shoulder, saying, "you don't know any history." What should I do? [phone conversation, March, 1991]

Another, Cari, used my visit to gain perspective on her own confusion of values:

When [my cooperating teacher] says "they can't" so much, I tend to fall into her way of thinking. [March, 1991]

Yet another, Elyse, found value in just being heard by a teacher educator who shared her vision:

I've been trying to sort all the issues out....it's been so good to talk. [phone conversation, June, 1989]

The evidence of this case study confirms other indications that teachers who would otherwise take creative risks get stuck in traditional approaches because of the absence of opportunity for on-going dialogue about the choices they are making [Bussis, 1976; Goodlad, 1990; Sarason, 1971]. It is best if the dialogue is with a person knowledgeable about and committed to alternative pedagogy. When teachers immediately process classroom events with a teacher educator or colleague who advocates student-centered learning, they are reminded to think in terms of pairing or grouping their students. One student teacher's comments reflect Sheila's--and many other teachers' and student-teachers'--reactions to direct observation-based feedback:

Seeing my cooperating teacher every day, and especially having her approve of my lecturing and answer-pulling, has made it hard for me to remember what I really had wanted to be doing in my classes.

You were my conscience: having you come in made me examine my assumptions, and shook me out of that comfortable place of her approval. [Al, March 12, 1991]

Traditionally-taught graduate courses do not give teachers what they need beyond the peer interaction that is often more valuable than the course material. What teachers need beyond the short-term group experience of those courses is sustained on-site support for development [Bussis, 1976, p. 27].

The usual procedure in most states in North America has been either to consider the certified teacher an essentially finished product who may or may not choose to come back to the university for further credits, or to require graduate courses leading toward an advanced degree. These courses are often seen as more of the same--lectures, or at best seminars, at the university. The perspective in Australia, however, seems more enlightened. There, induction year teachers are considered to be at their "ultimate teaching moment," and they are mentored by an assistance committee that includes a professor of teacher education [Andrews, 1987, p. 143]. What Australians call "entry-year" is seen as a developmental phase in teacher education, along the continuum of on-going professional development of teachers, separate from supervision [1987, p. 143].

Andrews indicates that where the school context includes active and supportive staff development, beginning teachers can innovate. They need not merely succumb to "socialized compliance" or be overwhelmed by

regulations and expectations [1987, p. 148]. He concludes, "not all teachers will lose their idealism or experience transitional shock during their first year of teaching if supportive and respectful teaching environments are present," and he says that teachers need to experiment under "relatively safe conditions," with a mentor who shares a compatible teaching orientation [1987, pp. 149-152]. Far from the role of facilitating assimilation, the mentor's job, he says, is to keep the new teacher from being too cautious [1987, pp. 149-152].

The Issue of Labor-Intensiveness

The approach used in the two-year study this dissertation documents may seem to be a prohibitively labor-intensive one, especially if one considers the numbers of student teachers and practicing teachers who need and deserve support. How is it possible to achieve that kind of frequency of visits and conversations, and that intense focus on one individual teacher? Is that much work necessary? How might such efforts be made more economical and thus cost effective? Is it possible to think about cost effectiveness and still provide the intensive, sustained feedback and reflection that this study describes?

First, it is important to say that if there is another high school teacher out there like Sheila--and there are others--this much effort is worth it, and

more. Then, teacher educators may decide, within their own programs and its constraints and possibilities, to take some or all of the following steps, once they identify a teacher like Sheila, committed to the struggle toward student-centeredness:

- * Learn from her what is possible in immediate real life high school classrooms.
- * Send pre-service and in-service teachers from other schools to observe her classes.
- * Invite her to be a cooperating teacher, and to co-teach some of the teacher education courses.
- * Do participatory research with her on issues that arise from her teaching.
- * Co-write for journals that practicing teachers read.
- * Work with her to restructure the high school in which she works, to allow teachers within it released time to observe in each other's classes and give feedback to each other.
- * If the teacher education program is too far away from the university for students to observe or student teach with her, video-tape her classes, focusing on her students rather than on her as a teacher. Use those videos in teacher education courses, to stimulate dia-

logue about how teachers get themselves there. Get the videos onto TV specials as models of excellence, challenging the usual ones that are driven by the dynamic personality of one unique but almost always traditional teacher.

- * Help her network with others who share her vision.
- * Learn from her.
- * Be there. Don't let her quit teaching!

It is true that the kind of mentoring that Sheila experienced from a teacher educator took an enormous amount of time and attention. In fact, it would be easy to say that if the intensive work described in this dissertation had not been a research investigation, it would not have taken place. Over the course of the two-year data gathering, The bases for observing, interacting, and listening were twice-weekly whole-day visits during the first year, then once a month for the second. Phone conversations increased or decreased in frequency depending on the extent to which Sheila felt she needed support. Interviews outside of school occurred when they could be arranged.

That kind of intensive, frequent contact can sometimes be called for in the course of effective supervision of student teachers. Therefore, before they dismiss this structure as a model for mentoring of

practicing teachers, three aspects of the investigation that would be important for teacher educators, school administrators, and school committees to notice.

First, apart from the time spent in the transcribing, storing, organizing, and analyzing of the data--work that a researcher would do in any situation--all of the time invested in the mentoring, except for the driving, was as professionally beneficial to the teacher educator as it was to the teacher. I did not need to "prepare," in the traditional sense, although my on-going reading was useful for our conversations. I was there to be alert, observant, open. By practicing active listening with Sheila, I became a much better active listener and clinical supervisor for my student teachers in their placements. Working with Sheila made me sensitive to teachers' fears, and helped me let go of the supervisor posture that can get in the way of trust. Far from detracting from my own teaching, the privilege of such frequent, intensive witnessing of high school lessons and interactions, and such an in-depth view of a teacher's daily as well as long-range struggle to teach well, gave substance and credibility to my own work with pre-service and other in-service high school teachers.

Second, if John Goodlad's conception of simultaneous renewal begins to receive widespread practice, teacher educators will be routinely spending much of

their time inside the schools. They will supervise cohorts of student teachers and work directly with practicing teachers as colleagues. Extending that collegueship over student teachers to conversation about and actual feedback upon the work of some of those practicing teachers who desire it is a logical next step. Goodlad's model assumes the value of close, respectful, mutually supportive relationships between teacher educators and classroom teachers. In addition, the availability of the teacher educator on site will make it possible to break some of the isolation of teachers from each other, even if the work cannot always be as one-on-one as this study was. It may not need to be, for most teachers.

On-site on a regular basis, teaching and often co-teaching the university pre-service secondary courses right there at the high school, teacher educators would be easily available as both equals with and advisors to practicing teachers, most of whom would be the cooperating teachers of the cadre of student teachers. The main attribute of the new role, like the role of the student-centered teacher, is that of resource person who listens respectfully as a teacher/learner, rather than expert or critic [Adams & Horton, 1975; Bussis, 1976; Freire, 1968]. The role would be to model and then facilitate the process of being present with teachers who request

non-evaluative concrete feedback and opportunity for reflection.

Third, if Sheila was telling the truth about herself, the mentoring she received kept her in teaching. If we are as serious as we say we are, as a nation, about wanting to attract to and retain within the teaching profession people who think hard, well, divergently, and imaginatively; who care about and attend to the whole student; who are willing to live with uncertainty if they can see that their risks might benefit the students; if, in other words, we really want to populate our schools with change agents, the time and energy that this kind of support work requires is a cost worth paying.

To do the work of mentoring a teacher like Sheila, teacher educators will be most effective who are knowledgeable about student-centered teaching and cooperative learning strategies, about a range of divergent ways of seeing and knowing, and about the practice of active listening. In terms of the academic content, it was helpful to Sheila that I had, in my own teaching of English, already figured out how I felt about most of the traditional agenda items. On the other hand, as I told Sheila in the last few months of the study, I was learning more from her about how to teach English well than I had ever thought of when I was

doing it myself. Having supervised student teachers in all academic subject areas, I feel confident that, just as a student-centered teacher leaves the struggle with a text to her students, a mentor can confidently work with a teacher without being an expert in that teacher's subject area. The process is the important content, in both student-centered teaching and in mentoring.

Reflection. Sheila said, well after the trust between us had been solidly built:

Being the object of such scrutiny definitely makes me think about what I'm doing, which is missing for teachers.

What does it mean if teachers, after the initial anxiety of beginning, have very little occasion to think about what they are doing? The Connecticut State Department of Education expects of mentor teachers and cooperating teachers that they will "have regular dialogues with their beginning or student teachers about the teaching process," because:

Opportunities to reflect about teaching with colleagues are rare, and beginning teachers report that such opportunities are invaluable.
[1989]

Combs [1982] states that dialogue with students happens for teachers more than with colleagues, but both are crucial for teachers' growth. Teachers, he indicates, need the support of fellow professionals in times of doubt and confusion. They also need the stimulation of

ideas, the fulfillment of interacting, and the perspective that comes only with feedback and with believing in long-range evidence that they have made a difference [Combs, 1982, pp. 173-175].

In the suggested evolving and interactive new roles for teacher educators [Bussis, 1976, p. 138; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1983, p. 12], it is necessary to start where people are. First is the need to work out certain problems having to do with habits of non-cooperation and lack of institutional commitment left over from the traditional assumptions held by most teachers, teacher educators, and administrators [Ruddick, 1987; Wideen and Andrews, 1987]. Then, the opportunity for all participants, including the teacher educators, is to develop ways to receive and give support in the on-going effort which Sheila described simply as "becoming a better teacher." Ultimately, the very process by which teachers become better at what they do will have created the kind of collaboration, cooperation, partnership, mutuality, collegiality, and interactive development that characterizes effective schools [Goodlad, 1990; Wideen & Andrews, 1987, vii-7].

Implications for Implementation and Further Research

Based on what I have learned from the study, I think teacher educators should spend much more time in schools. If they are to find out how their theories play

out in practice, they must observe in depth, over time, what happens when teachers of unusual vision find themselves in conflict with traditional structures. This case study suggests the complexity of the situation, and the need for what Sheila called a constant reminder of what she started out to do. Especially if they hope to make a difference in that process, teacher educators might very well decide to do what practicing teachers keep asking them to do: move outside the walls of colleges and universities. If, even longer range, they hope to participate in the kind of total change that Goodlad refers to as "simultaneous renewal" of education and teacher education [1990], they might consider locating at least part of their preparatory programs in the public schools themselves.

The question of the role and even the identity of teacher educators arises as small colleges and, in periods of political or economic retrenchment, even larger colleges and universities turn over the teaching of secondary classroom methods courses to professors of academic subjects. Such faculty may be excellent at their subject areas, and even in the craft of teaching, but they are generally not grounded in the secondary school experience. What realistic expectation can there be that they will welcome spending time in the schools, or that their feedback on teaching methods will be

useful to teachers of adolescents? Can we expect that they would be helpful to teachers who would like to experiment with student-centered approaches? Before characterizing them as completely content-centered, but also before engaging them for secondary methods courses, it would be useful to investigate the extent to which college teachers of academic subjects have thought and studied about complex issues of pedagogy, or are willing not only to do so but also to model student-centeredness in their own teaching.²

Thus a further issue emerges from the twin questions, "Who nurtures the nurturers?" and "Who should mentor?" Who should be the teacher educators, if research-based practices such as student-centered teaching are to be infused into school systems of the future? Except for some on the early childhood and early elementary level, most teachers who are presently operating student-centered classrooms report that they started out as traditional teachers, both teacher-centered and content-centered. That finding should serve 1) as a reminder that teacher educators, too, may very well still be tied to traditional assumptions about teaching and 2) as evidence that people can change. The

² Some colleges and universities are encouraging their own faculties to engage in "Re-learning," or such other dialogues on pedagogy. Frequently these emerge naturally out of efforts to create interdisciplinary courses, especially in small colleges.

question most usefully addressed might be, "What were the forces that initiated, encouraged, and sustained your new choices?" The findings of this study suggest that the very asking of those questions, by a researcher knowledgeable about and positive about the value of student-centered teaching, might encourage teachers to continue reflecting on their own choices, thereby supporting reaffirmed commitment to their enlarged vision.

As an extension of those questions, it would be useful to understand what teacher education programs expect of teacher educators, and how teacher educators are prepared. Beyond research, scholarship, professional service, advising, and the teaching of courses, the already labor-intensive but crucial work of teacher educators is supervision: being in classrooms with individual student teachers and helping them reflect about their experiences. The kind of support of practicing teachers that this study recommends is essentially an effective supervision relationship. But how do people learn how to do the kind of supporting that people like Sheila need?

Most teacher education programs assume that if a person has taught successfully in a public school, that person is automatically qualified to supervise student teachers. I have learned that that is no necessarily

so. Whether full-time faculty, adjuncts, or graduate assistants are employed as supervisors of student teachers, systematic efforts must be made to help supervisors think about the work they do. Readings or courses on reflective supervision should be offered and required. There should be regular dialogues about what constitutes good teaching, so that people who are observing, giving feedback, and in most cases evaluating classroom performance are given opportunity to reflect on their own expectations, in small groups with other supervisors who may or may not share their assumptions. Attention must be paid to how the cognitive dissonance that thus arises is handled.

Role-plays, simulations, and other activities should be part of the preparation and support of prospective and practicing supervisors, to help them develop skills of active listening. Most particularly in terms of this research study, the match must be made carefully between student teachers who are thinking they might want to do student-centered work and supervisors who will respect and can extend that work. This is especially important if the cooperating teachers within the school buildings have not had experience with or interest in pedagogies other than the traditional teacher-centered and content-centered ones.

Further research might identify processes for approaching entrenched college professors, especially teacher educators, with invitations to consider reconceptualizing their assumptions about their own roles. Even though they might espouse theories of alternative pedagogies, do they themselves trust those theories, and their students, enough to actually practice them and thus have their students experience their power? Are they themselves ready to let go of content-centeredness?

Teacher educators, like school teachers, also need, but may not have ways to gain perspective on their own and each others' assumptions and belief systems about teaching and learning [Munby, 1982], and their own teaching effectiveness. Special education teachers and teacher educators, in particular, often have ideas about cooperative learning and classroom environments that general education faculty might not have had occasion to study in depth. Regular, sustained collaborative reflection beyond artificial departmental boundaries should be as useful to teacher educators as it is to teachers.

Do institutions of higher learning provide or value that expenditure of faculty time? [Sorcinelli, 1977] Are professors likely to be initially fearful or suspicious of attention to their assumptions and exposure of their uncertainties? Would they fear presence of a colleague

in their classrooms? Might fear of judgment, and resistance to change, inhibit transformation of education on the college level as surely as it does on the secondary level? Without transformation of college teaching, can it be reasonably expected that secondary teaching will change? Where must the cycle begin? Where are people ready?

If teachers at the college/university level might profit from supportive interventions, who should do that mentoring-advising? Can colleagues do it for each other? Does that mentor need to be, as Sheila found, an outside person with classroom and research credibility but with no investment in the politics of that particular department or institution? Does that mentor have enough interest and commitment to spend time in classrooms? It is important that the mentor give consistent, unhurried presence and attention to "the concrete situations in the classroom" [Katz, et al, 1974, p. 157]. Such unhurried presence allows the mentor to serve as personal and professional support through the uncomfortable period of change [Katz, 1974]. Ultimately, can a transitional outside mentor serve to bring the faculty together, over time, until they become resources for each other?

Finally, the contribution of research should be the discovery and validation of ways to locate and encourage

as teacher educators people who are ready to model student-centered teaching, and provide opportunities for students to practice it and talk about it. One immediate place to look is among the increasing numbers of people who are educating themselves and others about multicultural and diversity education. The literature and workshops advocate full inclusion of women, people of color, and others whose voices have been unrepresented within the dominant curriculum [Banks, 1975; Belenky, et.al., 1986; Marchesani, 1991; Freire, 1968; Adams & Horton, 1975]. They speak of transformed process as well as transformed content. They recommend cooperative and other interactive, student-centered learning as strategies most conducive to a full experience for all students of the multiple realities of an increasingly diverse and richly complex world.

Methodological Postscript: It Can Happen Before We Are Ready

In the spring of the first year of the data gathering, I berated myself for not being more systematic in re-hearing and re-thinking my data as I went along, and for not reading more widely between visits. I wanted to be more useful to Sheila each time we met together. My full-time work got in the way of my doing this support work as I thought I should.

What I came to realize, however, was that the real usefulness of my role was not that of the well-prepared expert, but that of active listener and friend. Sheila did most of the work, and therefore most of the growing.

And that is the model for student-centered teaching.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I. As part of my doctoral program at the University of Massachusetts, I am engaged in a long-term study of public secondary school teachers who use non-traditional methods in their teaching. In particular, I am interested in the experiences of teachers who are attempting to use various forms of Cooperative Learning.

Class observations and interviews with teachers, administrators, and students will be used to ascertain sources of support which encourage and factors which discourage the use of non-traditional teaching methods.

II. Participation in this project asks that you give permission for me to observe you teaching at least one class and agree to talk with me about that class, and talk with me about your personal vision of good teaching.

III. The material from the observations and conversations will be used for presentations, publications, and my dissertation at the University of Massachusetts. In all written and oral presentations, pseudonyms will be used for all names of persons, schools, school districts, cities, towns, and counties.

IV. Although anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed, the following steps will be taken to protect your identity:

A. If you desire, interviews will take place in a setting other than your school.

B. I will transcribe group interviews myself. Individual interviews will be transcribed by a professional typist who routinely works with confidential material.

C. All audio tapes will be kept in secured storage.

D. Only pseudonyms will be used in written transcripts. Your name will not appear in any document used in this project.

V. While consenting at this time to participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time up to the conclusion of the project.

VI. Furthermore, you may withdraw your consent to have particular excerpts from your interview used in any written or oral presentations, provided you notify me in writing, within two weeks of the conclusion of the project (May, 1990), of the specific passages to be removed.

VII. In signing this form, you are also assuring me that you will make no financial claims on me for the use of your interview.

I, _____

(print name)

have read this statement carefully and thoroughly, and agree to participate in this project according to the conditions stated above.

(signature of participant)

(date)

(signature of researcher)

Liz Aaronsohn

University of Massachusetts, Amherst

PARENT CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

I. As part of my doctoral program at the University of Massachusetts, I am engaged in a long-term study of public secondary school teachers who use non-traditional methods in their teaching. In particular, I am interested in the experiences of teachers who are attempting to use various forms of Cooperative Learning.

Class observations and interviews with teachers, administrators, and students will be used to discover sources of support which encourage or factors which discourage the use of non-traditional teaching methods.

The focus at all times is on the teachers' methods, and on students only in terms of their responses to those methods.

II. Your child's participation in this project asks that you give your permission for him/her to talk with me, in a small group setting (3-6 students), about her/his perceptions of the teaching methods in a particular class. The teacher of that class will have given prior consent to have students consulted in this manner. No record of your child's conversation will be made available to the teacher. Conversations will be scheduled during students' free periods; instructional time will not be interrupted.

III. The material from the observations and conversations will be used for presentations, publications, and my dissertation at the University of Massachusetts. In all written and oral presentations, pseudonyms will be used for all names of persons, schools, school districts, cities, towns, and counties.

IV. Although anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed, the following steps will be taken to protect your child's identity:

A. I will personally transcribe group interviews.

B. All audio tapes will be kept in secured storage.

C. Only pseudonyms will be used in written transcripts. Your child's name will not appear in any document.

D. The students' teacher(s) and school administrators will not have access to the interview tapes or any transcriptions obtained from them.

V. While consenting at this time to have your child participate, you may withdraw your consent at any time up to the conclusion of the project.

VII. In signing this form, you are also assuring me that you will make no financial claims on me for the use of your child's interview.

Thank you!

Liz Aaronsohn

I, _____
(print name)

have read this statement carefully and thoroughly, and agree to allow my child to participate in this project according to the conditions stated above.

(signature of parent)

(address)

(date)

(signature of child's teacher)

A P P E N D I X B

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON STUDENT-CENTERED TEACHING

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