

JAEPL



The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

Memorial to Gabriele Rico

Praisesong: One (Worn) Path through AEPL, Libby Falk Jones

Twenty Years: Reflections and Questions, Alice Brand

Hitchhiking the Labyrinth, Thomas Gage

The Dance of Spirit in AEPL and Beyond, Susan Schiller

Stepping Beyond, In, and With *JAEPL*: Twenty Years of Hope, Kristie S. Fleckenstein

Coming to Nonviolence, Paul Heilker

To the Contrary, Beth Daniel

The Personal Creed Project: Portal to Deepened Learning, John Creger

“Put Your Ear Close to the Whispering Branch”: Deep Listening in the English Classroom, Jessica Jones

Out of the Box: Drawing Is Learning, Laurence Musgrove & Myra Musgrove

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JAEPL

The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (AEPL), an official assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English, is open to all those interested in extending the frontiers of teaching and learning beyond the traditional disciplines and methodologies.

The purposes of AEPL, are to provide a common ground for theorists, researchers, and practitioners to explore ideas; to participate in relevant programs and projects; to integrate these efforts with others in related disciplines; to keep abreast of activities along these lines of inquiry; and to promote scholarship on and publication of these activities.

The *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, JAEPL, also provides a forum to encourage research, theory, and classroom practices involving expanded concepts of language. It contributes to a sense of community in which scholars and educators from pre-school through the university exchange points of view and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. JAEPL is especially interested in helping those teachers who experiment with new strategies for learning to share their practices and confirm their validity through publication in professional journals.

Topics of interest include but are not limited to:

- Aesthetic, emotional & moral intelligences
- Learning archetypes
- Kinesthetic knowledge & body wisdom
- Ethic of care in education
- Creativity & innovation
- Pedagogies of healing
- Holistic learning
- Humanistic & transpersonal psychology
- Imaging & visual thinking
- Intuition & felt sense theory
- Meditation & pedagogical uses of silence
- Narration as knowledge
- Reflective teaching
- Spirituality
- New applications of writing & rhetoric
- Memory & transference



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—Jeff Gomb

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NCTE — IT'S WHERE THE IDEAS ARE

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EDITORS' MESSAGE

No surprise that several writers in this 20th Anniversary issue of JAEPL invoke the metaphor of a path as they ponder how their teaching, their scholarship, and indeed, their lives have intersected with AEPL over the past two decades. But as our



perennial cartoon colleague Tex observes, paths function a bit differently from what we imagine. More often than not, a life path rises from a passion, a talent, a turn of luck—or in the Frostian sense, we follow our quiet intuition rather than the loud insistence of others who want us to accept direction from them.

Libby Falk Jones's path suggests the latter, seeing now that her long association with AEPL began with meeting a few rare people like her, whose passion for teaching infused everything they did and all that they sought. Praising the unexpected friendships and rich discoveries she made, she tells new readers that if they choose a different way, they won't have to travel alone.

Alice Brand recalls a wider, more travelled path which led her away from the direction she wanted to take. Instead, she turned aside and became one of AEPL's founding members. Her need to pursue scholarly work that the mainstream would not affirm showed her—and us—that teaching calls us to pioneer. Her career invites us to disregard the temptation that conformity offers in our scholarship as in our classrooms. Instead, she urges us to broaden those domains that result “in psychological, spiritual, and even physical well-being” for us and our students, no matter how unconventional they may seem.

Pushing even harder against convention, AEPL supporter Tom Gage equates following the less trodden path with hitchhiking a labyrinth. He offers no straight line between two points, but promises us new frontiers that have taken him literally to Turkey, Morocco, Syria, and beyond. In a quasi-memoir/quasi-travelogue, Gage uses the pedagogy of his dear friend, James Moffett, as a template to represent how his own life lessons unfolded. Currently “retired,” he focuses upon directing the Gülen Institute of Houston. Gage will be a keynote speaker—alongside Janet Emig—at AEPL's 2015 summer conference.

Susan Schiller's recollection of AEPL's earlier years and subsequent growth captures the organization's *esprit de corps* as a dance that has conjoined with like-minded organizations globally. She persuasively documents a groundswell of interest in “teaching with spirit” that characterizes the 21st century as a millennium of new hope that crosses borders and unites cultures. Picking up on that hopefulness, Kristy Fleckenstein reflects on a great many of JAEPL readers' favorite articles. She sets her reverie in the beautiful environs of Estes Park, where she first experienced the kind of conference retreat that has inspired so many others to participate in the 20-year dialogue that the journal's pages

record. Her subtle emphasis upon embodied spirit indicates where that *JAEPL* dialogue is taking us, and like Schiller, she does not separate the dancer from the dance.

Both Paul Heilker and Beth Daniell became acquainted with AEPL by the paths of publication. Heilker remembers his essay in Schiller's and Foehr's *Spiritual Side of Writing* as a milestone toward his commitment to nonviolence and a scholarly career that has stretched the boundaries where the personal essay finds acceptance. Meanwhile, Daniell's groundbreaking work with spiritual practice in Al-Anon so closely parallels AEPL's aims that we could not resist our impulse to issue her an invitation to share how that work still shapes and guides her thinking. "It all ties together," she asserts, giving us the four insights that she has gained: rhetoric can help us see the facts clearly; oral and written language are ever-shifting; women's stories must be told; a pedagogy of the oppressed has deeply spiritual roots.

Returning to the pedagogical path that James Moffett forged, John Creger updates his ongoing success with what he calls the Creed Project. In so doing, he provides us with a model for deepened learning that identifies how we can not only make the Common Core meaningful, but also how we can avoid the dangers to deepened learning that the mania for standardized has brought down upon our students. In tandem, Jessica Jones goes out on a woodland trail to bring at-risk urban children into harmony with nature through deep listening. The poetry to which her young students give voice will uplift readers and remind many of the deep listening they engaged in during lakeside mornings at the past AEPL conference in Sudbury, Ontario.

The Out-of-the-Box contributor to Vol. 20 is Laurence Musgrove, who teams up with his daughter to give readers a superb graphic article on drawing as learning. We are especially excited to see if this article will entice other *JAEPL* researchers to leave the path of least resistance and experiment with scholarship that informs the eye as well as the mind.

As we speak of paths, we bid farewell to Judy Halden-Sullivan, who has passed the editorship of *JAEPL*'s book reviews to Julie Nichols, a fine reviewer herself, whose recommendations have guided readers toward many current and new publications. We're so happy that Judy recruited one last group of reviewers for this 20th issue, and we wish her well, while we know that Julie will do as superb a job of ushering in the next decade for us. At the same time, Helen Walker returns from a sabbatical of teaching in Africa. With her, she brings two contributors to "Connections," as well as poetry and teaching-ales from this side of the Atlantic.

Please remember to turn to the back pages for news of our 2015 Conference, to be held once more in Estes Park, Colorado. Come July, all paths should lead us to the Rocky Mountains, where Janet Emig, Tom Gage, Sheridan Blau, John Creger and others will honor James Moffett with their own continuations of the work he valued so highly and enhanced so well.



A MEMORIAL: GABRIELE RICO

On March 15—about a month and a half after Volume 19 of *JAEPL* went to press and readers received their copies—Gabriele Lusser Rico bravely passed away from the recurrence of a cancer that she had defeated twice before. She left to those who admired and loved her, the memory of a life well lived.



Gabriele Lusser Rico

Many have read her highly regarded book, *Writing the Classic Way*. Teachers nationwide have used the technique she called “clustering,” which not only helped young writers discover their creativity and make intellectual connections, but also transformed corporate thinking, software design, and appeared in textbooks everywhere.

A host of students will recall Gabriele Rico’s 40-year teaching career at San Jose State University, where she became the very pattern of the caring professors with whom she studied. Receiving her Ph.D. at Stanford, she was named President’s Scholar in 1986 and was awarded the title of Teacher/Scholar in 1991. In 1992, the College of Notre Dame at Belmont, CA appointed her to an Endowed Chair. She was founder of Natural Way Publishing.

As a child in Germany, Gabriele lost her mother in a bombing raid, shortly before the end of World War

II. She immigrated to America with her family at age 12. She was wife of Richard Ressman and devoted mother of four children: Stephanie, Suzanne, Simone, and stepson David.

Members of AEPL knew her simply as “Gaby.” Her presence as a workshop leader, colleague, and friend enriched the many conferences she attended. Her words will not stint the deep sense of loss we feel, but they will remind us of her sense of wonder, her unquenchable curiosity, her unceasing courage, and her grace:

If you face your griefs and your losses and your negatives, you can take your life in little steps, one at a time. You won’t be caught by unmanageable crises. It’s not a matter of what hurts us in life; it’s how we deal with what hurts us that matters.



Wisdom Drawing



More about Gaby:

Gabriel Rico. "Writing the Natural Way." <http://gabrielrico.com/>.

---. Amazon.com. [http://www.amazon.com/Gabriele-Lusser-Rico/e/B000_APEMX6 / ref=ntt_dp_epwbk_0](http://www.amazon.com/Gabriele-Lusser-Rico/e/B000_APEMX6/ref=ntt_dp_epwbk_0).

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Photo from Emeritus Faculty Association Biography, San José State University
"Wisdom" drawing, courtesy of Libby Falk Jones.

Praisesong: One (Worn) Path through AEPL

Libby Falk Jones

I've walked this path for almost a quarter century. It's a path I'd been on without knowing it, a now-worn path that's offered surprise, insight, connection, challenge, camaraderie. It's a path of ideas and experiences, reading and writing, talk and silence, people and places.

Come, walk with me.

"We're called as teachers to live out on the edge of what we believe and know, to take risks with ourselves and our students."

Richard Graves, co-founder and AEPL Chair, 1992–1994

What does it mean to live on the edge? I think of margins and centers—my own hunger for centrality, stability, safety. I think also of the energy of the edge, of bell hooks' urging us all to live there. I think of Elaine Showalter's concept of the wild zone, place in limbo, place of ferment. A desirable obscurity: skunkworks, the name Boeing Aircraft gave to its 1940s basement lab where experimental scientists created off the grid.

I think of a 1990s AEPL workshop led by Jane Tompkins. She asked us to draw the edge. In the show-and-tell, what a rainbow of designs, what force. AEPL was about the edge before "edgy" became a compliment. We know risks. We know danger. We know success. We know failure. We learn.

River

Sanctuary

Rip-tide¹

March, 1991: I've come to CCCC in Boston last minute, flying up from Louisiana, leaving the bedside of my ill father, trusting he'll be okay. When I show up at my session to speak about the ways teaching listening helped my Basic English students' writing and thinking to flower, tucked into my pocket is a magnolia fuscata blossom from my family's yard. My parents planted that tree when I was a child. Its fragrance is potent, its blooming season short.

1. Editors' note: During the 2014 AEPL Conference at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, the author asked participants in her session to provide words that represented AEPL to them. She has grouped those words here.

After my talk, I scan the program for resonant sessions to attend. A provocative title draws me: “Beyond the Cognitive Domain.” I crowd into a small meeting room, magnolia perfume from my pocket still faintly hovering. The session organizers don’t read prepared papers; instead, they ask us to talk in small groups. What a buzz, electric! We probe possibilities and experiences of teaching, learning, and being that tap into spirit, embodiment, silence, emotions, arts. We draw up lists of good readings and ideas for future sessions. I meet Dick Graves and Alice Brand and Sondra Perl. Magicians, all three! It’s my favorite session of the conference. And Alice types up all our suggestions and sends them out. A network flowers, with perfume strong enough to waft through years, decades.

My work with listening will open and deepen, too, through AEPL, becoming parts of a presentation at AEPL’s workshop at CCCC 2000 in Minneapolis, “Knowing and Loving: Deepening the Educational Agenda” and my facilitation at AEPL’s 2003 summer conference at Ithaca College, “Beyond Fear and Isolation: Building a Culture of Listening in Our Institutions of Learning.” In December 2012, *The National Teaching & Learning Forum* will publish my invited essay, “Listening In,” where I argue for the pedagogical and personal value of listening in the academy. In that piece, I name AEPL as a resource for educators interested in this approach.

“AEPL is a wave of the future, a way of looking at what learning, and writing, and teaching, and eliciting, and evoking—rather than drumming in—is all about.”

Gabrielle Rico, 2002

Gaby, AEPL summer workshop, Estes Park, June 2002: energy and wisdom in motion. Passion for the word and the heart. A day of writing, the natural way. Gaby reads poems and prose passages, asking us to recreate them, to mingle our essences with those writers and words. She shows us young people’s clusters, their writing, their art. She reads from the new book she’s written on her approach: *Creating Re-Creations: Inspiration from the Source*. We are indeed inspired.

As one prompt, Gaby reads a passage from Audre Lorde’s “Poetry Is Not a Luxury”:

... poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest external horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.

As they become known and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas. They become a safe-house for that difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action. Right now, I could name at least ten ideas I would once have found intolerable or incomprehensible and frightening, except as they came after dreams and poems. This is not idle fantasy, but a disciplined attention

Jones/ Praisesong

to the true meaning of 'it feels right to me.' We can train ourselves to respect our feelings and to transpose them into a language so they can be shared (37).

I hear these words in Gaby's rich voice, snatch some for my page, name my cluster, and, in two-and-one-half minutes, write:

Creation

I can carve a turkey, not well
(my father mastered the art,
my mother prepared the platter)

cobble along a rocky path,
dodging the big ones

train morning glories
to reach for the deck rail

survive a memory

name my cat officially, then find
the other name by which he will be called
for 14½ years

light a fire, a burner,
a birthday cake, a sky

feel numb

house a guinea pig
and a snake

vitalize a class

mean well,
build a well (and cry when the water
seeps through the rocks)—

these ten things I can do.

In re-creating, I have discovered myself. Thanks to Gaby, thanks to AEPL.

Possible

Playful

Radical

“I’ve learned I’m not alone in my thinking,” writes a participant in a day-long AEPL workshop at Cs. And another participant, in a different workshop: “I get filled up with grace, spirit, and a sense of purpose *every* time I get to attend an AEPL function. Thank you for making space for things that I value.” And another, from an AEPL summer conference: “I will carry what I have learned here . . . in my heart, which is quite. . . full.”

“AEPL’s members recognize that knowing cannot be neatly boxed in.”

Regina Foehr, AEPL Chair, 1994-1998

March, 2007: with Mike Heller from Roanoke College, I lead a session at AEPL’s C’s all-day preconference workshop. Our session is titled “Don’t Try To Avoid the Rocks’: Grappling with Discomfort in the Teaching Life.” I share my short essay, “Anger in the Teaching Life,” published that winter in JAEPL’s Connecting section. Working with a student who seemed to be deliberately provoking me, I learned to sit with my anger, to let it teach me. Sparked by our writings, participants write, share, and learn from their own stories.

Anger, fear, ennui, jealousy, despair—like the Savage in Huxley’s *Brave New World*, we teachers—we AEPLers—must embrace them all.

“A home. A sanctuary. A magnet for kindred spirits who believe that learning goes beyond the cognitive—or ‘rational knowing’—to include the senses, spirituality, emotional and moral intelligence, intuition, body wisdom, creativity, and other ways of knowing. That’s how founding and current members of NCTE’s Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (AEPL) describe their community on the occasion of its tenth anniversary.” Peggy Harris, 2002

Spontaneity

Innovation

Grace

Baltimore, November 2001, the Special Interest Group meeting of AEPL at NCTE. Marian MacCurdy, co-editor of *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice* and co-organizer of the coming AEPL summer conference, leads us in a memory exercise. After some have shared their writing, Marian notes that most people have more to say about their sad rather than their happy memories, since sad memories are the ones we typically store. She gives workshop guidelines on writing to heal:

1. Take the process in pieces. Focus on a single moment. Ultimately, writers have to get to single moments.
2. Focus on techniques that bring material out of the subconscious and into consciousness where we can control it. Don't focus on a particular topic.
3. Never ask writers to do something specific. Invite them to work with their material in open and non-judgmental ways.

Marian's words resonate. Four years earlier, I curled on the sofa in my father's hospital room, companioning him on his final passage, my journal by my side. I have lived what Marian tells us: that writing can help us to recover our voices, to begin to integrate our fragmented selves. When we can name our experiences, we can recognize them, lift ourselves out of the blankness Emily Dickinson writes about feeling "after great pain."

Seven years later, I'll publish "Songs for My Father"—a cycle of poems from my father's last four days—in *Caduceus: the Poets at Artplace*.

November, 2002, AEPL workshop, NCTE, Atlanta: Bruce Novak, AEPL Co-Chair, has invited me to keynote. I don't want or feel ready for the limelight, but Bruce encourages me. I develop a presentation on "The Pedagogy of Hope: Teaching as an Act of Faith," drawing primarily on my work on appreciative inquiry—exploring ways to affirm ourselves and our students. I begin by reciting the opening lines of a poem that has shaped my teaching life, Galway Kinnell's "St. Francis and the Sow":

The bud
stands for all things,
even for those things that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self-blessing;
though sometimes it is necessary
to reteach a thing its loveliness

I'm still—always—walking this teaching path, investigating ways to create a culture of affirmation and abundance in the classroom and in our and our students' writing lives.

Contemplative

Holistic

Energizing

Standing behind my camera on its tripod, I watch the early light turn the lake's smooth surface—pink, then gold. It's a chilly 5 a.m. in late June 2014. Participants in AEPL's summer conference, "The Art of Noticing Deeply," held at Laurentian University, Sudbury, Ontario, have gathered for a dawn lakeside concert. From one shore of the

lake, a flute calls. On the opposite bank, an oboe answers. We notice with our eyes, our ears, our skin. In concert, in silence.

In my presentation that afternoon, I share a selection of my photographs of water, earth, and sky, geometries of light, along with words from photographers and poets. The practice of photography has sharpened my awareness of the world, even when I'm not behind my camera. Incorporating visual exercises into my contemplative writing courses has helped students see—and think and feel—more deeply and widely. How joyful to spend three days in an AEPL community, exploring deep perception!

Reconciliation: to bring together opposites; to understand, even embrace, what is other and strange and difficult. Reconciliation is more than a mending of fences, of enlarging of our normal world. Reconciliation means creating a new reality, a new beginning for our lives.

AEPL's 2006 summer conference, held in Berea, Kentucky, explores the role of writing in achieving reconciliation within ourselves, our institutions, and our communities. I serve as conference organizer, developing the theme in consultation with author and teacher bell hooks, featured conference speaker.

In an introductory writing exercise, hooks invites each of us to craft a personal ad. Reading these aloud, we discover that important dimensions of ourselves and our desires emerge through play. Here is my ad:

Wanted, by writer
hungry for inspiration:
a consistent muse. Will provide
comfortable accommodations,
including morning woodpeckers,
Lipton's Black Label tea,
bicycle access. Excellent
working conditions:
requires presence only,
no light housework,
not even dusting of poetry books.
Equal opportunity employer:
women, minorities, and
cats especially urged to apply.

Organizing a conference is demanding and rewarding. I think the 70 participants had as much fun as I did. "The conference has *completely* made me feel alive again!" writes one participant in the final reflection. And another: "I have begun writing more; I'm encouraged to do what I've always said that I love to do." Amen!

Stretch

Unfold

Renew

In 2004, ending my four-year term as AEPL Chair/Co-Chair, I write a poem of appreciation and gratitude. In 2014, 20 years after AEPL's birth, these words still ring true:

I want to praise AEPL,
For affirming and nurturing deep parts of my being
For not backing down or away from our truth
For holding to wholeness amidst fragmentation
For providing shelter that supports gradual growth, challenge that builds strength
For honoring the tentative, the contradictory, the neglected
For inviting unlikely partnerships, for dancing with everyone
For offering constancy that fosters deepening, difference that leads to insight and expansion . . .
For allowing me to be of some use—I have gained much more than I have given.

As AEPL begins a third decade, I look forward to continuing to contribute. May we keep talking, writing, laughing, dancing, making our path by walking, and, in Dick Graves' words, finding mountains to climb.



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Twenty Years: Reflections and Questions

Alice Brand

I was 45. No, I was 40. It was the 4Cs. With a newly minted doctorate, I had yet to serve as a presenter. But I attended not only because of the non-speaking roles that helped pay my way but also for the veritable tsunami of books, people, and sessions that inundated me. I loved it. While composition theorists at that time welcomed the British expressive writing model of the 1960s (e.g., Britton), everyone was beginning to bow at the altar of the cognitive processes movement (see Flower and Hayes): the direct, objective architecture of scribal language. Nothing captivated the larger community of educators quite like pure methodical composing. It was rational and mappable. It was predictable. Cognition was all over the CCCC and NCTE.

Some years earlier when I met with my advisor Janet Emig about my dissertation topic, her first question was: What ideas do you have? Thinking that we would plumb the depths of ideas for the next hour, I responded off the cuff: How do people feel when they write? Boom! Her head straightened. She opened her eyes wide: That's it! We went no further. She was thrilled about my addressing a side of writing that had not been examined before. Surely, no one ever talked about it in the academic circles I was becoming familiar with. I came to this idea from the perspective of a BA in psychology and an MA in English education which insiders knew meant writing/rhetoric. My dissertation on personal growth writing was the wellspring for my first book, *Therapy in Writing*. It argued that if we strip away the academic constraints, writing not only helps the basic need to find meaning and understand but also to stabilize individuals. Individuals come to clarity. Writing neutralizes venom. People feel better.

At the same time as following the psychological and scribal changes of two of the eight students I worked with for six months, the book had much to say about the history of writing therapeutically, the evolution of English education, and teachers in a therapeutic role. I realize belatedly that in my own amateurish and naive way I had made an early case for writing and wellness in the American composition classroom.

While I was riding high on the British expressive writing movement and its American counterpart, no one prepared me for the colossal STOP sign ahead. My book was so out of bounds that it was completely ignored by the field. It was not reviewed. It was not critiqued. It was invisible, easily overtaken by the vocal, well-supported, and organized Cognitive Process paradigm.

The Cognitive Writing Process movement managed to institutionalize itself quickly. Everyone from the NEA to the NCTE applauded the ideals of cognitive science, the intellectual dimension of writing. It was mainstream, politically correct, apple pie, and motherhood. Who could argue? Writing and therapeutic change was, after all, outside the academic tradition. Nobody warned me that my breaking with it was problematic for the academy—on both the secondary and college levels. Administrators were worried. My colleagues were ambivalent. Cognitive process educators felt threatened. Publishing in English journals on this subject was almost nonexistent or masked. Skepticism prevailed. (Remember, too, it was the 1970s. Linger shame surrounded the term

“therapy,” held over from earlier pathological models of the mind. It was stigmatized, a dirty word that no one was supposed to say.)

I can't begin to tell you the grief I endured when I wanted to base a unique class on personal growth through writing. At one point, I remember being told by a cognitive writing pioneer (and naysayer incarnate) that my emotions research was merely ho-hum. It had no currency because my work had already been dismissed by editors (he must have been a reviewer). I recall a dean interviewing me for a director of writing position, stuttering that, well, your research uh, uh, emotions. . . that kind of funny stuff, uh . . . won't interfere with your appointment. I assured him it wouldn't.

I did in fact finally earn a speaking slot (the first of several) at the 4Cs. (I suspect due to the catchy title, “Hot Cognition,” of a published article). Now every time I presented, there was a kindly, genial, gray-haired gentleman sitting and listening toward the front of the room. We finally introduced ourselves to each other. Alice Brand, meet Dick Graves and vice versa. That began a long and fruitful partnership. Dick's colleagues came out of the woodwork, interested in emotion and metaphor, body movement, imagery, and meditative practices. My work was heartily received. These scholars and practitioners were grateful that somebody was saying something about non-cognitive phenomena when composing.

It looked like we were forming a group. We began to build a home for like-minded thinkers who felt marginalized by establishment types. The more we as a group met, the more we believed in it. Finally, we decided to formalize this interest with whole sessions and pre-convention workshops. It was formalized further when the NCTE through Charles Suhar recognized our group. Thus formed the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning.

I alone could never have pulled it off the way these practitioners did. I was surrounded by committed professionals of all stripes: teachers, professors, counselors, scholars, social workers, therapists, administrators, poets. So much so that we decided to publish a journal. And I volunteered to be its first editor.

Some composition theorists gradually inched closer to the reality of emotion by sanctioning the themes of social construction or social emotions. Somehow, interpersonal phenomena were an acceptable lens through which to explore emotion. Feelings could be couched in a psychosocial vocabulary. But to my mind that still wasn't it.

No one had ever asked specifically and systematically—as crude as it was—how writers felt before, any time during, or after writing; the motivation for writing, rewriting, the feelings accompanying writing, the feelings on completion. That research produced *Psychology of Writing: The Affective Experience*.

Furthermore, when I dug deeper, I wanted to talk about root motivation: our core or primordial emotion, our *raison d'être*, without which we could not exist. We would not have the impulse to eat, stay warm or cool, or procreate. They make up our biological imperatives. In the real world of life, baseline motivation is self-evident. Feeling can be physiological like arousal. It can be psychological like emotion. It can be cognitive where words are key to our social and cultural code. At the far end of the spectrum, emotion shapes values and can take the form of judgments and character, the coolest forms of feeling.

It's easy to pay lip service to these grand terms: motivation and values, which have

been the subject of countless analyses since the dawn of humankind. I simply wanted to punctuate how ubiquitous emotions were. They seemed to underlie everything. I could not hope to put these terms under one definitional umbrella. But I just couldn't wait until the future produced them, much less *vis á vis* writing.

By this time the cognitive processes movement in writing was losing its one-dimensionality. The controversy between accounts of the primacy of emotion and that of cognition were no longer. Building up was an impressive array of evidence pointing to the significant role of cognitive functions in emotion that could not be ignored. There are intellectual aspects of emotion just as language has emotional loadings. Words have emotional attributes. So, terms like emotional intelligence made sense. Apart from survival impulses, the brain triggers emotion for which the mind quickly finds its name. By virtue of its name, it technically becomes an entity (for want of a better term) of cognition. Emotion authorizes. Emotion interprets. Emotion mediates. Cognition and emotion are barely inseparable, to say the least. Their interpenetration makes me think of a double helix.

Coming from base arousal, my later studies looked at brain structures like the amygdala and into neuro-scientific theories of feelings because it was so compatible with ideas about the primal quality of emotion. And I found that these theories were closely linked to biochemical realities. It was at that boundary that I stopped. The staggering complexity of the human brain made me properly deferent. I was neither a biochemist nor a neuroscientist. I had no access to a laboratory or neurobiologists or physiology researchers willing to forge a protocol to test these ideas—to say nothing of scouting for grants, securing unnumbered approvals, establishing a lab, and so on.

The work began to feel similar to the medical model that many of us were trying to steer clear of. In our research, not all studies can or should be reduced to a pathology or, for that matter, to scientific method and its tightly controlled traditional inquiries. A reductive approach, it ignores the penumbra of untidy detail and the promise (and burden) of infinitesimal variables—which is to us the very navel of writing.

It bears repeating. Such an approach in and of itself is not wrong. It, however, warrants working with researchers credentialed in biology, physiology, neuroscience, and so on. Admittedly a tall order. But in a perfect composition-studies world, there should be room for it just as there should be for cognitive science. We could no longer be at odds with cognitive science. I am not sure what we would find. But I know this: scholarship should not be paralyzed by disciplinary boundaries. My vision is that any neurobiology of writing and its affective and cognitive counterparts would over time bring us closer to understanding the whole discursive person. We have more than a simple pedagogic responsibility to our students. I am happy to note that some work on wellness and healing is moving in that direction.

This is not to diminish what AEPL has done for the profession at large. It continues to be the threshold for considerations of ineffable learning not linked before: creative imagery, spirituality, intuition, empathy, dreaming, inspiration, kinesthetic knowledge, wellness, and imagination. The human capital is here, just beneath the academic surface, knowing when to hold and when to fold—and the willingness to try. Such learning means that depending on their purposes and recipients, writers marshal their feelings, the content of their responses, and their wish to express themselves.

But now I wonder: Was anyone left talking about emotion? Why have there been so few forays into the emotional work of writers since the founding of AEPL? Why has interest lagged into values, motivation, and applications of these processes to oral or scribal language? Has it again been eclipsed by so many newer themes? Is it because emotion is so visceral, so pervasive, so immediate that it still remains largely outside the field of rhetoric and composition? It can't be tamed? But of course, it can be. Isn't that how healing works?

What has endured in me over the years is the truth (but complexity) of the way writing heals. As I point out in *Therapy in Writing*, educators are already therapists in the general sense of the word. Just for starters, let me play devil's advocate for a moment and ask if it is easier for a therapist to become a teacher or for a teacher to become a therapist? There is no question as to the difference in rigor of the schooling between the two professions. Teachers are in general imperfectly qualified to deal with fragile emotional situations. Without considerable formal training, teachers applying therapeutic principles in the classroom could be problematic for all involved. The worst-case scenario could place students in the hands of only partially prepared or completely unprepared educators. Furthermore, the task comes with grave responsibility. Stream of consciousness writing captures some of our deeper mental processes. Yet, could someone get it so wrong that it would precipitate physical harm or suicide? How then can we become better equipped?

Another distinction: in its pure form, the talking cure or the writing cure (and I use these terms broadly) produces similar benefits. But the writing cure carries with it extra syntactic and cosmetic burdens—bringing with it collateral academic benefits. Should our aim in composition be evenly bifurcated between its healing and academic advantages? The talking brings one sort of resolution. Writing is its own reward. And how do we understand their interaction?

To my mind writing and healing is unique in its potentially long-term benefits (see "Healing and the Brain"). Applications occur in clinical settings under the auspices of integrative medicine departments as well as in such quasi-school settings as hospitals, juvenile corrections centers, twelve-step programs, prisons, GED programs, and group or individual counseling. I myself have used writing therapeutically in county jails with some success—even publishing some of the work. It has found a home in work with specialized populations: the brain injured, stroke victims, the elderly, addicts, those with PTSD syndrome, and the learning disabled.

Writing is on its face more durable. I embrace the expressivist genre for its subjectivity, its authenticity and audacity. Nonetheless, the student is at risk (notwithstanding some student material—violence, rape, pedophilia—that makes my hair stand on end). Such work is not for the faint of heart, either from the perspective of mental health professionals, teachers, or writers. (Some academics might wish to jump headfirst into a psychological maelstrom where 30 years ago I wouldn't have dared wade in.) How can we propose such writing without demanding the credentials to address its outcomes?

As a result, I have sadly become unsteady about the mental health role in academic settings. My thirty years in the profession has not seen a dramatic difference in typical schools. Yes, more is being done. Yes, more is being published. However, heady success remains outside of English language classrooms. Culture still privileges the cognitive. Healing writing does indeed fail to square with academic realities; that is, what is taught

is what parents, faculties, and administrators are comfortable with: intellectual pursuits. In this they succeed magnificently. I know. Before and during retirement, I scored hundreds of SAT, AP English Language, GMAT, and GRE essays. I have three children, seven grandchildren, and a dozen others whom I have tutored in essay writing for jobs, colleges, and graduate schools.

Clearly, it is not difficult to understand why. In the hands of unevenly trained professionals is the unpredictability of the process. Then there is no way to insure effectiveness. Students and their personal stories have seemingly unfathomable variables. Writers' emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and physiological contents are not easily analyzed. The themes, the threads, the perspectives are profound and often bewildering. Add to that the interaction between individuals and classmates, which further complicates the equation with its mind-numbing moving parts. Then why bother? Because students gain access to themselves through the written word. Because we can teach that this responsibility ultimately falls to them. Because courage counts.

It is easy to see that I have come full circle—perhaps a little world weary but wiser. While the writing and healing movement is on one level more straightforward, it remains a cautionary tale for settings other than stated therapeutic or quasi-therapeutic ones. The bottom line: If writing heals, it must move us from a worse place to a better place. But even under the best of conditions, as Carl Rogers once said, the deepest learning never seems to fit well into verbal knowledge. That's where AEPL comes in.

The Assembly has been stretching. Members are vividly exploring tactile learning, meditation, kinesthesia, spirituality (as opposed to observable reality)—which in its own way is at the moving edge of learning. Because there are holes in my knowledge, I have at best a shallow acquaintance with these phenomena. Like logical positivism with which I have routinely wrestled, perhaps these phenomena are demons that no longer exist. Another way to look at it is that perhaps my hesitations are a reminder of how far AEPL has come.

This is where my mind is today. I am 76, an undistinguished link to the literatures that teach us spirituality and the philosophies of being. I have not systematically kept up with recent work in learning beyond the cognitive domain, except for my abiding interest in writing and psychological healing. I confess that deep pull toward writing to work out my own emotional, interpersonal, and idiosyncratic consciousness. It brings my combined personal and professional history to bear on my perception of the Assembly.

So my sense right now is at least bifold. First, to recognize my own lopsided interest in writing and wellness. Second, to salute this gangly group that is growing up and out under our very eyes, when the world beyond the cognitive was barely mentionable in 1980. For all practical purposes, because our discourse has widened and deepened, I would want to identify the commonalities among the questions raised here—not so much in clinical settings as in various academic and workshop settings. How can our work translate across academic boundaries? How can we transcend the differences between them? What can we learn? What can we share? How can we better respond to the sublime fact of human feeling?

The best answer to these issues at least for me and for now is developing skill and versatility. I would like to make a case for careful individual inquiry into the spectrum of knowledge and processes—the what and the how, if you will. Having these skills

means using them with clarity and wisdom. By now a truism, words are a means of naming and understanding our lives. And, on one level, it's all we've got. At the other end, our lives are experiences beyond our words. Knowing is so much larger than cognition. To say anything less is to severely limit our understanding of the human mind. That insight may in the end be most empowering. Even when the enormity of the task seems impossible.

Such an approach is in deep accord with the spirit of AEPL. The most we can hope for is an assembly of scholars and practitioners working in an ever broadening range of domains that results in psychological, spiritual, and even physical well-being. As we shape language, the event it represents loses the ability to hurt us. And if we are lucky, the writing creates a body of artful expression.

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Hitchhiking the Labyrinth

Tom Gage

*“For Tom, my much valued friend, counselor, and fellow pilgrim,”
inscribed on title page of James Moffett’s *Coming on Center*.*

It’s late afternoon. I’m leaning deep into a mud-framed doorway. An analeptic breeze relieves me from the meat-eating sun. Sweat stings my eyes, my feet swollen but well-callused. Resting a bit, I reposition the straps of my 40-pound rucksack, while I hear a lute faintly expressing phrases. A breeze caresses my face. The music stops, but the Syrian breeze continues. I shift my weight so that air currents can creep beyond the neck of my shirt to vent below. I am just beyond my nineteenth birthday, and I am in the Jazeera, miles east of Aleppo, approaching the Tigris, bordering Iraq. “*Nazeem*” in Arabic is breeze—“*Nazeem*” accords with the flights of atonal melody in a Holy Land. The music commences again, and I follow it until tears roll down my dusty cheek. Then I think: Will I find food and lodging tonight?

Now, nearly sixty years later, a riff on violin, a *Nazeem*, or just a melancholy can elicit these images and feelings: the sun, sand, sounds, and joyful ambiguity of discomfort, and being alive.



Moffett, *Sufi of the Sierra*

More than a remembrance of times past, the year 1958-59 was pivotal. My year alone, of meeting strangers—many not speaking English—launched my life’s trajectory. After hitchhiking half way around the world, I changed from majoring in chemistry at Berkeley to several other disciplines that deepened my sense of the time frame of modernity and broadened my vistas beyond the spatial confines of the Bay Area, California, and the Western world. On return to UC, I distanced from the safety of easy grades in science courses and opted for those in threatening disciplines that required writing. In one class, the professor returned my paper inquiring if English were my native language. My failures taught me that if I wanted to write, I needed to teach English.

My path has become clearer to me now in retrospect. I view events in context: that year of hitchhiking, the optimism after JFK’s election, UC’s free speech demonstrations, protesting the war in Viet Nam . . . and meeting Jim Moffett.

From the 1960s, Jim was to become my best friend for the next thirty-five years. Two of my goals since my 2006 retirement stem from advancing what Jim and I often discussed. Specifically, I wanted to foster cross cultural fluency among students in a world

increasingly experiencing a plurality of consciousnesses. Generally, I wanted to further Jim's memory and work by introducing awareness of how his theory complemented pedagogy for peace building in any language. Having accomplished much toward these two missions, I address you of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning, holding speech, in Frost's words, "With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach./ 'Men work together,' I told him from the heart./ 'Whether they work together or apart.'" (Frost 22).

Some outcomes of my efforts to advance cross cultural fluency include writing, speaking, and chairing conferences. One international conference, Youth Platform of the Gülen Institute of Houston, awards secondary students, and some teachers, cash and certificates of merit for writing at Congress in Washington DC ("Youth Platform"). Since 2010, more than a hundred students from thirty-eight nations and eighteen U.S. States have received recognition from Congresspersons and from ambassadors or their representatives.

This year, I published *Gülen's Dialogue on Education: a Caravanserai of Ideas*; Chapter 8 features a comparison of James Moffett to John Dewey, Maria Montessori, Lev Vygotsky, Kurt Hahn, Benjamin Bloom, Jean Piaget, Albert Bandura—and above all, to Fethullah Gülen (106-118). Gülen is a Turkish imam, whose education philosophy and words resonated with Moffett's. Those following Gülen are referred to as the Hizmet Movement, a word denoting "service." AEPL is for Moffett what Hizmet is for Gülen, whose voice has inspired people of many languages and faiths to build, administer, and teach in schools in over two hundred nations. As Moffett, Gülen freelanced independently, functioning like Islam itself, from bottom-up, peer to peer.

I am deeply honored to be featured in the February Issue of *JAEP* and to share some thoughts which derive from, and expand upon, Jim's influence upon AEPL and on me. Since retiring, I've delivered more than thirty talks on four continents, at sites including USC, LSU, Temple, Yale, Houston, Texas, Toronto, Georgetown, Syracuse, Santa Clara, Yale, Mississippi, Fathi in Turkey, Erasmus in the Netherlands, Fes, Ibn Tofail, and Mohamed University in Morocco. In many of these talks, the subjects relate to Moffett's theories. Implicitly undergirding them is a thesis generated from a conversation I had when Jim picked me up from the Los Angeles airport for a UC Irvine conference: the promise of "a global plurality of consciousnesses."

I have taken every opportunity to further Jim's ideas. At the Asilomar conference on "Inhabiting & Expanding the Common Ground," I chaired and opened the program opened with Thomas Jefferson's assertion: "He who receives an idea from me, receives instruction himself without lessening mine; as he who lights his taper at mine, receives light without darkening me." An apt quote to suggest what Jim—when I first met him in the 1960s—had conceptualized as a system of educating for life

Much of what follows deals with how our friendship resulted in γίγνομαι or *gignomai*, the Greek verb for a magicking forth of personal achievements as Jim and I hitchhiked the labyrinth of active learning. *Gignomai* identifies learning that is growth and possessing, as in acquiring skills and applying strategies of performance. From the roots of *gignomai*, through the bole of history into the branches of English flower words like "gene," "genius," and "gentle." Much of my *gignomai* resulted from experiences teaching, at all levels, here and abroad, under the influence of Moffett and others.

How did it all start? In September 1961, I had a job teaching at an inner city school in Oakland. For the two years after my return from the Near East, I had been a Kemper Insurance scholar. Each summer I'd worked in the San Francisco office as an underwriter on Montgomery Street. Kemper, personally, offered to extend a scholarship for law school, so long as I accept a position as an apprentice, as the administrative assistant to the president of that company in Chicago. But how would a grad from Marxist Berkeley fit in the Chicago insurance world?

I began teaching English and speech that academic year in Oakland for a \$4,800 salary, instead of Chicago's lure of \$7,000. The first year teaching was desperate. But I met teachers who encouraged me to attend NCTE and California's affiliate annual conferences, especially at Asilomar. Asilomar was where Jim Gray launched the National Writing Project. And here, at this site, I met Jim Moffett, clearly the most remarkable rhetorician of the century.

Moffett's canon divides among the spiritual and secular. The latter I sum up as the United Field Theory of the language arts. Let me address the latter first—having to do with discourse and art—which results in composing speech or written discourse (orders of knowledge that include What is Happening, What Happened, What Happens, and What Should/Shouldn't Happen), as well as the appreciation, or valuing of beauty, the reading of literature, or viewing art.

Then I will address three events that crystalized Jim's practice of spiritual disciplines, which in turn complement the United Field Theory and make up the whole of his System.

What Is Happening?

Inner speech figures forth What is Happening as we stumble along in life. Writing inner speech manifests predominantly in utterances of the present simple and present progressive in the English language. These tenses instantiate *in media res*, from the instance of perception and conception, when thought becomes language. "Drama is What is Happening," as Jim observed in his *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (60-119).

For example, my prelude of being stranded in the desert is a double vision of me, a semi-literate kid in the Jazeera, to now as a point of time, a retrospect over a half century. It is descriptive discourse in a dramatic mode, the present simple and present progressive signaling What is Happening. The reader asks, "What is Gage doing in Syria?" My rhetorical choice elicits ambiguities: will this episode lead to trouble, given the writer is a youngster who appears alone in the Muslim world? But that which you are reading is exposition, two modal stages—a procedure and a "taking effect"—bridging across the spectrum of Moffett's "Universe of Discourse."

Our inner thoughts are just scintillae of meanings. They can result in a silent chuckle or a tear on a dusty cheek, with counter-thoughts moderating. Our inner speech is I/Thou, attuning both consciously and nonconsciously with the self, which approaches the public stage in speech and writing. What agency in our mind moderates this inner speech? Moral intuition, God, or Foucault's tyranny?

Teachers of Moffett's system often begin by assigning students to write from inner speech. Many who know and thrive on his theory, and those who habitually practice its

pedagogy without knowing the source, still miss the next, all-important step of his fundamental sequence: after having students write in present simple or progressive, assign them readings from collateral literature, works that approximate the students' genre. Have them read a masterful version of "What is Happening," such as Eliot's "Prufrock," once they have recomposed a personal moment of relative impotence—or read Updike's "A & P" after describing the immediacy of an event from their last summer. Or ask students to compose an op-ed about their frustration with politics, then read Zola's "J'Accuse!" A point of entry to a writing task is best conceived from the self and then affirmed in form and eloquence by a master. But too, too many teachers do it the other way around and then complain because they have read so many stumbling attempts in papers after reading Keats' "Ode to Autumn."

What Happened?

For the sake of order, let's shift to What Happened, Moffett's next structure of knowledge. Narrative reporting, in contrast to recording What is Happening, covers beginning, middle, and end as the reader comes in synch with the writer's prior *gygnwsko*—which is knowledge linked to mastery and erudition. I attended the 1973 Spring Asilomar Invitational, a conference divided into trifurcated strands: Moffett's system, brain research, and modes of perception. I looked forward to hearing speakers that included Jim, the artist Jean Millay, and people from the Institute of Noetic Science, created by astronaut Edgar Mitchell after returning from moon travel to assess what the USSR was so engrossed in—parapsychology and telepathy. Some time ago, Fran Claggett, a longtime AEPL member, suggested that the following episode might have fostered the origins of AEPL.

Friday night's initial event featured Ms. Millay performing *Light Sculpture*, her debut having only recently been featured at New York's Guggenheim. On stage, she appeared with an Alphaphone Brain Analyzer octopused upon eight areas of her scalp. The machine displayed her chemo-electric waves in colored lights in an adjacent Plexiglas-sheeted box. Like a pinball machine, this boxed monitor documented stages of her relationship with her environment along a spectrum of stances from I/It to I/Thou. Red dots signaled beta waves of numeracy, as she computed fractions. Purple dots signaled the alpha waves of her literacy, as she processed lines of Verlaine's poetry. Green measured her theta waves, while she enjoyed a recording of her husband accompanying Ravi Shankar.

Over the weekend Jim and I experimented with the electronic octopus while first reading aloud, thinking, meditating, reading silently, listening, and speaking. By the end of the conference, many—including writing research and literacy experts, Miles and Celeste Myers—followed Jim and Jan Moffett to their Berkeley home for a session of hatha yoga, based on what we all learned from the *Light Sculpture* performance and our own experiments in reading chemo-electric waves.

The narrative of how my personal survival in the Fertile Crescent transformed my education and this narrative of the English Asilomar Spring Conference both denote two singular Happenings in my life that in retrospect exemplify pivotal shifts toward maturation, towards the realization of *gygnwsko*.

Let's get plural, moving from psychology to sociology.

What Happens

What Happens has to do with recognizing the important generalizations we make about personal experiences. In the early 2000s Bruce Novak chaired another AEPL conference, "Returning Wisdom to Education," at Mt. Madonna, California. Bruce provided conference participants with an event that inaugurated a host of generalizations, explicit and implicit. A featured presenter at the conference was Brent Cameron, a Canadian educator and architect whose work focuses students on their life generalizations (135-147).

I remember sharing a chalked stone with a well-loved AEPL participant, Gabriele Rico. Our stone linked with others arcing in a Fibobacian chrysalis-like curve, which Cameron had drawn outdoors. Brent asked each participant to occupy the stone nearest their year of age. Then, he asked us to find the chalked circle closest to the most formative year of our lives. I moved from our first stone to "21," representing the Syrian desert. Gaby moved to stone "5," the year she and her mother endured Allied Bombings when fleeing Germany. On our formative stone, all were to share. My neighbor at "21" matched my travels abroad with her initial trip on LSD. Finally, we returned to our age stone. Looking back, I realized how a sequence of the years' experiences in one's life aren't a numerical line, but an arcing, ever expanding sweep from the inner circle of experiences during elementary and middle school. I saw an instance of What Happens as I connected personal images of a latchkey childhood—torn shirt, school trouble—to images of my mother working as a secretary in the neighborhood where Huey Newton co-founded the Black Panthers, images of hitchhiking in the Middle East, and images of shaking hands with a 29-year old Martin Luther King, Jr., after hearing him speak at Wheeler Auditorium. A generalization about what formed my educational philosophy emerged, leading to my current interest in Fathulah Gülen and the Hizmet Movement.¹ Like stakes of a picket fence or the incremental stops of a bus itinerary, each year along a person's labyrinth includes *cul de sacs*, right and wrong choices, or opportunities expanding radially to now. A year's experiences embed so much more than just a second year in college or a year closer to a driver's license. Cameron's chalked chrysalis on asphalt enables one to encounter, through I/Thou chiming with fellow travelers, how education, as the Department of Education puts it, is "a post-experience good." Or as Frank Pinner writes:

Undergraduate college students] do not expect that their understandings of the world will change, that their beliefs will be altered, that old interests will be replaced by new ones, that on the day of the graduation they will be —as human beings —quite different from the freshmen who entered the university four years ago. They attend the university not as the truly religious transforms person attends to worship, for the sake of an experience which will transform; but rather as does the average Sunday churchgoer, for the sake of social conformity and from habit. (948)

Pinner's abstraction documents Moffett's System shift from singularity to generality, like the rhetorical shift from the narrative of a fable to the implications that lead to the fable's concluding moral. And here, I must also call attention to how his System includes at

1. Editors' Note: See Gage's YouTube discussion of this point at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdTeEjsM4-I>.

each order of knowledge modes of art, or genres of literature (and explicitly, a pedagogy requiring the teacher to assign writing tasks first, and then readings in literature, not the other way around!). What is Happening complements the genre of drama and What Happened the genre of story and novel. The fable bridges the two, which bears first on singularity and then on generality.

When the focus shifts to What Happens, the discourse pluralizes, language nudges thought—or if you prefer, thought nudges language—beyond specifics to generalizations. The syntax sometimes includes imperatives, sometimes conditionals, such as “If this, then that.”

Let me advance another example of What Happens from the following biographical sketch.

I grew up balancing poverty with imagination. My mother moved us ten times. My brother ran away at age fifteen. But we had an unusual family history. Captain Bill Jones, my great grandfather on my father’s side, had made Andrew Carnegie a steel czar. He managed Carnegie’s most productive steel mill. Carnegie filched patents for some of Jones’s many inventions. At my school library during lunch one day, I found out about Captain Bill Jones’ inventions and learned how Carnegie had benefitted from them. The Captain’s daughter Cora was my only living grandparent. I learned more about the Captain during a single phone call with my grandmother—the only contact I ever had with her.

I had a story to tell. But I knew that I had to master writing, and my grades weren’t indicating success. Through classes in science, I began to sense achievements that connected me to my great grandfather, the Captain, and by graduation I was earning nearly all “As,” except for the “B” in English. In college, I took as many science classes as I could, to balance lower grades in other subjects. But eventually, I switched to English because of my interest in writing. And in 2013—following a career focused on education, linguistics, and writing—my book *American Prometheus: The Steel Genius Who Made Andrew Carnegie* won two silver awards at the New York Book Expo. The generalization: if you have a story to tell, sometimes you have to wait until you know you can tell it right. *Gygnwsko*.

What Should Happen/What Shouldn’t Happen

From What Happens to What Should Happen—or the obverse, What Should not Happen—the order of knowledge shifts from generality to suasion, argumentation, exhortation, and legislation. Implicitly, stories from my youth elicit a host of propositions, but under close inspection just as many alternatives or refutations emerge.

As first theory and then pedagogy, it bears repeating that Jim crafted a series of assignments for students to write about what they know, as a precursor to reading works in the genre of literature that is similar to what they just composed (1992). Moffett believed that the subjects of student discourse must commence with what the student knows but the teacher doesn’t. The point of entry is best from the self and then affirmed in form and eloquence by a master—not the other way around, or you’re not following Moffett. Moreover, there are two major principles:

- What ought Happen? To write is to inform the uninformed.
- What ought not Happen? Under compulsion, to write to inform the already informed, i.e., the teacher, who holds up the grade like a Damoclean sword

In educational institutions, the latter is nearly always the case. The student writes to the teacher's *gignosku*, an I/It stance that usually leads to bad writing, lack of elaboration, namedropping instead of authentic research, and obliging the teacher's bias.

Another episode of my Middle Eastern *gignomai* may explain why I am conjugating Moffett's Orders of Knowledge with my earlier personal Happenings, which also influenced my commitment to multiculturalism.

1959: I got a ride with a Korean, a decorated columnist of the *Seoul Times*. Mr. Moon earned the equivalent of his nation's Pulitzer for frontline coverage of the United Nations two-year peacekeeping efforts in Korea, a war that killed nearly as many GIs as the ten-year Viet Nam War. When we got to Greece, we were entertained by a retired military man who'd served during the UN's Korean conflict. After we had dessert at the home of this former head of the Hellenic division in Korea, he announced that the next morning we were to pick up two university students at Syntagma Square for a week's tour of the Peloponnese. General Daskaroulous' students were Korean adoptees. So my week in Greece was in Korean.

It would be easy to advance the following propositions of What Should Happen or Shouldn't Happen. For such a Grand Tour, one should travel under the guidance of a specialist in European cities and environments, one who could enrich the Korean students' *gignomai* on topics such as Greek culture's ability to withstand the onslaughts of modernity; Greece's population, pollution, and traffic; Greece's art; or Greece's influence the spirit of Western civilization. But this order of knowledge—if it were not presented in Greece itself, amidst Greece's richness of cultural and historical artifacts, but in a typical educational context that was informed only by accountability-driven cost-benefit analysis—it would require the teacher to assume an I/It stance in herding the Korean students towards predetermined outcomes. Such a typical educational context would also dismiss the opportunity to invite Korean students to bring their knowledge their own culture and history into comparison with Greece's.

The Should/Shouldn't Happen therefore includes curriculum development in which education engineers risk turning *gignomai* into a Procrustean bed of miseducation that ill prepares students for gaining unique insights through multicultural connections (Taleb 2007). Moffett's theory and pedagogy fosters *gignomai* by allowing I/Thou attuning with students to share in their writing to inform the less informed teacher about their unique lives. From this point, appropriate literary selections (or other kinds of texts and objects of art) can highlight stylistic choices in genres for students to become autonomous writers.

Jim distilled it down to the following:

I gradually disentangle myself from my sole point of view and learn to speak about myself, first, as if I were another person (objectification), then about others as if they were myself (identification), and finally about others without reference to myself (transpersonalization). Put another way, I evolve from passion to compassion to dispassion. (1995 593)

Those critical of Moffett's theory and pedagogy assert that his ideas encourage permissiveness and avoid responsibilities to prepare students to write in the register of other academic disciplines. Also eliciting harsh criticism was Moffett's conviction that a writer needed stillness or dispassionate spirituality to reinvigorate the mental acuity so necessary for centering thought. But the sensitive reader of this system will also discern beyond the Unified Field Theory of Discourse and Art, to observe how Jim accommodates a refraction toward inner discipline, a realm that includes much of what he published in his last works.

Spirituality: Complementarity of the System

I have asserted that Moffett's United Field Theory constitutes but one half of his System. He wrote, "Thought that is not spiritual is intellectually inferior because it is too partial" (*Universal Schoolhouse* 43). Jim's spiritual disciplines include methods to attune to creative thinking and ethical action, which also parallels the core of Gülen's education philosophy.

To limit teaching to I/It delivery of information results in γιγνώσκω, or *gignusko*, which is *also* the Greek verb for passive, non-critical learning. On the other hand, spirituality, unrelated to any religion but heightened by mental disciplining, enables teaching from an I/Thou stance that yields *gignomai*, a type of learning that is so much more transformative in terms of developing and refining moral behavior. Teaching is more than getting students to perform for some remote audience, as they anonymously hustle toward "accountability." Teaching is engaging in mutual learning with students who have unique names and identities. That's how I acquired literacy and taught it, thanks to Moffett.

Jim's regimen included no specific religious affiliation but honored all spiritual traditions that find their roots in a universal metaphysic. His first level of contemplation and attunement begins with "visualizing by closing eyes and imagining an object," proceeding then to deeper, topical meditation ("Writing, Inner Speech" 236). Through rigorous, practiced, and scheduled observation, one advances to self-witnessing. Stilling the mind by suspending inner speech approaches an emptiness more receptive to deep thought. This regime is similar to what the art historian Hans Belting suggests happened at the onset of the Renaissance, an epistemological training that he calls *The Gaze* (297-98). Jim repeats and elaborates on this regime in many of his publications, e.g., *Universal School House* (173-74); *Coming on Center* (121). Also see "Markov Thought Chain."

Moffett's interest in spiritual regimen dates back at least to when we first met. In 1961 Jim had just published "Turning Language Upon Itself," a review of Alan Watts' *Psychotherapy East and West*. A turning point occurred when Jim passed up a beer at an Oakland archery range in fall 1971, telling me: "I've decided to roll back the years." He gave up smoking and drinking, and became a vegetarian. But three events in particular document Jim's shift toward inward exploration: (1) The onset of national behavioral objectives, when Jim walked out of the 1969 Tri-University Conference in Indiana (see "Misbehavioral Subjectivities"); (2) The founding of two ashrams, one in 1973 and one in 1976.

Moffett's Walk-out and Afterward

The Moffetts joined us in Mendocino for a weekend shortly after he'd walked in disgust out of the Tri-University Conference. I had been hearing rumors about teachers being required to write student behavioral objectives for a pilot project of the State Board of Education. At the national level, NCTE and the DOE co-sponsored the two-year Indiana project to implement an English and reading component for education, as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "Systems 70s." Johnson misguidedly extended to all federal departments the questionable success of an accounting system innovated by Robert McNamara, the Secretary of Defense. U.S. education still struggles from this federalization.

That Mendocino weekend with our families led to Jim and me, with Ken Lane, to appear before the California State Board of Education in Los Angeles to stop a pilot PPBS, using behavioral objectives, being implemented in the California K-12 schools. Our efforts to suspend implementation at the elementary and secondary levels lasted until the 2000s when higher education meekly complied without a whimper from professors to write anticipated student outcomes.

Violence over Literacy

Four years later, a board of education near Jim's wife, Jan's hometown, was shot up when attempting to adopt several textbook series, including Jim's *Interaction* and *America Reads*, of which I was a co-author. *Interaction* was so ahead of its time: a most remarkable textbook; methods and multimedia program; with writing prompts for individuals, groups, and whole class; anthologies of literary genres as collateral readings, scaffolded from students' rhetorical modes to literary appreciation; cassettes accompanying readings for students with reading troubles; and in-service staff development video tapes demonstrating for teachers how to orchestrate the System. Hostile parents with fundamentalist bias clashed with a newly elected board committed to progressive education. Textbook publishers under fire flew a number of authors to West Virginia to support adoptions. Jim's testimony surprised many for he argued for more inclusive adoption procedures, seemingly to concur with locals, but not with their violence. Moffett felt that these parents had a right that had been denied.

Soon after, Houghton Mifflin abandoned the *Interaction* Program.

The Moffetts' Ashrams

In 1973, Jim and his family joined mine at a Hindu wedding in the Montclair district of Oakland. Jim met a well-known swami, who would for some years help the Moffetts. They organized their first ashram west of Benbow in Humboldt County, where they taught meditative routines more rigorous than the Transcendental Meditation that Jim had introduced to me during the summer of 1972.

In 1976, the Moffetts and the swami founded a second ashram at a more convenient location in Mariposa, only fourteen miles from Yosemite. I spent many visits with them and often ashram-sat when Jim taught at Middlebury in Vermont. Much of my success at Humboldt State University derived from our many conversations. During a week visit, Jim asked me to read a 710-page manuscript that he'd been drafting for some time.

With day trips up Yosemite Falls, I read over several nights the incredible tome. For me this draft included Jim's latest and perhaps most important work. Exegesis, apocrypha, exoteric, esoteric, *agnosia*, and cross-cultural fluency. It was all there. But such a volume failed to entice all of the publishers that usually competed for Moffett's work. So Jim acknowledged marketing constraints and decided to break it into three separate books. He realigned the discussion to develop chronologically out of the Kanawha County debate, beginning with what became *Storm in the Mountains*, published by University of Southern Illinois Press. Jossey-Bass in San Francisco published *The Universal School House*, and Heinemann, *Harmonic Learning: Keynoting School Reform*.

Each of these publishers negotiated with Jim to massage out much of the integrity of what I had read, to ramp up profits and dilute the genius of the original. *Storm* became a *cause célèbre* about censorship and teaching, to contribute to the culture wars in the US—the opposite of Jim's mission. *School House* was narrowed to accommodate the home school market. *Harmonic Learning* failed to reach those beyond Jim's fans.

Since my retiring, I've attempted to realize some of what I read that summer in Mariposa. Many of the more than thirty classes taught for Humboldt's Osher Lifelong Learning ultimately derive from Jim's 710-page draft. Also from *Harmonic Learning*, I've organized and implemented cross cultural fluency (57-63) in more than thirty teamed classrooms of schools in California and Nevada with students in classrooms in Nigeria, Egypt, China, Morocco, France, and Indonesia. As of 2014, the flagship classrooms of Mark Hertz at Six Rivers Charter School, Arcata, California, have sustained units in cross cultural fluency for fourteen semesters.

Chartres

In 1984, Jim picked me up at LAX. Cruising down the freeway, we discussed my experiences and his recent work. I'd just returned from completing a Fulbright year teaching at Syria's Aleppo University, while next door the dozen-year civil war raged in Lebanon. Now the war has shifted to Syria. Jim was acquainted with my former student from Humboldt who as a professor taught at the University of Beirut, until 1987 when he with three others were taken and chained to a floor for five years in Lebanon's Beqaa Valley. Jim acknowledged barbarism but analyzed the violence as insular communities hanging onto mono-identities—clans inclined to belligerence, then compelled to brutality in tribal desperation to withstand the effects of Western media and civilization cannibalizing their way of life.

"Human kind is evolving towards a plurality of consciousness," he reflected. Jim believed in rational optimism, asserting that it could not get worse but only get better—though incrementally (see Ridley). Our job as teachers is to facilitate this progress, in spite of centrifugal violence.

In 1996, my wife and I were planning for a North African Christmas in Tunis, with a dogleg stay over in Paris, to visit Chartres. Two months earlier, I'd visited the Moffetts in Mariposa. At the ashram, we sipped fresh coffee that Jan had placed on a coffee table that was a millennium old, an asymmetrical labyrinth of redwood burl. Years ago Jim had bought the slab in Fortuna. He had worked it into a table, with glass overlaying the pocketed patterns of tree rings. Discussing the Moffetts' earlier visit to Chartres, Jim

offered to introduce us to a friend, Marvin Miller, a renowned scholar of the Cathedral. On December 17, the day before our flight left, Jan called to say that Jim, terribly ill, wondered if Marvin had affirmed the appointment at Chartres. She passed the phone to Jim, and we talked briefly, his voice weak as he confessed that he was facing a trip to the hospital. Three days later, he passed away.

Within a week, my wife Anita and I met with Miller at Chartres. We walked the lines of the cathedral's labyrinth, cut into the floor during the 12th century. Just days later, in snow, we landed at Tunis International. We learned that our flight path had just crossed over the greatest mass murder since WWII—the deliberate drowning of Muslim refugees seeking sanctuary in Sicily (Hooper). What would Jim have made of this horror? Of 9/11? Of Fox News?

He would insist upon dispassionate critical thinking, arrived at after passion and compassion. Jim would work to help students acquire *gignomai*, and above all, tolerance of the Other.

Jim did not live long enough to know of the dire threats our planet is experiencing, essentially caused by humankind. Hitchhiking the labyrinth now in post-retirement, I improvise, doing what I can to further Moffett's System. I hope that the world's students, working among themselves, will learn to advance a plurality of consciousnesses to protect this earth that we only have on loan.



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The Dance of Spirit in AEPL and Beyond

Susan Schiller

1991-1993: AEPL Begins—A New Rhythm in Teaching and Learning

I had just submitted my dissertation. Research for it had started with phenomenological experiences in the reading process but led to the role of emotion in meaning-making. As a new Ph.D. on the tenure track, I was looking around in composition studies to see where my interests could land. I wanted to create a rewarding research agenda that could make a difference and add to the knowledge in the field. However, I was growing frustrated over the lack of validation for research that advocated for a higher value of emotion in the writing process. Then I saw that a special interest group, “Beyond the Cognitive Domain” founded by Alice Brand and Dick Graves, was meeting at the 1991 CCCC. This group looked promising. About 150 other people apparently felt the same.

Only the front row chairs were open when I walked in just a minute or two the start of the session. Charlie Suhor and James Moffett sat in the front. Alice Brand began the special interest group meeting when she introduced herself and Dick Graves. They took turns inspiring us with their vision for the future, and we were delighted to affirm their goals. That was the first public seed for AEPL. At the 1992 CCCC, we met again. Alice, Dick, and Charlie presented their plan to form an NCTE assembly. What to name it? How to talk about it in a “safe” way, in a way to invite acceptance and to present our ideas to others as a legitimate strand of inquiry? As pioneers we understood risk, but we also aimed for significant change and a broader base for research in education and composition studies. At NCTE in 1993, we voted to accept the by-laws. We recognized the executive committee and welcomed AEPL as an official NCTE assembly.

Dick Graves’ charisma, experience, and dedication made him perfect as our first president. I think most of us would have followed him across the great Sahara if it meant our AEPL would grow. Dick was well known for his love of dancing, and I know for sure that we were willing to follow him to the dance floor as well as in his leading of the organization. As AEPL was being choreographed, I met Regina Foehr in 1991 in Boston, when we were placed on the same panel. I presented a paper about emotion then, but motivated by AEPL goals, I shifted my interests in 1993 to spirituality in education. AEPL had guided me to my niche, and it felt right to move to this new beat and to do so in the company of so many excellent teacher/scholars.

1994-1997: The Pace Quickens as AEPL Continues

The first time I collaborated with Regina, we co-authored, “Power Within: Spirituality in the Classroom,” a paper for a panel with James Moffett and Dick Graves at the 1994 NCTE meeting. This session was well-attended with an audience of over 100 people. Each of us spoke to the importance of spiritual approaches in teaching, and in one way or another we all were defining what that meant. During the question and answer session, I remember feeling challenged when skeptics spoke, yet comforted when audience members interjected answers in support. Naturally, we were delighted when

NCTE chose our panel for tape-recording and sales to conference participants. With this recording, NCTE seemed to validate our ideas; we felt encouraged to continue with this AEPL topic. I think all of us believed we were engaged in stimulating a paradigm shift within the academy, one that ushered in a whole-system transition that accommodated the whole learner. We advocated for a pedagogy that aimed at global change and one that allowed students to develop such qualities as love, compassion, patience, generosity, courage and wisdom.

Concern about the direction of educational trends created other organizations also concerned about the same matters which had drawn us in AEPL together. The Alternative Education Resource Organization (AERO) was founded in 1989, and in 1990, a retreat of holistic educators wrote "The Chicago Statement on Education." This document defines holistic education and its principles. GATE, The Global Alliance for Transforming Education, directed by Phillip Gang, held conferences over the next few years. In 1991, they issued a paper titled "Education 2000: A Holistic Perspective." Outside of the United States, the first International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC) was held in Israel. In Mexico, Dr. Ramon Gallegos was establishing a foundation that offered higher degrees in Holistic Education to teachers seeking a spirit-based pedagogy. These groups, along with AEPL, were radically arguing a whole-system change—one that acknowledges the spiritual side of learning.

AEPL leaders were aware that to expand beyond the cognitive domain in educational studies, we needed conference papers, articles, books, a journal, and maybe a conference of our own to support this expansion. In 1994, *Presence of Mind*, edited by Dick Graves and Alice Brand, was released, offering a thoughtful and clear expression of these radical ideas. Alice also led the organization in beginning *JAEPL—the Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning*, being very careful to maintain scholarly integrity to persuade the audience of our non-AEPL peers. The caution she exercised is strongly evident in "The Editor's Message" she wrote for the inaugural issue:

The theme of this first issue is Contemporary Composition Studies: Steps Beyond. What it does not mean is abandoning the solid armature of knowledge and skills. What it does mean is that we reflect our history but we question it. We resist its safety. Let me rephrase that. It means that we hold tradition up for scrutiny at the same time we push boundaries back, follow intuitions, test and record them . . . This journal is for all thinking-feeling instructors who learn and teach, so to speak, to the beat of a different drummer. (v)

Alice also was defining who *we* were and what we were not. I did the same thing with spirituality in education. The language of a spirit-based pedagogy felt risky and without any camouflage. So to me, her caution seemed timid. I yearned for us to boldly dance in this new movement with verve. Isn't this tension between junior and senior colleagues so typical? Alice had the future to think about, while I was just thinking about an immediate move. She was right. She taught me to re-vision the AEPL path, especially when coaching me through reviewing some of the first submissions to *JAEPL*.

The first AEPL conference, "Feeding the Mind, Nurturing the Spirit," Winter Park, Colorado, had James Moffett as the keynote speaker. In spite of severe health issues, he exuded wisdom and compassion for all of us in his humble way. The YMCA bunk beds and dorm style accommodations with shared baths were adequate but only slightly com-

fortable. I was just happy to have a roof instead of a tent. Once again, I found myself on a panel with Jim, Dick, Regina, and others. My talk, titled “Spiritual Points of Teaching,” reviewed basics for a spirit-based pedagogy. Scheduled for 5:00 p.m., this panel was set up in a room with large ceiling-to-floor windows that looked out over a Rocky Mountain range. The attendees were seated with their backs to the windows, while the speakers stood at a microphone facing the view. Before starting, I asked everyone to stand, to turn, and to gaze out the window. Someone switched off the lights. A communal “ah” swept through the room as we met the vast Rocky Mountain beauty. Together we stood. Holding spirit in silence. Afterward, a man—someone I didn’t know—hugged me and whispered, “Thank-you! Thank-you!”

Peak experiences of awe are essential to a spirit-based pedagogy, but we need to follow our intuition to welcome them when we can. This was my primary message in the ten minutes I used to speak. A woman in the audience challenged me when she asked “What is so new about this? Isn’t this what good teachers do anyway?” I answered, “Yes, that’s my point; spiritual experiences are already in our classrooms if we only will acknowledge them and try to invite them more regularly, rather than waiting for a rare opportunity.

At the 1995 CCCC in Washington, D.C., the AEPL workshop on spirituality led to proposing a collection of essays on spirituality in pedagogy. With a wealth of over seventy submissions, Peter Stillman at Boynton Cook Publishers assured us that “some books just need to get published” and strongly coached us through the process for publication. Two years later, *The Spiritual Side of Writing: Releasing the Learner’s Whole Potential* was published in 1997, with the anchor of the collection being a modified essay from the first chapter of *The Universal Schoolhouse* by James Moffett.

However, changes slowed the tempo of the movement. Moffett’s death in 1996 was a heavy hit. He was truly irreplaceable, and our grief was deep. Additionally, Dick Graves wanted to pass the presidency on to someone new. His wisdom was demonstrated in showing us an organization is not one person, not one leader—it is a shared responsibility among all its members. Oligarchies live short lives; communities grow with nourishment that supports and enhances the spirit of its members.

Leadership is risky and not always popular, but when one is elected to lead, the members need to trust in the majority vote. I believe that trust is inherently a spiritual act which can motivate reflection and wisdom. In 1996, Regina Foehr, the new leader of the organization, moved the conference out of Winter Park into Estes Park. Some loudly resisted this move. Those of us who questioned the move thought it was disruptive of our spiritual home. But Estes Park provided more comfort and attracted more attendees. After a few well-attended conferences, AEPL’s stability, as well as its role in the academy, was established. Now while Estes Park will always feel like home, a change of scenery can rejuvenate our soul and bring new excitement into our community.

1997-2004: AEPL’s Next Moves

In 1997, Richard Fulkerson wrote a review of four books for *College Composition and Communication*. *Presence of Mind* and *The Spiritual Side of Writing* represented edited collections and were paired with two single-authored books, Nancy Welch’s *Get-*

ting Restless: Rethinking Revision in Writing Instruction and Susan H. McLeod's *Notes on the Heart: Affective Issues in the Writing Classroom*. All four books dealt with affective issues and moved along a continuum from traditional accounts to radically expressive accounts: McLeod's at the traditional end and Foehr and Schiller's at the radically expressive end. Fulkerson claimed that these works were part of a "mini-groundswell," but he staunchly held to a traditional viewpoint by the end of the review (101). Maybe it was too much to think that Fulkerson would be "converted" to the AEPL view. We were happy that he was respectful and that he carefully considered our work. The CCC review meant that the work of AEPLers was being noticed and talked about. We saw a "mini-groundswell" as something significant.

Others felt the energy of this "groundswell." In 1997, Ron Miller released the 3rd revised edition of *What are Schools For?* Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* swept across the academy in 1998. Courage! AEPLers knew what that meant—and what it cost. In 1999, two very courageous AEPL collections were released: *Writing to Heal*, edited by Chuck Anderson and Marian McCurdy, and *Writing, Teaching, Learning*, edited by Dick Graves. The AEPL conference of 2002, "Writing and Healing: Toward Wholeness of Mind, Body, and Spirit," seemed to pull together everything AEPL had done so far. Many remarkable people contributed to this meeting, but I remember most the teachers from Columbine High School and ways AEPL members embraced them and loved them. I left that conference convinced that the AEPL message was being heard as well as motivating spiritual action.

Other activity confirmed that this "groundswell" wasn't confined to the U.S. The Nottingham Conference for Education in 2002 held its first meeting of twenty educators in the UK for two days in 1997, and that same year Jack Miller launched the first International Holistic Education Conference: Breaking New Ground in Toronto, Canada. In 2002, The Ministry of Education in Japan included three key words into their educational lexicon: "*kokoro-nokyoiku* (education for the heart and soul), *sogo-gakushyu* (integrated learning), and *tokushyoku, koseika* (the uniqueness of each school as well as of the individual person)" (Yoshida, 130-31).

Rachael Kessler's, *The Soul of Education: Helping Students Find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*, was published in 2000 with a forward by Parker Palmer, becoming the model for PassageWorks Institute, which she founded in Denver. Her book details "seven gateways" as a model for K-12 education that develops the inner life of students and teachers without ignoring standards. As Parker Palmer wrote, she addresses "the desire to truly engage and equip today's young people for effective learning" (qtd. in Kessler vi). Kessler's work that followed over the next ten years before her death has significantly contributed to the foundation for a spirit-based approach to learning. Her work continues today at PassageWorks Institute.

Linda Lantieri's edited collection, *Schools with Spirit: Nurturing the Inner Lives of Children and Teachers*, came out a year after Kessler's and further demonstrated how a spirit-based approach could be manifested in a variety of ways. Speaking to this approach were contributors such as Parker Palmer, Rachael Kessler, Angeles Arrien and Geoffrey Canada. Again, we were presented with multiple voices in agreement that the inner life of the learner is essential for quality education and meaningful educational experiences. Holistic education, teachers with courage, spirituality in learning, writing

to heal, fresh systems of thought. It took on the appearance of a whole-system transition—one happening globally wherever pockets of people like those of AEPL were writing, meeting, making a difference.

By 2001, I had decided to serve AEPL more directly on the board and co-chair with Bob Root the 10th annual AEPL conference at Estes Park, “Mapping Nonfiction: Inspiring a New Sense of the Terrain.” Doing this work brought reflection to my own spirit, which surprised me in the way it not only contributed to my professional identity, but also motivated my intensive shift into holistic education.

At an AEPL workshop in 1999, I picked up a flier about the Breaking New Ground conference in Canada. I attended it in 1999, then offered a workshop on spirituality in 2001. Spirituality is the core of holistic education, and it was *expected* to be included in everything we did. Gradually, this conference became my next home base. In 2005, I took a break from AEPL conferences. Yet I never drifted from the journal, and never from my membership or loyalties to AEPL. As these early years passed, my presentations and publications on spiritual pedagogy earned me tenure and subsequent promotions in rank. My academic career had become an example of creating a sound scholarly foundation in the study and practice spirituality and education with success—this is exactly what AEPL and the push to publication was meant to do.

2014: Moving Along in the Presence of Others

Sustaining the Writing Spirit: Holistic Tools for School and Home is an accumulation of my research in spiritual pedagogy over the last twenty-three years. As is my custom, I was thinking of a book that would serve others. In this case, I thought of the teachers or parents who are new to holistic education and new to the idea that a spirit-based pedagogy is necessary for a peaceful future.

In 2013, Dr. Ramon Gallegos, founder of the International Foundation for Holistic Education, invited me to be a keynote speaker at the Foundation’s annual conference, The World Holistic Education Forum in Guadalajara, Mexico. My presentation, “Spirituality: The Core of Holistic Education,” was based on a new chapter just added to my book. With this talk, I had the opportunity to promote spirit-based pedagogy. Like Jack Miller, Ron Miller, Dick Graves, Peter Elbow, Parker Palmer, and others, Ramon Gallegos has cut new paths in education. His Foundation is a private organization, partially funded by the Mexican government, offering doctorate and masters-level degrees in holistic education and in meditation practices. While Ramon has written many books, a principal book translated into English is *Holistic Education, Pedagogy of Universal Love*. He sees holistic education as a social movement, rather than an educational one, and he seeks to spread the holistic vision across the world. People from twenty-five different countries, especially from Latin American, have attended the Foundation’s annual Forum, as have people from America, Asia, Oceania, Europe, and Canada. It is vital for those of us in AEPL to stay connected to others around the globe so that we are strengthened in our efforts to create change.

Today, I believe a spiritual pedagogy is founded upon and develops our wonder and awe of the infinite mystery of the cosmos, of all people and gifts of the Earth, and of our mental, physical, emotional and creative abilities. With this definition we can see that

spirituality is easily identifiable outside of religion; it is a flexible and varied topic that can sustain and enrich education. However, we still have much ground to gain before spirit-based education is more widely respected. As we continue to publicly talk about this, we also need to encourage national and international organizations to become proactive and make space on conference schedules for scholars who are working in the area of spirituality and education. NCTE is slightly better than it was 25 years ago. The Association for Supervision and Curricular Development, with its “Whole-Child” structure, embeds spirituality in their discourse, albeit too quietly. Increasing panel discussion, workshops, and sessions on the topic would make ASCD and NCTE stronger advocates.

Although spirituality in education is only one of AEPL’s pioneer topics, AEPL significantly contributes to keeping it in the national discussion. As strong as AEPL, if not stronger, are those in the holistic education groups. When we all move together by putting spirituality at the core of how we teach and what we research, we are sending the invitation to all educators to join our dance—a vital dance that functions in part to offset the damage imposed by the current craze for standardized testing. Perhaps the greatest threat to education is any complicity we contribute to this craze. AEPL and groups like it offset this because they beat to a tune of discovery that compels us to be positive change-makers in our schools. They validate and sustain us as we provide pedagogies that go beyond the cognitive domain. This is one reason that AEPL is essential, more so today than ever before. It pleases me greatly, and makes me proud, to see that AEPL, vibrant with a steady beat, keeps our spirit illuminated.



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Additional Resources

- ACSD. <http://www.ascd.org/Default.aspx>
- Alternative Education Resources Organization (AERO). <http://www.educationrevolution.org/store/>
- The Global Alliance for Transforming Education (GATE). <http://hent.org/gate.htm>
- International Democratic Education Conference (IDEC). <http://www.idec2013.org/>
- The International Foundation for Holistic Education. <http://www.ramongallegos.com/englishversions.htm>
- The International Holistic Education Conference. <http://www.holisticlearningconference.org/>
- PassageWorks Institute. <http://passageworks.org/>

Stepping Beyond, In, and With *JAEPL*: Twenty Years of Hope

Kristie S. Fleckenstein

*“The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for.
And the most you can do is live inside that hope. Not admire it from
a distance but live right in it, under its roof.”*

Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*

In *Animal Dreams*, a complex narrative of place and identities, Barbara Kingsolver speaks to the human need to live inside hope. Twenty years and twenty volumes of *JAEPL* attests to that need, for, rather than admire hope “from a distance,” the journal “live[d] right in it, under its roof” (306). Throughout its pages, via articles, style, and spirit, it embodied as well as articulated the dreams and aspirations of its parent organization. In this retrospective honoring the journal—helmed initially by Alice Glarden Brand (Volumes 1-3), then by Kristie S. Fleckenstein and Linda T. Calendrillo (Volumes 4-15),¹ and currently by Joonna Smitherman Trapp and Brad Peters (Volumes 16-ongoing)—I mark three intertwined hopes and tropes that have circulated throughout *JAEPL*’s pages.² First, we have longed to define and validate ourselves as a legitimate field of study by *stepping beyond* the accepted parameters of literacy studies and, by so doing enrich, if not transform, teacher-scholars, classrooms, and students. Second, we have at the same *stepped in*, aspiring to connect not only to each other in the spirit of community but also to “the inner landscape of the teaching self” (Palmer 4). And, third, we have *stepped with* the larger discipline within which we situate ourselves, returning to literacy studies writ large to nurture and celebrate the shifting center of reading-writing education. As the pages of *JAEPL* reveals, we have lived inside these hopes for two decades, hopes that resonate to disciplinary change and teacher-scholar’s dreams.

Posted at eye-level, the black and white sign warns us to close the door firmly, else inquisitive, possibly hungry, bears will wander the halls uninvited. So, as Linda and I step from the Alpen Inn into a mist-layered June morning, we double check the latch, ensuring that the yoga devotees in the second-floor common room will not rise from their surya namaska to salute unexpected wildlife rather than the more traditional sun. Lightly jacketed against the night’s lingering chill, Linda and I stretch, loosening tight quads, hamstrings, calves, and shoulders. Cupped within the calloused palms of the Rockies, the pre-dawn YMCA camp around us drowns in silence: no Frisbee games on the green, no engines growling, horns honking, or voices calling. Just silence. Pausing a moment as we face the east, almost as if to offer the breaking dawn our own sun salutation, an obeisance to the day’s hope. Finally, in wordless accord, we

1. Peter Elbow guest edited the final volume in Fleckenstein’s and Calendrillo’s tenure as co-editors: Volume 15, “Pictures of the Believing Game.”

2. Editors’ note: Readers are invited to browse the *JAEPL* archives and revisit the articles this essay reviews. Go to: <http://trace.tennessee.edu/jaepl>.

step beyond the safety of the lodge with its modern plumbing and comfortable beds, its balconies and electricity, to slip into a stillness lambent with possibilities.

In “Contemporary Composition Studies: Steps Beyond,” Brand chose as the theme for her inaugural issue of the fledging journal a hope central to the AEPL’s identity: a longing to define and validate a scholarly and pedagogical focus that extended beyond the accepted parameters of traditional composition, literary, and language arts education. Echoing the call to go “Beyond the Cognitive Domain”—the rallying cry of the 1991, 1992, and 1993 Conference on College Composition and Communication interest groups that served as the precursor for AEPL—the first issue spotlighted *JAEPL*’s desire to “step beyond” conventional approaches to composition studies as a means to enrich teachers, research, and students. In her editor’s message, Brand makes this aim explicit, declaring that this journal is “for thinking-feeling instructors who learn and teach, so to speak, to the beat of a different drummer” (v). That trope of launching off into *terra incognita*—of stepping beyond the security of the known dimensions of composition studies—became a common metaphor throughout the journal’s history as the titles many of its 15 themed volumes indicate. If the first issue stakes out “stepping beyond,” the second issue reaffirms this hope, emphasizing the value of “Writing, Teaching, and Thinking in the Borderland,” claiming that “borderland” as *JAEPL*’s home territory, underscoring not just the ability to step beyond but also the necessity of stepping beyond. Subsequent issues, such as Volume 6’s “Between the Words: Reading and Writing the Unknown,” or Volume 7’s “At Risk: Teaching and Writing outside the Safety Zone,” as well as Volume 10’s “Leaping into Uncertainty: Teaching and Learning beyond Logic and Reason” likewise carry forth the hope of stepping beyond traditional boundaries to legitimate this new terrain. At the same time, the individual articles in these and other volumes manifested the hope of the “beyond” by mapping the specific contours of the landscape comprising *JAEPL*’s borderlands, as the journal’s attention to spirituality—one key landmark in this new landscape—illustrates.

“There are dreams, hopes, and yearning which possess our lives, calling us away from the usual round and the common tasks,” mystic and religious leader Howard Thurman reminds us, and establishing the academic and pedagogical salience of subject matter denigrated by the discipline of literacy studies constituted a crucial dream, hope, and yearning (45). *JAEPL* acted on that desire by calling readers away from “the usual round and the common tasks” and providing sustained attention to content rarely acknowledged in traditional academic venues, such as spirituality, or, as Parker Palmer defines, “the diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching” (5). Brand and Richard L. Graves note that in the early interest groups, “many didn’t know what or where the domain was. But . . . they knew important things happened there,” and one of the important things happening consisted of inquiry into the oft-scorned phenomenon of spirituality (1). That inquiry initiated in the early 90s carried over into the pages of almost every volume of *JAEPL* for the next twenty years. Articles explored Western and Eastern spiritualities in their many guises, establishing “the heart’s longing

to be connected with the largeness of life” as a focal issue—if not *the* focal issue—for K-12 and postsecondary education. *JAEPL*'s very first volume signals this hope, concluding with Martha Goff Stone's "Mastery: Or, Where Does True Wisdom Lie?" Here Goff introduces the value of Zen teaching practices, which, predicated on the art of "wait[ing] properly," can balance Western teaching practices, characterized as a "mountain-climbing approach to wisdom" wherein all energies are fixated on moving toward a goal (89). Goff's argument about the blending of Zen and Western practices acts on the assumption that such an argument is worth making; it begins the process of validating spirituality in education as a laudable subject area, one worth exploring. Volume 2 ("Writing, Teaching, and Thinking in the Borderland") makes this claim ever more boldly; it builds on Goff's beginning by paying particular attention to mapping the intricacies of spirituality in five of the volume's ten essays. Signaling both the topic's depth and range, the essays highlight the importance of spirituality in different configurations for prison classrooms (Trounstine), composition teaching (Papoulis), meditation (Kalamaras), Freirean liberation theology (Ferry), and students' spiritual diversity (Buley-Meissner). Subsequent issues maintained a consistent attention on spirituality with individual articles providing everything from the "alchemy" of an individual's spiritual identity with his or her institutional identity (McCurrie 1) to an argument concerning writing-to-learn's dependence on a "spiritual source of creativity" (Kearney 76). Through such an abiding emphasis on spirituality, *JAEPL* worked to establish the richness of this subject for educational endeavors and to validate its salience for teacher-scholars regardless of grade level, student demographic, or institutional type.

Spirituality illuminates the hope of stepping beyond, just as the provocative list of possible topics of interest—such as "intuition, inspiration, insight, imagery, meditation, silence, archetypes, emotion" and so forth—similarly underscores that hope. "For educational reform and cultural transformation," James Moffett protests in *The Universal Schoolhouse*, "nothing should be off the map," and *JAEPL* serves this goal by taking nothing off the educational map (17). Published in every volume as well as periodically revised and expanded throughout *JAEPL*'s history, the list of potential topics includes as well a reminder that any of this inventory is only suggestive, not inclusive. Promising subjects are never "limited to" a catalog, no matter how elaborate, but instead exist in any step beyond the borders of entrenched academic interests. In their innovative re-design of the *JAEPL* cover in Volume 16, co-editors Trapp and Peters state this aspiration visually and verbally. The "simple star" on the top right of the cover "at its core presents that scintilla of creativity that keeps teaching fresh and inventive" (vii). Here lies the hope for educational reformation and transformation that characterizes both *JAEPL* and its parent organization. Here, too, lies a second dream: stepping into, as well as beyond, our newly mapped territories.

"Your dreams, what you hope for and all that, it's not separate from your life. It grows right up out of it."

Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*

The morning-mist long burned off, the morning jog washed away, and the pre-dawn yoga practice still a road not taken, I drift back to the lodge from a 20-minute directed ramble

in the bright afternoon Colorado sun. Meeting Linda by chance at the lodge's south door, we join other ramblers, who, like us, have returned for the second half of an afternoon workshop. One becomes two, then four and five, clustering together with our words tumbling over each other as our feet find their sure way to the second floor. With the sun streaming in from the west window, more than 35 kindred spirits in tennis shoes, flip-flops, and an occasional bare foot sit in a circle in a circular room, close enough to touch each other, skin heating skin, a flow of mutual energy and interest dissolving separations between institutional affiliations, geographical positions, ages, races, and genders. "So what did you bring back with you from your ramble?" the facilitator asks, leaving us to determine how we might interpret that "what" and how we might share it. Voices respond, at first tentative, and then with rising confidence until a lull brings us to a brimming silence. In that pause, Linda rises and steps into the circle. Saying nothing, she places at the center a smooth, oval rock, bringing into our common space a trace of the mountains beyond the windows and gesturing to its significance for her. As she sits, my heart flutters, bidding me to step more fully into the circle around and within me.

While stepping beyond is a foundational hope of *JAEPL*, one that circulates throughout its two decades of publication, it is not the only hope important to the "field" we call AEPL. Even as we stepped beyond—perhaps even because we stepped beyond—we also by necessity, stepped in, hoping through that movement to connect individually and collectively. In committing to non-traditional academic pursuits, to teaching and researching from unconventional perspectives or methodologies, we risk alienating ourselves from the larger discipline, becoming a stranger in a less than hospitable land. Such is the peril of stepping beyond. Palmer acknowledges the pain of communal betrayal, the "pain of people who thought they were joining a community of scholars but find themselves in distant, competitive, and uncaring relationships with colleagues and students" (21). He likens this pain to dismemberment, the result of "being disconnected from our own truth, from the passions that took us into teaching, from the heart that is the source of all good work" (21). To create a home, a safe zone, for the many who felt homeless within or dismembered by the larger discipline, *JAEPL* fostered stepping in, vigorously pursuing a kind of intellectual and emotional outreach. Brand in her editor's message for the first issue, articulates the spirit of welcome intrinsic to stepping in: "Feel free," she urges, "to recommend individuals whose interests intersect with ours but who may not be affiliated with the Assembly" (viii). Evoking the spirit of James Moffett, one of AEPL's charter members, Brand's invitation resonates with the belief that "to be spiritual is to perceive our oneness with everybody and everything and to act on this perception" (Moffett xix). The articles in *JAEPL* reveal this hope for such oneness, first, through articles that dismantle pernicious binaries and, second, through articles to draw us to cherish the inner life: our own and our students'.

Regina Paxton Foehr and Susan A. Schiller in their introduction to *The Spiritual Side of Writing* emphasize the need for community, advocating fellowship through sharing ideas. Through such intercourse, they assert, we "can create connectedness to each other and represent a search toward truth" (ix). Palmer reinforces the need to share, for, he warns, without it, we forget who we are, "with unhappy consequences for our politics, our work, our hearts" (20). Sharing ideas reminds us, re-members us, connects us.

But for *JAEPL*, the key is not just sharing any ideas; it is sharing ideas that forge bonds that foster an ecumenical vision of teaching and learning. This hope manifests itself in *JAEPL* through contributions that aim to heal divisions—for example, those caused by binary thinking.

Rather than East vs. West, emotion vs. intellect, belief vs. critique, conscious vs. unconscious, image vs. word, or spiritual vs. secular, the pages of *JAEPL* hearken to Howard Thurman's gentle reminder that "there must be a unity deeper than the area of conflict" (103). Palmer concurs, advocating a deeper unity: "to chart that [teaching] landscape fully, three important paths must be taken—intellectual, emotional, and spiritual—and none can be ignored. Reduce teaching to intellect, and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions, and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to the spiritual, and it loses its anchor to the world (4)." The hopeful agenda of a "deeper unity" begins in *JAEPL*'s very first issue with Derek Owens, who, in "Earthworm Hermeneutics," exposes "what's wrong with binary thinking that wants either to preserve final boundaries or transgress (through exclusion) 'all' of them" (9). Relying on a "worm motif," Owens argues for an approach that neither reifies nor eliminate binaries. Rather, he advocates respecting boundaries by tunneling beneath them to assist the "rise and fall of boundaries" but "without seeking to contain or restrict the variation on the surface" (11). Constructing boundaries is human, he says, so our charge is to "imagine newer, richer ways of articulating whatever boundaries we seek to build with and over the old" (9).

That agenda is forwarded in different ways throughout *JAEPL* but is especially evident in the articles that burrow beneath the mind-body binary to transform those boundaries without sacrificing variety. Thus, Volume 1's Tim Doherty in "Strictly Ballroom" draws on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, especially bodily-kinesthetic knowing, to emphasize "moving words" (18). He argues for a pedagogy that shifts "student awareness of thoughts and feelings into and out of somatic and linguistic action" (19). Fifteen years later in Volume 16, Sara K. Schneider similarly builds on Gardner's bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, advocating in the K-12 classroom "playful choices" and detailing different types of learning that can guide those pedagogical choices. Doherty's and Schneider's efforts to reconfigure the mind-body binary is complemented by articles that further this agenda, this hope, by introducing yoga, the quintessential practice melding mind, body, and spirit. Contributors like Geraldine DeLuca in "Headstands, Writing, and the Rhetoric of Radical Self-Acceptance" find in yoga the inspiration and the tools to wed curriculum with students' bodies and minds, not by practicing it necessarily in the class but by mining its experience and precepts for pedagogical guidance. Christy I. Wenger in "Writing Yogis" goes even further in reshaping the mind-body binary by introducing yoga in the writing classroom, especially through *pranayama*, or focused meditative breathing. Such techniques help students embody their writing (24-25). Judith Beth Cohen in Volume 12 likewise recovers the "missing body" in higher education, highlighting how her practice of yoga changed her teaching. Seeking, like Wenger, to redress the separation of mind and body, she brings strategies derived from her practice into the classroom to change how her students learn. From Owens to Doherty, from "earthworm hermeneutics" to "moving words," *JAEPL* has fostered sharing ideas to help us re-member, a process that feeds into the second form of stepping in: attending to one's inner life.

Hope grows out of the life lived, Kingsolver muses in *Animal Dreams* (136), which includes the life lived beneath the skin, “the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self” (Palmer 11). If connecting as a community is an abiding hope of *JAEPL*, then connecting to and with oneself is an equally abiding hope. Moffett explains that we as a group might have a “common goal or desideratum, but,” he continues, “each person starts toward it from unique circumstances and conditions in which he or she is enmeshed, like the spirit fallen into and involved in matter so idiosyncratically that only certain paths or means will work” (9). Education, he notes, consists of “finding for oneself what these are,” a process that relies on plumbing one’s inner life (“Soul School” 9). Palmer agrees, contending that one’s inner life is the “landscape of the teaching self” from which the good teacher emerges (4). *JAEPL* exemplifies the hope self-connecting—of stepping into the circle of self—by inviting teachers to explore in a variety of ways the life inside. Making that invitation explicit in Volume 14, Gina Briefs-Elgin takes as her starting point a particularly low point in a teacher’s inner life: burn out, or the “dull ache” that makes us feel as if we are just trying to “get through the day, to get through until we can retire” (36). She seeks for this inner miasma a “refreshment at the root,” finding it in Eastern mystical traditions which help dispel the shadows darkening a teacher’s inner landscape. Important to Briefs-Elgin’s essay is not just the solution to teacher burn out, but the singular attention that the essay places on maladies that strike the inner life. Effective teaching—healthy teaching—requires care for that inner life.

Kami Day in “We Learn More Than Just Writing” similarly accepts as a given the importance of a teacher’s inner life, but she extends that value to students’ inner lives as well. She brings to bear on both a classroom technique based on the collaborative care intrinsic to the Quaker Clearness Committee, a group of trusted advisors brought together to help an individual explore a life problem or issue (4). Day uses the Clearness Committee to guide peer review, encouraging students “to develop awareness of their own inner teachers” as they connect with each other, underscoring that we write and teach in accord with this inner life (9). Reinforcing the value of the students’ life within, Gesa Kirsch in Volume 14, inspired by Mary Rose O’Reilly, asks how classroom spaces might be created that “allow students the freedom to nourish and sustain an inner life” (56). She recounts her effort to share her own vulnerability as a means to establish trust, to risk new pedagogical practices—such as moving class outdoors on a cold March day to walk in silence—all in the service of “stirring the spirit within” (Thurman 48). The need to step in, to connect to the life inside remains a steady hope and focus throughout the pages of *JAEPL*.

“We in composition studies are just beginning to grasp the potential of the inner experience that helps writing develop and to legitimate the writing that helps our inner experience develop. And this means nothing less than the mind in its whole humanity,” write Brand and Graves. By stepping in, *JAEPL* sought to establish a circle wherein we could connect to each other and to our inner lives and thereby sustain the dream of stepping beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. At that same time, stepping in became an initial move for stepping with the larger discipline in the hope of transforming it.

“Right now I’m living in that hope, running down its hallway and touching the walls on both sides.”

Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal Dreams*

The sun long gone, the dark mountains press against the windows, a denser enduring presence against the falling night. The afternoon’s circle of chairs now rings the perimeter of the common room, pushed back against the walls and windows, leaving the dimly lit center open and ripe for new movement. Voices buzz, and laughter—basso profundo guffaws, earthy chuckles, an infectious giggle—rumbles through the room. Amidst the murmur and hum, Benny Goodman suddenly launches into “Swingtime in the Rockies,” bidding congregants to practice a different kind of asana: jitterbugging AEPL style. On this, the last night of the conference, we celebrate with a gathering, a dance as non-traditional as the perspectives we espouse. Not immune to Goodman on clarinet, Harry James on trumpet, and Gene Krupa on drums, Linda and I look at each other, and grin. “Can you lead? If you can lead, I can follow.” Hooting like loons, we begin, stepping with each other (and occasionally on each other) as we step with (and on) our fellow jivers who move to their own rhythm around us. With bodies, with humor, with faith, together we greet the darkness in the hope that tomorrow we might continue to step with classrooms, institutions, and loved ones.

JAEPL provides a venue for articulating the aspiration of stepping beyond, of defining and inhabiting new territory, new thinking, and new feeling for education. It provides a venue for articulating the desire to step in, to connect with one another and with one’s own inner world. But JAEPL also provides a venue for the culminating dream of both stepping beyond and stepping in: stepping with, where, as Kingsolver expresses, we run down hope’s hallway and touch the walls on both sides (306). Stepping with brings what is at the margin—the periphery—into the center, thereby changing what constitutes both margin and center. Even as JAEPL pushed against the parameters of traditional education, it also selectively embraced those traditions. Such practice aimed not to reiterate those traditions but to transform them, engaging in a process of “putting ourselves back together, recovering identity and integrity, reclaiming the wholeness of our lives” (Palmer 20). Stepping with underscores the necessity of changing traditional paradigms, not rejecting them whole cloth. Articles anchoring themselves in a key aspects of disciplinary traditions—subject matter, scholarship, pedagogy, or methodology—remind readers that we are not outside a discipline; rather, we are stepping with a discipline as a means to spark a sea change for that discipline. Only by reiterating with difference do we hold on to the hope of transforming the old and refreshing the new. Thus, Catherine L. Hobbs and Keith Rhodes in separate articles turn to classical rhetoric, rescuing from scholarly obscurity the ways in which that the past resonates with JAEPL’s twenty-first century hopes. Hobbs in “The Architectonics of Information” illuminates the “lateral thought processes and everyday logic” of classical rhetoric to discover “off-beat, out-of-time connections that may prove enormously productive, if surprising and unsettling” for this digital age (49). By turning to classical rhetoric, Hobbs steps with, uncovering the value of the non-traditional in the traditional as well as the value of the traditional in the non-traditional. Rhodes in “Plato, Gorgias, and Trickster” performs

a similar service, taking the Jungian archetype of the Trickster and applying its “healing attention” to rhetoric. As he exams the history of rhetoric, he does not replicate it for the present day; rather, he recovers the “Trickster’s dialectical value” for rhetoric and for writing pedagogy, stepping with the conventional and unconventional, suggesting changes in both. Perhaps the most enduring example of the hope of stepping with lies in the multiple instantiations of Peter Elbow’s the believing game throughout *JAEPL*, ranging from individual articles to a themed issue focused on the believing game.

The believing game itself embodies stepping with, joining as it does the critical approach of the academy with the power of believing. As Elbow explains, “careful thinking or reasoned inquiry” relies not solely on Cartesian doubt; it relies also on belief. Or more precisely, it relies on the combination of what Elbow calls “methodological doubt and methodological belief” (255). While our modern era, and the academy especially, might be dominated by need “to criticize everything . . . to find flaws or contradictions, this is only a half of what constitutes effective thinking” (257). Necessary as well is a “systematic, disciplined, and conscious attempt to *believe* everything no matter how unlikely or repellent it might seem—to find virtues or strengths we might otherwise miss” (257). Both doubt and belief are integral to careful thinking and reasoned inquiry, a stepping with that changes how we think in and out of the academy. *JAEPL* contributors have followed Elbow’s lead and extended the believing games in ways that reiterate the traditional with a difference. Thus, C. Jan Swearingen in “Doubting and Believing” draws on the dialectic of doubting and believing to articulate an academic model wherein “faith—in a higher being or God—and belief—in commonly held doctrines, concepts, and values” work “hand in hand with reason and the intellect” (17). Such a model that steps with doubt and belief changes not only academic thinking but, potentially, academic curricula. Kym Buchanan and Perry Cook in Volume 17 extend the believing game to pre-service teacher and science education, finding it an apt strategy in addressing “entanglements of learners’ motivations and reluctance” (32). With the Dr. Seuss children’s story *Green Eggs and Ham* as pedagogical inspiration and tool, the co-authors engage their very different students in the “Trying Trio,” or productive behaviors including “admitting ignorance, taking risks, and making mistakes” (32). Stepping with the believing game, the co-authors conclude, constitutes the “spirit of good teaching,” and they initiate a grassroots process of change on the level of the individual student (40).

Warned by the black and white sign to “enter quietly,” I slip into the hot, dimly lit room, a faint smell of sandalwood lingering in the air. With heat prickling my skin, I collect my props: a blanket to cushion my errors in balance, a strap to compensate for the limitations of an arthritic body, and blocks—two soft ones to elevate my hips and two hard blocks to support my knees. Unrolling my mat, pulling out my water bottle and towel, I situate myself in the back of the room, smiling greetings to familiar faces. Then, with the help of my props, I sit cross-legged as best I can, place my hands, palm down, on my knees, and begin to breathe. Miles away from the Rockies, rooted in the sandy soil of the Florida panhandle, I inhale and exhale with mindfulness, hoping with each breath for the strength to invite change, the patience to wait for change, and the joy in welcoming change.

Such are the lessons of *JAEPL*. It is hope—for our discipline, our community, our calling as teachers—that characterizes the pages of *JAEPL*. It is hope that urges us in myriad articles to step beyond a well-charted academic territory to enter unknown lands; it is hope that leads us to step in the circle of self and other, finding support and the resources for resilience there; and it is hope that draws us to step with, to align ourselves with tradition in order to transform tradition. Without that faith in possibilities, we lack the “the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able” (Palmer 11). So it is with hope that *JAEPL* launched into production twenty years ago, and it is with hope that *JAEPL* looks forward to another twenty years.

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Coming to Nonviolence

Paul Heilker

769. Today marks my 769th daily offering of Buddhist wisdom on my blog. To be more precise, every day, for the last 769 days, I have posted a quotation from the American Buddhist nun, Pema Chödrön, on a Tumblr account that links to my Facebook page. Here's today's :

3 September 2014

The awakened life isn't somewhere else—in some distant place that's accessible only when we've got it all together. With the commitment to embrace the world just as it is, we begin to see that sanity and goodness are always present and can be uncovered right here, right now. Pema Chödrön (*Living Beautifully with Uncertainty and Change*, 116)

Chödrön is the author of a number of popular books, including *The Places that Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times* and *Taking the Leap: Freeing Ourselves from Old Habits and Fears*. I stumbled upon her work in what I describe to friends as a “crystal unicorn bookstore” in Olympia, Washington, when I was in town for my niece's wedding. It was an incredible discovery, and I have been sharing her wisdom with people ever since. Her words help me, and it certainly helps me to share them with others as well. My blog is a tiny karma engine: my daily posts allow me to begin each day by freely offering a gift of unalloyed good to the universe and to my fellow travelers on the planet. Another way to look at it, as folks in 12-Step programs say, is that “You have to give it away to keep it.” In either case, there is no denying that I am personally helped a great deal by sharing Chödrön's wisdom with others. It is difficult to say, though, how much these posts help others. The numbers would suggest they have little direct influence. The blog has all of 14 followers, and while I have 446 Facebook friends, only about six of them ever “Like” or comment on the Chödrön quotes when they show up in their feeds. But those 20 or so potential daily readers interact with a great many others over the course of their days, so perhaps there are wider concentric circles of influence, especially over a longer haul. I like to think so, anyway.

What I see in these daily posts in miniature, then, is what I seem to have always been about, what I seem to have been doing my entire career as a scholar and teacher of writing—that is, writing spiritually, composing (my) spirituality, writing about spirituality—although I would not have described it as such until, well, this morning, when I sat down and opened up this file. But as I look back and connect the dots, I see it has always been there. And as I look forward, I see that the connection between writing and spirituality has now become the overt focus of my scholarly efforts and what I hope will be my legacy. It is both disconcerting and liberating to say that, at once both an odd realization and a relief.

My awareness of this process begins with my training and work as a graduate teaching assistant during my M.A. program at Colorado State University in the mid-1980s. The broader orientation, mentoring, and instruction I received in writing pedagogy at CSU were tremendously helpful. Every day as I teach, I hear helpful things coming out of my mouth that I can directly attribute to Kate Kiefer, Steve Reid, Jean Wyrick, Bev

Atchison, and many other colleagues in that program. But what I am equally grateful for in retrospect, although I would not have said so then, is the extreme narrowness and rigidity of the genres we were allowed to teach our students at that time: the description essay, the comparison/contrast essay, the definition essay, the causal analysis essay, and the like. These assignments not only calcified single modes of development as pure, self-contained textual forms, but more importantly, they valued only *logos*, dismissing students' emotional connections to their content as irrelevant and unworthy of discussion, or worse, as a corruption that needed to be excised. It rankled from the get-go. I thought there was something wrong with me. I could not, for the life of me, figure out how I was supposed to write (and how I was supposed to help others write) about anything meaningful, anything worth talking about, without talking about how these matters affected us emotionally. But then again, when I was a new GTA at Colorado State, I was also hurtling toward the end of a decade of drug and alcohol abuse, fueled, I now recognize, by a culture of American masculinity that made it exceedingly difficult to be me—to be, that is, a decidedly emotional dude. My mother's great gift to me is the ability to weep at the drop of a hat, but it was decidedly not OK—is still decidedly not OK—to be a weepy, emotional male in our culture. My only recourse at the time, the very height of my coping mechanism, was to medicate myself daily with powerful combinations of drugs and alcohol in an attempt to obliterate those troublesome, persistent *feelings*.

So I am grateful, then, that the hyper-restrictiveness of those required genres and the *logos*-only nature of academic discourse were so in my face, so utterly offensive and intolerable at the outset of my career, because they made me immediately begin to seek a better, more whole, more humane way of expressing myself and trying to help others express themselves. I needed a form of analytical, scholarly nonfiction that wouldn't force me to cut myself in two, to forego half of my nature and experience, to excise the affective and emotional from my thinking and writing. I turned first to the exploratory essay. I took to heart Ross Winterowd's challenge that "if the essay is to serve as the kind of writing through which students realize their full potential as liberally educated beings, they, and we, need an expanded conception of what the essay is and what it can do" (146). I went to Texas Christian University and studied the exploratory essay closely with Gary Tate and Jim Corder for my dissertation. I worked up what I called a rehabilitative theory and pedagogy of the essay as a form of writing that transgresses disciplinary and discursive boundaries in an attempt to recover an undifferentiated unity of life, to address whole problems of human existence.

I was fortunate enough to publish that work as a book for NCTE in 1996 (*The Essay: Theory and Pedagogy for an Active Form*), but it is difficult even now to assess the influence it may have had on other teachers and scholars. Do we look at the sales figures? *The Essay* has sold only about 2000 copies over almost two decades, and most of those surely went to university libraries with blanket orders for NCTE titles. Years later, many of those copies may well have gone to the remote storage facilities of those libraries without ever having been checked out. The book is now out of print, although the odd copy still continues to sell, apparently, since I keep getting royalty checks (the two I received in 2014 have been for \$2.16 and \$2.12, respectively). Do we look at the reviews of the book? As far as I know, only one rather brief review was ever written, which I uncovered

as I laboriously constructed the dossier for my tenure case. Do we consider the number of times it has been cited? A search of the Thompson Reuters Arts and Humanities Citation Index database returns zero hits, but a quick Google search on the title suggests that the book has been cited 67 times. Still, since we typically review the literature on our topics to point out the flaws or gaps in our predecessors' work and thus make room for our own contributions, these 67 citations would more likely than not be working to demonstrate the book's *negative* influence, holding it up as an example of "what *not* to think and what *not* to do with the essay in writing and writing instruction."

I must content myself, then, with the occasional note that readers have been kind enough to share with me over the years. I've printed out those emails, archived them, and pull them out on rainy days to remind myself that my work has been stirring enough to make a few people, at least, reach out across the void and tell me so, such as Dana Morgan—"the book has been a strong influence on my teaching"; Anne Laskaya "I am writing just let you know how much I've appreciated your book on *The Essay*"; Pegi Taylor—"Congratulations on such a thoughtful and helpful book"; Elizabeth Hodges—"Personally and professionally, I think *The Essay* is a tremendous book"; and Kara Siegl—"Hi! I'm your newest fan. After finishing your book about the essay, I dared myself to contact you." Moreover, I take heart knowing that any real, substantive effects the book has had will be manifested in the educational experiences of the students fortunate enough to study with actively engaged scholars and teachers of writing such as these. Over the last 20 years, that could be quite a few students, I suppose, and some of them, too, may have gone on to become writing teachers

Personally, the strongest effect of my doctoral work on the essay was that I became emboldened enough to use the essay as a vehicle for my own scholarship. I began sending out exploratory essays as manuscripts to the editors of journals and scholarly collections in the field. These editors frequently offered confused but sympathetic responses to the odd artifacts in front of them, and they frequently rejected these explorations outright as "too subjective," not serious, or not rigorous. But sometimes they warmly embraced my weird, little essays, and even those rare bits of encouragement were enough to help me begin talking freely about the personal and emotional aspects of my professional functioning. I came to foreground the personal and emotional quite candidly in my scholarship as overt issues of consequence in our discipline. As I wrote in one NCTE collection, "I want to discuss this unfortunately and unnecessarily taboo topic and help prepare new teachers for the personal and emotional aspects of their careers, a preparation I did not have and which cost me dearly This personal, emotional reality is the single most important thing I have learned as a teacher" ("What I Know Now" 74, 80).

About the same time, I also began taking up the challenge to write directly about spiritual matters in a professional context. I think here of smart, brave editors like Regina Paxton Foehr and Susan A. Schiller. They both held positions of leadership with the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning at the time, and their collection *The Spiritual Side of Writing* urged me to be brave, too. The chapter I wrote for their book, "The Rhetoric of Spirituality in Popular Meditation Books," was, looking back, a watershed moment for me, a kind of coming-out party—as well as an affirmation that AEPL embraced the same values that my chapter described. I wrote, for instance:

There is more to the universe—more to the ways we can think about it, be in it, and respond to it—than just logic and rationality. But logic and rationality are the *only* forms of thinking, being, and responding we are conditioned to value and teach in academia. Spirituality is an alternative, *complementary* way of thinking about, being in, and responding to the universe in which we live. It is a kind of thinking, feeling, and being that is very rarely, if ever, valued, taught, or practiced in academia, but which is nonetheless an essential form of problem-solving and thus an integral part of the liberal education of a well-rounded individual. (109)

That chapter was also a very successful merging of the most advanced theoretical thinking in my scholarly discipline (at that time) with a fuller accounting of my lived experience. It was a major step forward in my quest to feel whole in my writing. In that piece, I used social construction theory to argue that the quality, terms, range, goals, conventions, and grammatical/rhetorical structures of conversations about spirituality are the sources of the quality, terms, range, goals, conventions, and grammatical/rhetorical structures of an individual's reflective, spiritual thought (111). What I recognized in the conclusion of that chapter served as a springboard for further scholarship and teaching: "Spirituality, I now see, is something that I *do* with language, both internally and externally. And so I have had the happy realization, for instance, that my teaching and my thinking about my teaching are important ways I can think spiritually and "do" spirituality" (117).

But as I reflect here on what influence, what effects *my* embracing of the personal, emotional, and spiritual in *my* scholarship and teaching might have had on *others* in the field, I find it impossible to guess. These were brave moments for me, and I would like to think they might have inspired others to make similarly brave moves in their own scholarship and teaching, but there is no way to know, really. These were, after all, small pieces in small publications read by a small number of people who were already favorably inclined to these matters in the first place, or else they wouldn't have been reading these books. That's not false modesty; that's a realistic assessment. But I am increasingly inclined to think on a more cosmic or absolute level about such things, I guess: if these texts helped even one writing teacher move even slightly closer toward a perspective, a decision, or an action that helped him/her write (or his/her students write) in a more fully human way, then that is work well done.

For myself, the most important outcome of my chapter in the Foehr and Schiller anthology seems to have been that in writing that piece I came to understand and talk about popular meditation books as a "concrete embodiment and enactment" of spirituality, to understand and talk about writing as embodying and enacting a way of being in the world. It was about this time (late 1997) that I came face to face with a very different way of being in the world from those I knew, because this is when I learned that my son, Eli, was autistic. Becoming educated about autism, learning how to parent an autistic child, learning how to advocate on Eli's behalf to his teachers and other caregivers, and other similar matters quickly grew to command the time and energy I might have otherwise spent on reading and writing scholarship in my field.

This dynamic continued for a decade, really. During this period, old friends were kind enough to ask me to contribute pieces to their edited collections, but those texts did not constitute any great advancements in my thinking so much as render new variations

on my familiar themes. But during this period I was also, however, engaged quite deeply on a daily basis of exploring how to understand my son, who, among other things, has a distinctive rhetoric, a fascinating way of using language, an unusual way of being in the world through language. In 2008, as a result of these circumstances, I vividly recalled something Jim Corder had said in passing in a lecture when I was doctoral student at TCU and that had clearly been percolating in my thinking ever since, though at an inarticulate level: “Each [of us] is a rhetorical creation. Out of an inventive world (a past, a set of capacities, a way of thinking) [. . . we are] always creating structures of meaning and generating a style, a way of being in the world” (152). And following Corder, who defines rhetoric here as a way of being in the world through language, through invention, structure, and style, I came to understand that autism itself is a rhetoric, that autism is a way of being in the world through language, through invention, structure, and style—an argument I explicated with Melanie Yergeau in “Autism and Rhetoric” in *College English* in 2011. I will note here that this piece seems to have been picked up and used in a number of graduate courses in composition theory and pedagogy since it was published (based on the number of Google hits that point toward students’ blogged responses to the piece). I am pleased to know that our ideas on autism and rhetoric remain in circulation—and again, if these ideas move even one person even slightest closer to a perspective, decision, or action that allows them to treat some other person in a more fully human way, I would consider mine a career well spent.

But what has happened of late is that this idea—that rhetoric is a way of being in the world through language—has come to completely dominate my thinking. As I wrote in *Writing on the Edge* in 2011,

The implications of this concept are just now beginning to impress themselves upon me, and they are everywhere, and they are immense. If rhetoric is a way of being in the world through language, then discourses are ways of being in the world through language, through invention, structure, and style. And if discourses are ways of being in the world through language, then their constituent genres are ways of being in the world through language . . . ways of emerging into the world. (19)

In that essay, in an attempt to render just how important this concept is, just how personally critical this idea is, I invoked my history as a recovering alcoholic, telling the story of how a rhetoric of spirituality that I learned in a 12-Step program saved my life when I was a graduate student at Colorado State:

I sit, miserably at first, and listen to people talking about God, and honesty, and acceptance, and control, and selfishness, and fear; I learn, very haltingly, to begin talking about change, and pain, and growth, and healing, and faith the way that they speak of such things; and I begin, quite reluctantly at first, to read and write the texts that make me a member of this community. For instance, I am invited and compelled to write in new genres like the 4th Step, a rigorously honest inventory of those I have wronged and how I have done so, combined with a probing analysis of the part I have played in how others have wronged me. And I come, over time, to inhabit a new way of being in the world through language. And this new rhetoric, this new form of invention, structure, and style, this discourse and its constituent genres, saves my life by fundamentally altering how I am in the world. (23)

I concluded that essay with a series of questions for writing instructors, myself included. If genres are ways of being in the world through language, “When students take up your writing assignments, the genres you assign, how do they need to be in the world? How does the assigned genre require them to emerge into the world? How does it require them to exist in the world?” (30). And my own answers to these questions were unsettling, to say the least. It has become abundantly and painfully clear to me that the primary—and sometimes the only—way that academics (scholars and students alike) can be in the world is through adversarial violence, that is, through the symbolic and sublimated warfare of argument.

This is not a new idea, of course. In 1980, in *The Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson noted that “Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people” (4). And their very first example is “the conceptual metaphor [that] ARGUMENT IS WAR”:

It is important to see that we don't just talk about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of . . . attack, defense, [or] counterattack . . . Try to imagine a culture where arguments are not viewed in terms of war, where no one wins or loses, where there is no sense of attacking or defending, gaining or losing ground [. . .]his is the ordinary way of having an argument and talking about one. (4)

In war, alas, the ends can justify the means, and thus we come to the kinds of scorched-earth public discourse we can find almost anywhere in American culture, where opponents face off on television or in the comments section of webpages and attempt to annihilate each other with ever louder, ever more vicious, monologic, vitriolic, hate speech.

Thus, 30 years into my career (with 20 more to go, I hope), I have come to believe that we cannot effectively re-imagine the human condition as less violent using the same discursive tools that created our currently hostile conditions, that we cannot bridge our deep disagreements and schismatic worldviews using the same schemas of discourse that constructed today's antagonistic realities. To create a less hostile and violent future, we need less hostile and violent discourses, and we need to teach these alternative ways of being in the world to students. I expect to spend the next two decades explicating just what this might mean. Some obvious starting points include the work we have already done on dialogue, intercultural communication, negotiation/mediation, conflict resolution, Rogerian rhetoric, and feminist alternatives to traditional argument, to name just a few. But the goal, once again—just as it was back when I was a GTA at Colorado State—is to find more fully human ways to express myself—ourselves—in writing. I am right where I have always been, it seems.

Even so, I have begun reading work in Peace Studies, and in the first text I read, Johan Galtung defines violence as follows: “violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations . . . Violence is here defined as the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is” (168). In what ways, I am called to wonder, does language use and instruction, especially writ-

ing instruction, reduce/inhibit/prevent someone from reaching his or her full human potential? In how many ways, and to how great a degree, is writing instruction therefore violent? From this perspective, I have been coming to nonviolence since I first began thinking critically about my work as a writing instructor, since I first balked at the radically truncated “humanity” forced upon my students via the comparison/contrast essay, since I first took up Winterowd’s challenge to use writing as means to help “students realize their *full potential* as liberally educated beings.” In my scholarly work to date, my goal, I now realize, has been to reduce the violence I do to myself, the violence I do to my experience as I attempt to render it, the violence I do to my humanity in that process, and the violence I do to my colleagues and students, as well. If any of these efforts have helped even one person move the tiniest bit toward a less violent way of being in the world themselves, it has been a career well spent.

I recognize, of course, that I am consoling myself in what might be construed as a mid-life crisis (of conscience): *Oh my god! I’ve put in 30 years of hard work and I have nothing, NOTHING concrete to show for it.* Perhaps. Given all my references here to “back when I was a grad student,” I can easily see how this might read like a mid-life crisis in print. But I have long known that I would not likely see overt and clear results for the work I do. Hell, *any* writing teacher knows *that*. We simply *must* believe in the “virus theory” of influence: that if we are lucky, we infect our students with ideas and aspirations that can lay dormant for a very long time before becoming fully functional, perhaps for years after they have left our classes, but once functional in a person, those ideas and aspirations can come to infect/affect other people in an increasingly large chain reaction. We also have to believe in the long haul. Teaching writing is an act of faith.

There is an apocryphal story about Jim Berlin that goes like this: “If you really want to make a difference in the world,” he is supposed to have said, “Then get out of teaching. Go man the barricades.” Again, perhaps. But I will end here by suggesting that we will only really change the world by laying down the tools with which we built it and coming to nonviolence. Changing the world begins with our next gesture, however small, to the next person we encounter, with the next thing we say or write, especially as a teacher.



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To the Contrary

Beth Daniell

To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the *Journal of the Assembly for Advanced Perspectives on Learning*, the editors of JAEPL have issued a call for papers wherein they charge researchers committed to AEPL's founding principles with taking a retrospective look at their work on writing in community settings, writing to heal, writing to raise spiritual consciousness, service learning, embodied writing, writing as self-counseling, writing for meditative practice, and so forth. They ask, in addition, for discussion of the effect that this kind of research has had on one's subsequent scholarship and teaching and on that of others as well. Since some of my work falls into this broad category, I'm trying to respond to that call, though the task is not as easy as it sounds.

My 2003 book, *A Communion of Friendship: Literacy, Spiritual Practice, and Women in Recovery* reported on how a community of women in Al-Anon used literacy as part of their spiritual practice. For those unfamiliar with organization, Al-Anon is designed to help family and friends of alcoholics. Al-Anon encourages its members to practice the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous as a way of coping with and rising above someone else's drinking.

The particulars of how I came to do the research for this book appears in Chapter 1, "A Dais for My Words." But I can summarize: As I wrote a dissertation critical of Great Leap, or Great Divide, theories of literacy, I began to question why the scholarship on literacy seemed to leave out spiritual and religious uses of reading and writing. Historical studies like those by Goody and the Resnicks took up the connection between literacy and religion. But otherwise only a few brief comments occurred in the scholarship I was reading and then in a cursory way. Of course, by the last decades of the twentieth century, when the bulk of research on literacy was taking place, religion seemed to be off the radar in much of the humanities and social sciences. Surely, I thought, this motive for reading and for writing could not have disappeared altogether. Perhaps, I surmised, it was more important in contemporary times than academic studies indicated. Exploring this gap stemmed not from any brilliance on my part, but rather from what my mother used to call my contrariness—the tendency to argue with, to find fault with, and so forth.

The research for *Communion of Friendship* has influenced, perhaps even determined, my subsequent scholarship and pedagogy. As I have considered this essay for JAEPL, I realize certain key insights not only brought me to that research but have continued to influence my work.

1. *We must be able to employ persuasion just as strict reasoning can be employed on opposite sides of a question, not in order that we may in practice employ it in both (for we must not make people believe what is wrong) but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are* (Aristotle, 1.1)

What my mother called "contrary" is seeing weaknesses, omissions, and contradictions in prevailing opinions, especially those offered with certainty by authorities. The problem for my southern mother was that I tended to question or object aloud. For much of my life I saw this tendency as a character flaw, a "besetting sin." In gradu-

ate school in the early 80s, as I discovered rhetoric, I found a Greek name for what I was doing: the *dissoi logoi*—contrary propositions, differing theses, opposing opinions. According to rhetoricians from ancient sophists to Kenneth Burke, *dissoi logoi*, or counter-statements, help people think through a proposed solution, figure out what they really think, see arguments that counter their own position, and recognize the fallacies and incomplete reasoning in others' arguments. What I also came to realize is this approach is how I make my living—examining things from a different perspective and teaching students to do the same.

The most exciting reading of my first year at in the Ph.D. program at Texas was Pat Bizzell's article on "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty"—not just because she showed that writing was more than a set of skills for classroom use, but because she was taking issue with what seemed the accepted version of composition research. Bizzell was the first scholar in composition and rhetoric I read who made explicit the claim that language—thus also writing—is connected to identity and culture. As a southerner and as someone who had taught minority students, I felt Bizzell's article resonate deeply with me.

2. The nature of oral and written language and the interplay between them is ever-shifting, and these changes both respond to and create shifts in the individual and societal meaning of literacy. The information to be gained from any prolonged look at oral and written uses of language through literacy events may enable us to accept the protean shapes of oral and literate traditions and language, and move us away from current tendencies to classify communities as being at one or another point along a hypothetical continuum which has no societal reality. (Heath 116)

The following year I began reading intensively on literacy. Goody and Watt, Olsen, Havelock, and Ong offered a theoretical perspective that separated orality—language and thought—and literacy—language and thought—but proved attractive because it explained, well, everything. The Havelock-Ong Great Leap theory said, in essence, "become literate and your intelligence takes a great leap into to western European academic language forms and into western syllogistic thought. Not only you, but also your culture will become more advanced." Despite occasional paternalistic praise, Ong depicted "orality" as the unvalorized side of a binary. I found it troubling that Ong's categories called people I had known all my life "oral," thereby deeming their thinking faulty. Work by Heath, Chafe, Basso, Akinnaso, Scribner and Cole, the Resnicks, and others pointed to specific instances that contradicted the Havelock-Ong theoretical statements, thus calling into question their orality-literacy dichotomy. My dissertation argued against the Ong version of the Great Leap theory as well as its underlying ethnocentrism, claiming rather that relations among speech and writing, culture, cognition, identity, and rhetoric are more complicated than presented in Ong's description. Because Father Ong had once been president of the Modern Language Association and because by all reports he was a very nice man, people in English departments were, to put it mildly, surprised that a graduate student would take on his ideas.

Communion of Friendship continued the argument that written and spoken language are intertwined in complex ways, as Heath says. In addition, here I argued for the spiritual uses of literacy. I countered the misinterpretations that came from merely reading Al-Anon literature without attending meetings where people glossed various passages

and interpreted Al-Anon teachings in light of their own experiences (27-28). As I wrote the final chapter, “Literacy Lessons,” which focused on the pedagogical implications of the research, I began to see with more clarity the importance of class discussion. What Lilly, one of my research participants, said of the group discussions of Ntozake Shange’s *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide* applies as well to the classroom: “I loved watching what people liked. And we talked a lot about it.... The more conversation we added about it, the fuller everything got, because there were so many ways to look at one poem...” (*Communion*, 121-122).

Consequently, in my writing classes I began to focus more and more on discussion—not just about the readings and the ideas, but also on strategies, plans, and lessons learned about writing, putting everyone’s ideas on the board. My favorite comment on student evaluations included this comment: “Dr. Daniell is so accepting. She lets everyone talk.” My response was “No, honey, Dr. Daniell makes everyone talk, but she’s subtle about it.” In my administrative work and in my Writing Across the Curriculum outreach, I have continued to point out the complex and unconscious relations of talk and text.

For example, in a presentation at the 2014 WAC conference I contended that using WAC strategies can enrich class discussions by helping teachers go beyond “guess what’s in the professor’s mind” questions. In WAC circles, this is hardly a groundbreaking idea. But calling on the research Mary Lou Odom and I are doing with WAC classes in our college at Kennesaw State University, I could claim that both students and teachers at our place think writing augments discussion, and students say they understand the material better by hearing their peers’ ideas. My talk concluded by advising that incorporating what students say in class or on discussion boards into our lectures and assignments shows that professors value student contributions.

Perhaps I would have come to these beliefs about the connections between talk and text anyway, but I think I got there sooner by being contrary about the Havelock-Ong literacy-orality binary both in my dissertation and in *Communion of Friendship*.

3. *Women’s stories have not been told.* (Christ 1)

When I was reading intensely about literacy in the 80s, the literate—whether reader or writer—was assumed to be male and white, as indeed all subjects were until near the end of the twentieth century. Even while anthropologic and linguistic research clearly showed literacy influenced by race, culture, economics, and politics, all too often the discussion omitted gender. There were few exceptions: In Heath’s *Ways With Words*, the literates were not abstractions, but rather actual humans who sometimes occupied race and gender not fitting the traditional model. Heath discussed the literacy of women, even in fact the literacy of women of color. See, for instance, the Trackton mothers decoding the letters about the shots required for first-grade, or the school teacher praying at church, elaborating on the prayer she had written ahead of time. In *Reading the Romance*, Janice Radway portrayed women readers as agents in their own literacy. Allowing her research participants to speak for themselves, Radway interpreted their reading of romance novels as a way to claim private time away from the demands of family life. While critics of romances point out that the content of the books keeps women “in their place,” the literate practice of Radway’s readers turned that message on its head.

In preparing for the interviews with the Al-Anon women, I was lucky enough to run across Ann Oakley's chapter, "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms." Oakley says there that "[W]hen a feminist interviews women... it becomes clear, in most cases, the goal of finding out about people is best achieved when the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own identity the relationship" (41). Using this sentence as a guide, I purposely structured the time with the Mountain City women as informal exchanges (see *Communion* 17, 20-23, 35-36). Because of the information I was thus able to glean, literacy can be seen in *Communion* in its private and spiritual uses, embedded in conversations that continued for years. Like Radway's readers, the Al-Anon women who talked with me used their literate practices as a way to claim space for themselves, as a means to spiritual and emotional growth.

So having spent a decade researching and writing about women's literacy, I said "Yes" immediately when Peter Mortensen asked if I might be interested in working with him on a collection pulling together new research on women's literacy. The result was *Women and Literacy: Local and Global Inquiries for a New Century*. While some of our contributors were established researchers, others were still in graduate school or early in assistant professorships when we accepted their pieces. Almost all of these scholars are now known for their research into women's literacy. We have been delighted to see books come out of our contributors' projects. What struck Peter and me as we read the proposals was the variety of research methods employed by these scholars—archival, ethnographic, interview, demographic, oral history—used to offer glimpses of literacy in the lives of actual women. Some of our contributors, like Kim Donehower, Rhea Lathan, Katrina Powell, and Charlotte Hogg, investigated the literate practices of women with whom they had family or cultural ties and thereby told women's stories that had not been told.

Telling women's stories is still my project: to a promotion and tenure committee, where I served as the only woman; to a department chair who has ignored scheduling general education courses on the basis of gender (guess who gets the easiest schedules!) rather than on the principle of sharing work equitably; to a dean who needed to be told that I was making less money than male colleagues who had responsibilities for far fewer teachers and students than I. And I continue to tell women's stories in my scholarship. In the last few years, in a series of CCCC panels with Roger Cherry and David Jolliffe that have focused on rhetoric, I have included women's rhetoric—for example, the use of rhetoric by women on opposite sides of the Komen Foundation-Planned Parenthood controversy and the difficulties of using Aristotle's notions of ethos to examine women's rhetoric. My Kennesaw colleague Letizia Guglielmo and I have written on the changes in women's political speech and writing; our argument is that women who speak out on behalf of women's causes are supported these days by other women using social media.

4. Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed comes as much from his Catholicism as from his Marxism. (Berthoff, CCCC, 1988)

After I left graduate school and began to look consciously for connections between literate and spiritual practices, a panel at CCCC explored the implications of Freire's work for composition. After the presentations, the first question, posed by Ann Berthoff,

reminded the audience of at least 200 that Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed had its roots as much in his Catholicism as in his Marxism. Christian images are to be found throughout the book—dying to be reborn, sacrifice, and so forth, and reading *Pedagogy* as a graduate student, I had noticed them all. I didn't bring the subject up in class, first, because nobody else did and, second, because I had already figured out that talking about religion in an academic setting was simply not done. But here was Ann Berthoff articulating in public what I had suppressed. Her comment gave me the courage to write about the relationship between literate and spiritual practice. Two things came of this over the next two or three years. The first was writing a grant to return to the place I now call Mountain City to ask the Al-Anon women I knew there about their experiences of literacy and spirituality. The second was a panel at CCCC with Jan Swearingen and JoAnn Campbell called *Spiritual Sites of Composing*, which turned out to be far more successful in drawing an audience than any of us had imagined. From that panel grew a symposium published in CCC in 1994.

Later, writing about my research while simultaneously teaching a seminar on literacy, I once again became contrary, observing that it wasn't just Havelock and Ong offering what Lyotard calls a "grand narrative," but Freire as well. The Great Leap theory offers a narrative in which composition teachers can become, according to *The Postmodern Condition*, heroes of cognition or knowledge (31). Composition scholars had taken up the other narrative Lyotard names. Seeing themselves as heroes of liberty and speaking of their students as if they were the peasants Freire taught in the culture circles in the back country or in the cities of Brazil began to tire me (Lyotard, 31). Yes, there are American students who are oppressed, as I said in a CCC article called "Narratives of Literacy," but they only rarely attend universities where their professors are writing about pedagogy of the oppressed. The students in the U.S who are oppressed are most often in public schools, community colleges, prisons, or in women's or homeless shelters, and the teachers of those students seldom have vitas of multiple pages and rarely have the institutional support to go to national conferences to talk about their students.

Near the end of the Narratives article, I said that perhaps in America we had missed Freire's actual narrative, his real message, because we were too focused on his Marxism, ignoring his Christianity. I suggested that perhaps Freire's narrative was rather a story that called us to be "laborers in the vineyard" (402-03). This reference to Matthew 20: 1-16 led to the next phase of my scholarship. Not long after "Narratives of Literacy" appeared, Elizabeth Vander Lei called me up asking if I would be interested in being part of a symposium on Christianity and rhetoric.

This is how I came to work over the next decade with Elizabeth, Anne Gere, Tom Amorose, and, for a few of those years, David Jolliffe, whose work as the Brown Chair of Literacy at the University of Arkansas finally had to take precedence. The association with this group led to conference presentations, meetings among the five of us and then the four of us, a conference on Rhetoric and Christian Tradition (note: no definite article because we do not consider Christian tradition to be one thing), a Special Interest Group at CCCC, and finally to our jointly-edited 2014 collection *Renovating Rhetoric in Christian Tradition*. Here scholars examine the role of rhetoric in the expansion of Christianity, the formation of denominations, the work of women in various Christian groups, and teaching religiously conservative students. The name of the SIG has

changed to indicate inclusiveness. Our SIG “Rhetoric and Religious Traditions” now has a permanent place on the CCCC program, as well as a set of officers that are younger than the founders. Hearing those young scholars talk about their projects both humbles me and simultaneously makes me proud. Among others, Heather Thompson, Emily Cope, Michael-John DePalma, Jeff Ringer, and T. J. Geiger are teasing out connections among religion, spirituality, rhetoric, literacy, sexuality as they explore hitherto unseen issues with various research methods that gather concrete data on how undergraduates work to negotiate the difference between their religion and the academy. These scholars are presenting at conferences, writing dissertations, and beginning to publish their findings, as Gieger recently did in *College English*. Jeff Ringer’s and Michael-John DePalma’s collection *Mapping Religious Rhetorics* has just been published.

This is where my work is now—chapters in both collections mentioned above and a *College English* review of Vicki Tolar Burton’s brilliant book *Spiritual Literacy in John Wesley’s Methodism*. Because *Spiritual Literacy* argues that, following Wesley’s precepts of spiritual and literate practice, early Methodists changed eighteenth-century rhetoric by endowing working-class men and *women* the agency to speak in public, my co-author Letizia Guglielmo and I use this book as a source in our exploration of the changing ethos of women speakers. It all ties together. As I anticipate with some joy retirement from administration and teaching, I look forward to continuing the search for the next gap, the next neglected topic, the next connection among literacy, rhetoric, spirituality, religion, and women, to the next issue where my position is to the contrary.

The readers of this essay have noted, I hope, the number of colleagues who have invited me to write or speak and who have accepted my invitations as well. There are many others not named here who have shared their time and expertise—my own professors, rhetoric and composition colleagues from graduate school, Clemson University, and KSU in addition to editors, peer reviewers, students. Which brings me back to where I started questioning what appeared as an over-emphasis on cognition in composition: Yes, literacy does have to do with thinking and with problem-solving. Literacy is nonetheless social. Rhetoric is social. Always connected to a rhetorical situation, human language rises out of identity and culture, and its development depends upon who is allowed to speak or write, about what, how freely, and in which forms. It all ties together.



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The Personal Creed Project: Portal to Deepened Learning

John Creger

All of us share through our culture and bear within us a deader, less evolved aspect of being that calcifies because it is still mineral or vegetates because it is still plantlike or preys because it is still animal, all while the human aspect of the self works toward its partly divined divinity. This sludgier element of individuals settles out in society as sedimentary attitudes and institutions that mire down efforts to better ourselves.

Moffett, “Confessions” (4)

James Moffett’s 1980 “Confessions of an Ex-College Freshman” first came across my radar in graduate school during the mid-90s. Champion of the student-centered approach that guided my first eight years teaching, Moffett gave a generation of teachers a green light during the watershed late 80s—early 90s. It is difficult to overplay the excitement of entering the teaching profession at a moment when the Soviet empire was collapsing, the Berlin wall toppling, and the Clinton years bubbling into being. The awakened insights into learning and teaching, the expanded view of the universe in which Moffett’s ideas and practices unfolded in his later books, seemed to fit the shifts of the time. They certainly fit my own spiritual journey. Though I never met Moffett, I felt in his writings a vote of confidence, an invitation, permission to launch my career as a valued participant in a coming transformation. Happening across this passage during a leave from teaching to attend graduate school, I was electrified at its originality, delighted by the truth made familiar in its language.

Fifteen years earlier, the period when Moffett had written “Confessions,” the chilliest depths of the Cold War were just ahead. Few in the 80s could fathom, much less see, significant progress toward even a “partly divined divinity.” As the 80s wore on and government rewarded big business with tax and profit advantages, education’s deeper, spiritual evolution stalled. Not until the early 90s, after years of what Moffett might have seen as a coagulation of our sludgier element, did we finally see progress ahead. New teachers could perceive Moffett harmonizing with what, at times, really did seem a new world coming. Emboldened with the ideas that Moffett and organizations such as AEPL brought out, many of us wanted to unite our students’ development as persons with what they learned in school—a disconnect I had felt painfully as a high-schooler.

In “Confessions,” Moffett dramatizes his early epiphany in the 50s as a college freshman from Jackson, Mississippi, coming to terms with his own stultified notions about how he should present himself in writing. Arriving at Harvard, “an untested freshman fearful of losing a full scholarship by not attaining a B average,” Moffett had been asked to write a theme on “your home town” (1). “Half-convinced that [he] didn’t really belong at Harvard and had only got in by way of some back door carelessly left open,” he took no chances (1). His paper stuck to formulas that had pleased his teachers in high school:

One topic-sentenced paragraph was on sports, one on food, one on night-clubbing, and so on. No chance of the reader getting lost here. No problems of transition, or organization or coherence. The signposts were all there, and the sentences scanned grammatically. But it was atrocious writing. In fact, it wasn’t really writing; it was a

paste-and-scissors job, only collaged inside my head instead of with physical clippings and splicings. (2)

His instructor agreed. “Quite below college demands,” he called it, among other things, and advised him to do it over (1). Moffett did, and managed to write something true to his life and experience—about his real Mississippi hometown this time, not Los Angeles, where his family had only recently moved. His professor helped him divest himself of self-smothering conventions about what makes good writing.

His instructor “knew I was on a trolley headed utterly the wrong way, toward endless suffering, and that only a powerful jolt right at the start would derail me so that I could make it in that course and even perhaps in college generally” (1). In the process of rewriting that paper, Moffett says he

just suddenly changed my whole orientation toward writing. My teacher had said, in effect: “No one wants to read what he knows already or could come out with himself. We read for something new. Write only what you know, or what you have put together for yourself. Make something, don’t just take something.” I had no problem with that. (3)

But now Moffett breaks open the conversation with something especially interesting:

We all live on planes of shallowness and depth all the time and so can shift planes at any moment if someone or something sets us straight. I thought, “Oh, I see. *That’s* how it is. Writing isn’t what I’ve been led to believe. It’s saying what you really think and feel or what you really want to put over.” (3)

Moffett’s freshman comp instructor knocked him from his habitual notions of himself and his place in the world into a deeper awareness. Neither rarified or far off, this deepened state of mind was near enough to be immediately accessible. Over the four following decades, launching one writing adventure or policy initiative after another, Moffett devoted his long career to helping teachers move beyond the inauthenticity and impersonality that today still pervade writing instruction. Moffett inspired those who could hear him toward a deeper experience of their own lives so they could then guide the rising generation to a more authentic, more personal and, as he would say openly toward the end of his life, a more awakened consciousness.

In our own consciousness today, 20 years after I read Moffett in graduate school, 35 years after he sounded his note on partly divined divinity, we find ourselves in an era of mandated racing to the top. The struggle against retrogressive sediment in our culture and classrooms is as profound and dire today as at any time in history. The only way to the “top” is through the deepest, least meaningful sludge. Profiteering business and government forces controlling American classrooms with standardized test scores, sedimentary attitudes and institutions prevail. So rarely are students today asked to write to discover something genuine about themselves that regularly assigned reflection is a shock to their systems.

Last year, after the first few weekly reflective writings of the Personal Creed Project that I explore below, a student of mine wondered with wary irony, “Is this even legal curriculum?”

What we need today, more than anything, is a professional understanding of depth, a new platform from which to re-orient and anchor our teaching and our students’ learning. This new understanding must do for us today what Moffett’s freshman comp

instructor did for him then. For 25 years, Moffett's green light has given me permission to think about these things, often subconsciously, while I experiment, observe, and think some more.

Development of the Personal Creed Project

I began developing the Personal Creed Project in 1988-89, my second year teaching, my first with sophomores. Early in the year, bantering one day at lunch with my sophomore student who was a Russian immigrant, I suggested a far-fetched solution to an unremembered dilemma he had brought me. "But Mr. Creger," he protested in his eloquent accent: "That would not be in step with my creed" (Creger 24). A 16 year-old—one recently arrived from the chaos of the rapidly collapsing Soviet Union—had a *creed*? Did other sophomores? Did *I* have one? What did it mean to have a creed? Could sophomores find them? Could I help them? My grey matter was branded with the word, and my curiosity was launching questions. By the end of the year, I had launched a pilot of the Personal Creed Project.

The previous year, I had so enjoyed the freshmen class I had been given that when I discovered I could request to teach them as sophomores, I jumped at the chance. I would realize in coming years that something profound happens in the developmental window between the ages of 15 and 16. As the sophomore year unfolds, new capacities enable them—suddenly—to see themselves and the world from perspectives that take them beyond themselves. They develop new, powerful facilities of *reflection*. These growing abilities set them far apart from the freshmen they once were. I began to notice the striking changes as I observed students responding to the Personal Creed Project.

As I'll document below, the Creed Project generates a rare, lasting, and often amazing enthusiasm in students everywhere along the so-called achievement gap—from brilliantly successful to hopelessly failing. For 25 years, I have documented and tried to understand the sources of this enthusiasm. One explanation that has suggested itself is the social environment in which the project has been conceived and developed. In shaping the project, I have been guided by insight and inspiration from my relationships with over 100 classes, containing more than 3,000 young people at just the time when they are discovering new powers to reflect on what matters in their lives and in the world. Shaped by all this dramatic development, the project provides them a natural and welcome opportunity to revel in their new capacities. This past April, at the end of her Creed Project reflections, an honors student wrote:

Through this huge self-reflection project, I have learned more concretely about who I am and what my purpose is in life. I didn't realize how much all of my influences shaped who I am today. And I didn't realize I value certain things so much. It has helped me learn and grow and mature as I shaped my identity and thought deeply about my values. It has been truly eye-opening and has shown me how different I am now than I was even just a year ago. I have explored so much through this creed project and it's amazing to see that now, my view of the world and myself is much more focused and solid than it was when I first started this project.

Though this student is especially articulate, her insights and enthusiasm are typical of responses I document every June.

My own sophomore English experience was less than inspiring. Widely appreciated for his effectiveness at browbeating and cajoling under-enthused sophomores into fighting shape for Ivy League colleges, our teacher paced and gesticulated before us, as I tuned out. Daydreaming about the most non-Ivy League world I could imagine, I carved out my future life in the great north woods. Little in school over the next two years offered to rescue me from disgruntled daydreaming. I don't recall the thought of graduation crossing my mind as a serious option. High school had done nothing to help me understand who I was, why I was here, or where I wanted my life to go. After 13 years of "learning," I left the back rows smoldering with a quiet rage at my ignorance of such knowledge. I later found in Walt Whitman's preface to *Leaves of Grass*:

Re-examine all you have been told in school
or church or in any book,
and dismiss whatever insults your own soul.

On the list of places where my soul felt unwelcome, somewhere toward the top was the back row in my late-60s sophomore English class.

I now believe that my revolt first against sophomore English, and then school at large, was touched off by being fed a diet of competition when my developmental fires most needed soul-nourishing. In his final book, *The Universal Schoolhouse*, James Moffett expands on this problem: "Schooling as we know it breeds rigidity and neurosis in the lucky and despair and fury in the unlucky. This is not how a democratic state keeps hale and whole. Years of forced competition for scores and grades have taught that you set yourself up by putting others down, that selfishness and secrecy hold the keys to success" (58).

As I conceived the Personal Creed Project, perhaps the attunement I felt with my sophomores began with an urge to nourish my own disgruntled inner sophomore.

The Project

The Personal Creed Project guides students to reflect on: a) how they came to be the people they are today, b) what they most value at this point, and c) how they wish to develop themselves in the years ahead. Reflecting systematically over a period of weeks (college versions) or months (high school versions), students identify the people and forces that have been the most important influences in shaping their lives in the past. They identify specific values each of their most significant influences inspire them to stand for in the present. They consider qualities they'd like to develop over the coming decade to help them live by the three to five values they have chosen (their personal creeds). And they envision how they want to make a difference in the world or others' lives in the future.

As it has taken root in schools and colleges around the country, the project has developed in a variety of adaptations, which I hope to make available as our Facebook Personal Creed group pulls together a Personal Creed Network in the next few years. In its current state of development, my high school version of the Creed Project comes in three phases and seven steps (Figure 1).

Personal Creed Project Contents—Seven steps in three phases

Discovering my Creed—17 total weekly reflections

Step I: Influences that shape me, six weekly installments

Step II: My short list, two weekly installments

Step III: My most and least valued influences, three weekly installments

Step IV: What I stand for/ draft Creed statement, three weekly installments

Step V: Critique of drafted Creed/ revised statement, three weekly installments

Sharing my Creed—Two weeks of presentations

Step VI: Personal Creed presentation—four elements of presentation:

- 1) My main influences
- 2) The values I stand for (my Personal Creed)
- 3) Qualities to develop in myself over the next 10 years
- 4) The difference I want to make in the world

Living my Creed—Time commitment varies

Step VII: Research, goals, volunteering

- 1) Creed-related team research project
- 2) Living my Creed goal-setting chart
- 3) Query letter on Creed-related volunteering

Figure 1: Personal Creed Project Contents

These seven moves appear to enable sophomores to activate their naturally unfolding capacities to become conscious of the forces that have shaped them, understand who they are in the world, and establish an initial set of values to enhance their potential for a satisfying and fulfilling future.

Students' enthusiasm for the project heightens with Step VI, the Personal Creed Presentation. In each school or college that has used the project, these presentations have become a major classroom rite of passage. Each student stands in turn before her class with an original poster, collage, painting, song, poem, film, technological production, or other creation and presents her personal creed. A Creed Presentation covers four elements:

- 1) The key forces and people that have influenced the student
- 2) The values the student has embraced
- 3) The qualities the student wants to develop in herself over the next ten years, to live out her creed
- 4) The ways in which the student would like to make a difference in others' lives and the world

The five to ten-minute Creed presentations have a profound impact on most students. Long weeks of personal reflection become public. In an atmosphere of trust, students to come to terms with the effects of sharing such personal aims with their classmates and teacher. Very often, the presentations become a defining moment in the students' lives. This moment can be especially transformative for failing students. Perhaps because they must travel the greatest intellectual and emotional distance to become enthused over a school project, they often become its staunchest advocates.

Failing all his classes, one such student had no hope of passing my class, or avoiding continuation school the following year. Still, his rows in my spring gradebook, while mostly blank, showed a respectable score for each Creed Project entry. After his presentation—before he left for continuation school—this student wrote in his course evaluation:

The creed project has helped me find out things about myself that I would have never known before. At first, I thought that this project was going to be the same stupid work that had to do with learning and school, but after I started getting into it I was so infatuated with this creed project. This project allowed me to experience deeper thoughts and explorations of my mind and soul. I found out things about my family and friends that all of a sudden appeared in my head . . . This project was tough at times to understand but paid off in the end. (Creger 81)

My growing collection of such statements from failing students is the most persuasive documentation of the project's power to help them gain a sense of control over their difficult lives. Over the years, most students take these presentations as seriously as any traditional rite of passage. Another key reason these presentations make such an impact is that this is the first time students have learned so much about classmates and even the friends they may have assumed they knew well. In her end-of-year portfolio, an honors student described what mattered to her:

Watching all the incredible presentations before mine, I knew I owed it to myself and the class to deliver something that came from the heart. But what I didn't expect was the impact of other people's stories influencing and also shaping me as much as what I placed on the screen. This project wasn't just about finding my story, but the story of each individual in the class, all our voices, our tears, and our lives intertwining to create a bond that is priceless.

In my classroom and at schools and colleges around the country where colleagues are adapting the project, hopelessly failing students, brilliantly successful ones, and average students alike regard the weeks of these presentations at least as a significant rite of passage. Often students report the Creed presentations as the most meaningful learning experience of their school careers. Another student sets the experience in context:

Everyone is just so lost with trying to get that A grade in their classes and get more social points by updating statuses and pictures online, but the creed really gave us a chance to think about ourselves for once. To me, the creed was about imagining a world with only yourself in it. No one else, just you. Put a veil over yourself and hear no one but your own thoughts. What would you then make of this world? We all succumb so easily to the traditional lifestyle we all live: school, work, job. What if there is more to life than just that?

If the presentations—and the project itself—seem to make a deep impression, they also appear to make a lasting one. Two emails from former students now in their twenties recently came out of the blue, the first in the fall of 2012. Hoping to make a significant career change and enter the Navy Seals, one of them asked me to send him the latest Creed Project instructions so he could make his best decisions for his future during this period. Besides, he wrote, nine years earlier as one of my sophomores, he hadn't given the project his best. The following fall, another former student emailed to say that in the midst of her own direction changing she had bought my book, used it to “update my creed,” and moved more confidently in her new direction.

The project also is well-established in several universities. A student of a colleague at American University in Washington, D.C. ran the project in her freshman composition classes for over a decade. She wrote: “The problem for me was that I could have, conceivably, spent an entire semester on this project. I was frustrated by the time constraints because I don't feel as though I was able to fully express the nuance and circumstantial reality of my views.”

In *Teaching Literacy for Love and Wisdom*, Bruce Novak notes that through this project, his students “became real to one another in ways many of them never suspected they could before” (194). In the fall of 2012, Bruce emailed me a comment from one of his students: “I now realize that you cannot judge others before hearing what they have gone through. And after hearing what they have gone through, you still cannot judge them. All you can do is love them for who they are” (194).

Larger Realizations

If for students, this project serves as a rite of passage, for me the observations, the harvest of portfolio reflections, course evaluations, and other writing serve as a continuing passage in my own understanding of the nature and purposes of learning. For my students, the Creed Project is the centerpiece of the course's emphasis on self-discovery. For me, my 20-some-year experience with the project also has become a window into certain larger realizations about the nature of learning.

I had the opportunity a few years ago to write a guidebook for educators on the Creed Project. But I found it impossible to begin a book about such learning, without a clear sense of a central purpose for the whole enterprise. What was the main purpose or purposes of learning? No class, seminar, or conversation in twenty-some classroom years of college courses and seminars, workshops and teaching had provided me an answer. What are the most fundamental reasons why human beings learn? No one I knew of was asking these questions. I set out, reading and thinking, meditating and brainstorming with anyone who would join me.

In recent years, I've experimented with sharing the model I've developed with my students. At a point in the year when it seems to fit (in honors classes during our study of the various theories involved in *Crime and Punishment*), I simply project an image of the model on a screen and ask for volunteers to attempt to explain what the model is saying. It's never long before someone suggests that the model is a critique of our current approach to learning in school. “Excellent!” I'll exclaim. “So what's the critique?”

One student offered, “It seems to be saying that most of what we do in school is memorizing facts.” Some teachers and programs, of course, do take students beyond

such material, factual recall, to construe various kinds of meanings—including emotional, musical, and artistic meanings, as well as logic. While social studies, math and science instructors teach students techniques of historical, mathematical and scientific analysis, art and music teachers expect them to gain the skills of aesthetic critique. English teachers guide students in textual and other sorts of analyses. These skills belong to the intellectual world. See Figure 2:



Figure 2: Model of Deepened Learning

But my students report that across the board the amount of time they are expected to give to thoughtful analysis and interpretation is comparatively small. Their impression, however unfair to their teachers, is that the majority of their time in school is spent

memorizing, recalling, and being tested on facts. This impression does not generate commitment or engagement, let alone a deep enthusiasm for learning. Maybe Common Core State Standards, establishing what Lucy Calkins, et. al. call a “thinking curriculum,” will expand the moorings of American education in the direction of the “What does it mean?” hub (9).

But from the perspective of what I call deepened learning, even courses and programs which afford students rich practice with analysis and synthesis—guiding them to develop facility in drawing inferences from their understanding of a discipline’s facts—address only two of the three hubs in the Learning Continuum. On Figure 2, you can see that the third hub, *Discovering Values*, does not serve as a fundamental part of such courses and programs. Those who feel moved to think of such things might envision this region as our current frontier in education. This frontier progressively leads students to discover who they are and what they value, or stand for, in relation to the rest of their learning. In this frontier, learning becomes relevant through the experience of depth.

It’s not as if we never discover something deep or important about ourselves from the occasional reflection we do in English, or the ethical questions we consider in social or environmental science, or the logical challenges we pose in math, or the aesthetic sensibilities we discover in the arts. And certainly, students develop from their interactions and relationships with classmates and teachers in and beyond class. But rarely does a school community prove to students that it truly values the learning about who we are: guiding them to discover what they value, what matters to them, what purposes they wish to live for, what kind of people they wish to become, what future they want to create, to envision the difference they want to make in the world. A school community only demonstrates genuine commitment in one way: by setting aside *time* in the curriculum.

Noting the model’s enlargement of font and the foundational positioning of the third hub—*Discovering Values*—students get the point. After studying the model and participating in our conversation, one student wrote to me excitedly, “This model fits my educational experience to a T.” But the model is more than a critique. It describes how we engage reality, through our values.

My studies and life experience have shown me that I actually do experience my life in these three areas. If I am to be a viable human being who survives with a chance to thrive more than a few decades, I must devote a significant amount of my energy and attention to ascertaining the facts of my life, of others’ lives, and facts about the world and universe. *I must learn to master facts.*

If I wish to be a successful human being, I am wise to develop my physical, intellectual and emotional capacities so I can interpret the facts I have ascertained in a way that makes logical and emotional sense and equips me to make apt choices. *I must learn to construe varieties of meanings.*

And if I am to be a fulfilled human being, I may choose to discern from my collection of facts and my assembly of meanings *what I value*, what *matters most to me*, *what I stand for*. This is the area of my life in which heart, soul, identity, creativity, and a sense of purpose are activated and nourished. Indeed, the essence of wisdom is choosing to live in a way that honors values we have chosen to stand for, such as kindness, compassion, honesty, patience, integrity, gratitude, unselfishness. This is depth in learning.

To reach deeper fulfillment, then, I must integrate a) what I know, with b) how I interpret what I know, with c) what I have discovered I value. This integration of facts, meanings, and values—considered in the light of my past, present, and future—encompasses a much fuller portion of my perceivable experience than I have ever been asked to consider in school.

Why shouldn't my learning, in school and elsewhere, be carried out in the same three areas in which I perceive and experience reality? In life we must learn to master facts, construe meanings, and integrate self-knowledge with the rest of our knowledge and interpretations. Shouldn't learning in school guide students to integrate with their academic learning the facts, meanings, and values that inform their personal lives?

In preparing to write my guidebook on the Personal Creed Project, I realized the project was finally completing for my students the uncompleted process of learning-as-usual-in-school. Centered thoroughly on the third hub of the Learning Continuum—*Discovering Values*—where little concerted activity has occurred in most students' experience of school, the Creed Project allows a kind of synapse to be traversed in students' experience of learning.

This analysis does much to explain the consistent enthusiasm and excitement that seem to emerge from classroom to classroom, high school to college, wherever students experience the Creed Project across the country. How do we make learning work more successfully for more students? How do we recover learning that has been separated from how students perceive and experience reality? How do we design courses and programs so students are consistently learning throughout the continuum: mastering facts, construing meanings, discovering values, all at developmentally appropriate levels? A workable curriculum must include plans for weaving depth—the progressive discovery of what students' life experience is teaching them to value—into learning at every grade level and discipline. It's not a complex notion.

Figure 3 shows the cross section of an English curriculum that follows from this model of deepened learning.

When I introduce my workshop for educators, I ask participants bluntly, "So are academic skills in English important?" Understandably, they often stare blankly a few moments. Nods begin bobbing around the room. Then I ask, "Are skills at the CENTER of what we do in English?" More quickly this time, a few heads wag sideways. If skills don't belong in the center of what we do in English, where do they belong? In deepened learning, skills are a means to the end of students' unfolding. Students who realize themselves more fully become citizens who are more committed, employees who are more productive, family members who are more loving—and students who are more successful. So skills belong at the edges of the curriculum. So far, colleagues seem convinced of this relation between skills and students. But where does literature belong?

Literature is a great facilitator. As we learn to understand and appreciate literature, we can focus on and develop higher and higher levels of reading, writing, thinking, and conversation skills. And we can personally benefit from the insights that literature gives us about the human condition. So, with such personal benefits, literature is more central than skills. Since literature can be instructive and inspirational to our personal learning, it makes sense to locate it in an intermediate position between personal unfolding and literacy skills in a 21st Century English Curriculum.

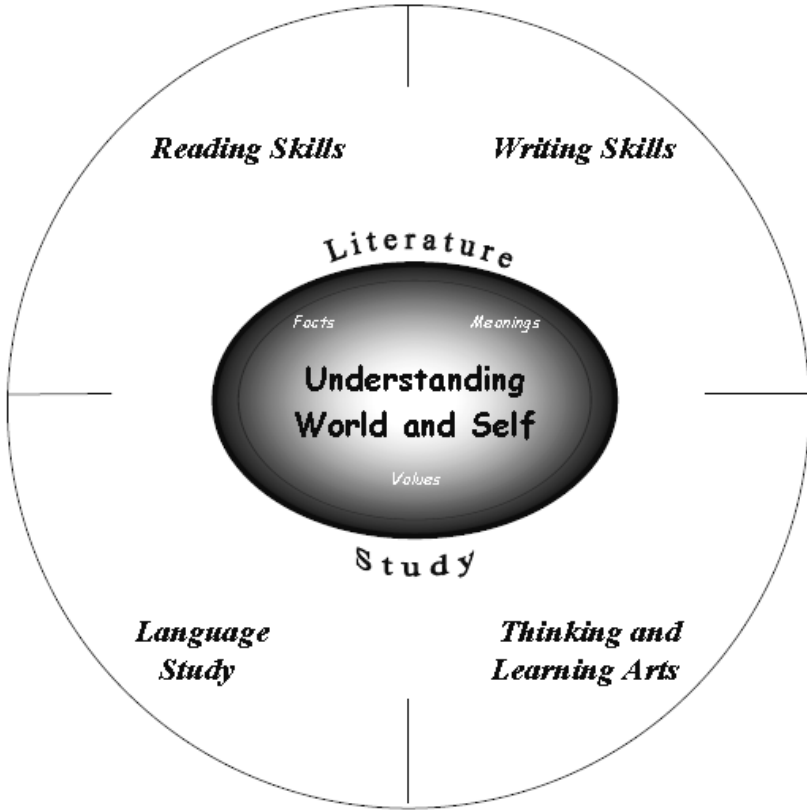


Figure 3: Cross Section of 21st Century English Curriculum

Are skills essential? Of course. They are essential because they help students pass tests, get good grades, get into college, find jobs, and play roles as productive citizens. Reading, writing, thinking and conversation skills are also important for deeper reasons—because they help students discover what they value, and therefore what topics might interest them, what books they might enjoy, what kind of career might be most satisfying, what kind of contribution they may wish to prepare themselves to make to their families, communities, nation, and world. Skills are important because of the focus and rigor they cultivate, focus and rigor we need to apply in sustained personal reflection as well as in analysis, helping today’s distracted and disengaged students discover purposes for continued learning and living. Beginning with a workable central aim of learning, and translating to a departmentally-crafted workable, central purpose of English (or math, science, art, social studies), and from there to teachers’ own course descriptions, we can help students equip themselves in accord with their developmental level, with viable reasons to learn.

Common Core and the Rigors of Deepened Learning

If the Common Core Standards (CCSS) are to engage students over the long term, we must complement the CCSS call for rigor in textual analysis with the deeper rigor of guiding our students systematically to discover who they are, what they stand for, and what future they want to create for themselves and their society. The CCSS documents not only leave room for such enrichment, I believe they encourage and even expect it: “While the Standards focus on what is most essential, they do not describe all that can or should be taught. *A great deal is left to the discretion of teachers and curriculum developer*” (CCSS Introduction, my emphasis). Students who most successfully master the rigors of the CCSS will be those who are also learning to navigate the deeper rigors of self-discovery.

As we undertake this balancing act, the theory and the practices of deepened learning such as the Personal Creed Project help us expand our understanding of rigor. A 16-year-old student, in a portfolio reflection he chose to write on the Creed Project, described his experience of a deeper rigor:

Never in my whole life have I ever experienced such understanding and insight [into] myself. Completing this project provided such a thorough analysis of me. Thinking back to all those days and nights finishing these Creed reflections really reminded me of the degree of difficulty it took to talk about certain things, and about the range of subjects I could talk about. I never realized how much there is to talk about in my life. Looking through my Creed Project again, I can still think of more material to add to these reflections. . . . I was able to, in a sense, see myself and learn what I really wanted in life. I can now picture my future and set my priorities straight for the following years to come. This project gave me determination and courage to follow through and succeed. Going through the Creed Project has definitely showed me a different side of English.

As important as it is for 21st century students to know who is making a given claim, it is just as necessary that soon-to-be global citizens are coming to understand those who are learning to *interpret* such a claim—themselves. This student, and all of our students, are depending on us to make this deeper dimension of English an honored part of a renovated curriculum.

Common Core State Standards are only the beginning of what should spell the end of the use of the term “reform” in education. “Reform” carries far too much baggage and has been wielded by far too many forces unequipped with understanding to guide what we ought to begin envisioning as the rebirth or renovation of education. As we enter this new period, perhaps we should consult those who have been exposed to a deeper experience of learning. Reflecting in her junior year in college, another former student looked back on her experience of the Personal Creed project five years earlier:

The Creed Project is a start at educating the student heart. I remember how the project changed the ambiance of the classroom. Sharing our Personal Creeds put us all on equal footing. We were all equally vulnerable and equally empathetic. There was a sense of cohesiveness in the classroom. By understanding one’s students on a deeper and personal level, a teacher can adapt their teaching style to truly serve each of their students effectively.

Fortunately for her own students, hopefully many years of them, this perceptive young woman is in her second year as a high school English teacher, the same point in her career at which I began developing the Personal Creed Project.

A Legacy of the Personal Creed Project

Is there a correlation between the experience of discovering that we *have* values, and the sense that we *are* valuable? The place where the sludgier elements of individuals can be refined into higher levels of consciousness is in the classrooms of an America that has learned to ask such questions at the core of classroom inquiry. In *The Universal Schoolhouse*, Moffett sounds a note of support for such a project: “The time has come to situate education in a perspective that comprises far more than management of schooling and that thus redirects thinking to intrinsic issues of human development” (xiii).

In these times of redefining national priorities, our classrooms should be laboratories of new understanding and discovery about the intersection between human development and education.

In *Harmonic Learning*, Moffett points to such an intersection: “Pursuing the question ‘Who am I?’ to whatever depth and height we can bear the answer is a cosmic voyage that should be the first goal statement in every school district’s curriculum guide, before that stuff about being good citizens and productive workers. Those will happen as fallout from self-development” (10).

As if to verify Moffett’s prediction, a recent email from another student of mine suggests where the Creed Project and other aspects of deepened learning may take the young people with whom I’ve been working. Two years before she came to my class, at age 13, this student was commended by the President as the youngest Obama-for-America organizer in the nation. Now, as a senior, she continues to be involved in political action. She wrote:

Although I was extensively involved in political activism and other leadership activities in my community before I did my Creed Project, it really helped solidify my understanding of my role in the world. I began to approach leadership with a new perspective -- not as something I merely enjoyed for the personal satisfaction I felt in making a difference in my community, or did as an activity that would assist me in the real world or college application process—but something that reflected who I was as a person, as well as my place in the world. From that point, everything I did became a product of my values, influences, and personal mission, and in retrospect, the Creed Project was the turning point in my life that allowed me to consciously realize that.

This student’s experiences drive home to me once again that sustained, systematic reflection, the core method of the Personal Creed Project, is one key to helping young people discover who they are and where they’re going in their lives.



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“Put Your Ear Close to the Whispering Branch...”: Deep Listening in the English Classroom

Jessica Jones

“Unless you are careful and deliberate, our society, with its blaring media and relentless marketing of entertainment, will dull you with its noise and pull you away from yourself. Unless you work deliberately to save yourself, you can easily just keep turning the volume up a little louder, watching another show...”

(G. Lynn Nelson, *Writing and Being* 50)

We live in a society of excessive noise. Coffee grinders screech at Starbucks. Hand dryers scream in our ears at Target. Traffic, TV, radio ads, cell phones, and the relentless stream of emails, Facebook, and Twitter plague us with their chugging, ringing, buzzing, and humming. In many places, even a hike comes with the distant drone of some highway or airplane. According to Scott Russell Sanders, by age 21 the average American has seen over 30 million ads and has spent more hours watching TV than attending school (*Conservationist Manifesto* 35). G. Lynn Nelson writes, “In a society filled with ‘words by the millions’— the I-It words of advertising and information and entertainment— we learn not to listen. We grow deaf as well as blind, sinking further into isolation and alienation. Perishing ‘by the word’” (“Warriors” 44). Contemporary life leaves little room for quiet unless we seek it out.

During the academic year 2007 and 2008, I was invited to serve as Writer in Residence for Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP) in Peninsula, Ohio. As the visiting writer, I was to dwell for a year in a historic farmhouse a mile from the Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center (CVEEC), and spend my teaching days on the trails with the upper elementary and middle school students who attended the CVEEC’s weeklong camp programs with their teachers. Each year, the park’s non-profit partner, the Conservancy for CVNP, raises need-based scholarship funds for children whom they believe would benefit from hands-on outdoor learning at the CVEEC.¹ Many of these students are reluctant readers and writers, struggle with behavioral problems, and/or live in urban areas. During their stay, they participate in an integrative curriculum called “All the Rivers Run,” which focuses on watershed ecology and draws upon concepts and processes from science, social studies, language arts, math, the arts, and technology. I was assigned to teach nature poetry to a new group of about 20 students four times a day, one to two days a week, which meant I would have one shot at reaching them during my one and a half hour workshop.

Before I arrived at the CVEEC, I had been driving 120 miles a week to serve as adjunct faculty in an English department, proofread for an advertising firm, and direct

1. In 2013-2014, 44% of the schools attending CVEEC were from low-income areas including Cleveland, Akron, and inner-ring suburbs of both cities, as well as low-income areas in Lorain and Summit Counties where 60% or more students qualify for federal lunch programs. Of the students attending CVEEC, 36% received financial support, with a total given for the year of \$96,129.50.

an after-school creative writing program. Like the children David Sobel describes, I “suffer[ed] from the time sickness of trying to do too much too quickly” (37). Infected with impatience, the noise of my exterior world penetrated my inner shell so that I could not hear myself think. I wondered if the students’ lives were as clamorous as mine.

At the time I had not yet heard of the pedagogies surrounding mindfulness or nature education. But having grown up out-of-doors, I possessed the instinct to turn to the natural world when I needed quiet. I wanted the students in my workshops at the CVEEC to experience this kind of listening as well, not merely to catch a few moments of birds and then move on, but to let thoughts circle and circle until thinking subsided, to let surface sounds give way to ears-wide-open, ego-aside listening. Deep listening.

A few days before the first school arrived at the CVEEC, feeling a bit panicky about my lack of lesson plans, I walked to a meadow to think. Butterflies flitted over the switchgrass—pearl crescent, European cabbage white, little wood satyr. Late evening sun cast pink light behind Queen Anne’s lace so that round edges glowed gold-white. The tall meadow grass beneath me was warm with afternoon heat, and the chink and whir of cicadas swelled from the woods behind me. Stillness was so full here. A quote from Guy Murchie’s *Song of the Sky* floated into my mind— “Put your ear close to the whispering branch and you may catch what it is saying...” (171). There were layers of sound around me.

I jotted notes:

purr purr purr thwip thwick bark rattle
swooooshhhhh. A fly. Crickets and
crickets in every direction. The birds gather and
swoop and disappear. My breathing
is absorbed by the air. You can’t force something
out of nothing. Andrea’s card never came.
nor my book.
A frog belches; I wait for the thing that I
cannot hear.

I listened and wrote, listened and wrote, sinking into almost dreamlike rest between jottings until the sun was nearly gone and the seat of my jeans had grown damp from dew. I could hear my own pulse, soft and low. I could hear the gravel churning down the side of the mountain as park staff left. I saw three deer wandering, long-legged, to the edge of the meadow. I felt quiet. Murchie’s invitation had worked for me. The prompt was open, perhaps too open for young writers. But I thought it worth trying with the CVEEC students. I could always rework the lesson if it failed.

Ten months later, having repeated the lesson with over 3,000 students, I emerged from the park with a spirited collection of their nature poetry and the sense that English students—and English teachers—have much to gain from deep listening in nature. In this essay I will explore what I believe to be the primary benefits of this practice—that deep listening 1) allows for stillness, 2) permits self-knowledge, 3) nurtures a sense of wonder, 4) invites playfulness and humor and 5) heightens awareness of interconnectedness.

Stillness

“We have forgotten what rocks, plants, and animals still know. We have forgotten how to be—to be still, to be ourselves, to be where life is: Here and Now.”

(Eckhart Tolle 93)

I held my first workshop at a pond behind the Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center. The students arrived noisily, shoving each other and talking over my welcome. They shouted out haphazard answers to my quick review of poetic devices (metaphor, simile, imagery) and poked each other during my one-sided discussion on sensory details in nature poems. (That day’s selection included Theodore Roethke’s “Moss-Gathering,” Mary Oliver’s “The Kingfisher,” and Robert Morgan’s “Honey.”) When I asked students to spread out so they could write their own nature poems, most of them scooted a few feet away from me in tandem with their buddies. The general response to my request that they close their eyes was one of skepticism, some making a show of peeping sideways to see who else was cheating, others tilting their heads to exaggerate the act of listening.

But when I read Murchie’s lines and instructed them to spend five minutes just *listening*, they gradually fell into silence. Once they had done this, they were allowed to open their eyes, and were urged to use their other senses as they paid deep attention to a chosen object, creature, or entity. To my utter surprise (and the surprise of their teachers) within ten minutes, nearly every student was listening, looking, touching, sniffing, and occasionally even tasting their immediate environment. Throughout the workshop, I crouched beside them, helping with grammar or prodding for synonyms, but otherwise letting each writer sink into his or her own detailed worlds, the eye of their imaginations having opened via the initial sensory prompt to listen.

What they read aloud at the end of our workshop was striking. Their attention to language and use of metaphor was, according to their classroom teachers, unprecedented. Interestingly, several of students wrote about the relationship between surface sounds or movement and underlying calm, such as this sixth grade girl in her poem, “Pond”:

In front of me lies a pond,
Lily pads calm on their green bed;
Reflections of trees glowing on the water...
Around the pond are growing buds.
Under the lily pads, frogs jump-
But the water stays still.

In the first few weeks of delivering this lesson, I was surprised by how often teachers commented on the atypical focus of certain students or the fact that the entire group was being quiet at once. Many teachers confessed that back at school they strove to fill every moment of classroom time with discussion or activities so that there was no time for misbehavior. I admitted I did the same in my college level English classes to “keep them engaged.” But as my CVEEC residency progressed, I realized that I had been denying my college students important opportunities for reflection, assimilation, and thoughtful

language choice. By filling my lessons with talk, nervously avoiding awkward spaces, I had been inadvertently perpetuating the superficial consciousness that can breed meaningless, even destructive communication. I had failed to trust that silence is not necessarily dichotomous from speech, and silence, especially in the English classroom, can be laden with communal meaning in the form of acknowledgement, validation, encouragement, or simply a space for more carefully chosen words to emerge. By being willing to pause, I was giving my students permission to let the right words come.

“Silence,” writes G. Lynn Nelson, who regularly integrates meditation into his college composition classes, “is an important part of my lesson plans. Not ‘Sit down and shut up!’ silence, but dynamic silence—outer stillness so that we can enter into the inner stillness and learn from it. Just as the space between notes is necessary for the music, so silence around our words is necessary if our words are to be meaningful” (“Bringing Language” 17).

Each week, I grew a little braver in embracing the silence with my students. I began class by having students stand and breathe deeply, closing their eyes to set the tone for listening. I told them ahead of time that it was okay to take time to absorb their surroundings and to absorb what I was about to read and offered that they could keep their eyes closed during the reading if they wished. Sacrificing breadth for depth, I sometimes read only one poem but read it two or three times, careful to allow ample space for line breaks and pauses. Afterward, rather than asking prescriptive questions, I invited the students to share what they heard. By slowing down our pace, opening a space for listening, I created a gateway to the prompt for their own pieces.

After reading Guy Murchie’s quote, I encouraged them to take a few moments to simply listen before choosing a topic. They didn’t have to include what they noticed in their poems, and once they had listened they could depart into the other senses. But if they got lost or frustrated, they could return to just listening for a little mental break. Similar to mindfulness meditation, in which participants focus on the breath (and the spaces between breaths), this approach allowed students to follow interlacing patterns and rhythms and enter empty spaces between sounds in the natural world. As I honed the scaffolding for my lesson, I was able to draw in more students early on and to keep them engaged for longer. But much of the lesson’s enduring success (and the success I experienced that first day) was, I believed with increasing certainty, due to the impact of nature itself.

Over the last two decades there has been an increasing interest in the benefits of time spent in nature on both children and adults. Richard Louv asserts that regular exposure to the natural world is linked to a decrease in mental health problems and a reduction of ADHD, depression and cognitive disabilities (32-34.) The students in my workshops exhibited this potential as well. They expressed their own observations emphatically, gesturing at how “*si-lent*” the woods were, how they felt “*so calm*” and that Cuyahoga Valley National Park was nothing like their city field trips. “The quiet wisdom of nature,” writes one of Louv’s students, “does not try to mislead you like the landscape of the city does, with billboards and ads everywhere” (83).

During my residency at the CVEEC, I often saw students sidestep social interaction to go off by a rock or cattail marsh or anthill—alone. One afternoon, a fifth-grade girl, whom I’ll call Mary, arrived at my workshop with tearstains down both cheeks. Though

she shyly turned her head when I asked if she was all right, one of her regular classroom teachers informed me that Mary was homesick and freshly bullied by peers. Her tears were a fairly typical display. As I began the introduction to my workshop, I noticed that Mary was listening intently. Though she did not speak up during the pre-writing discussion of other authors' poetry, her eyes were wide and she sat straight, listening. When the group dispersed to listen to what the surrounding natural world might be saying, I found Mary curled up by a line of red maples. In heavy print, with irregularly dotted i's and multiple misspellings, she had written the following poem:

Trees a Sometimes Silent Beauty

Trees a sometimes silent beauty, that come in various,
radiant colors of a fall rainbow. Waving at us as the
wind goes by, and leaning by each other as if they were
whispering each other a secret in their shimmering dew.
The homes of animals, and the one thing that helps us live.
Dancing in the wind, just waiting, watching us, the
mysterious beauty, Trees.

As I quietly read Mary's poem, she watched my face intently and, when I finished, reclaimed her paper saying simply, "I want to be an artist and a writer when I grow up." When I saw her at lunch, she was eating at a table with peers, quiet, but engaged, with no sign of tears.

Her abruptly recovered poise expresses a common theme. Louv recounts the story of a "little girl poet" who, having recently lost her special place in nature, describes the woods as "so peaceful out there" (13). In the natural world writes Louv, "a child finds freedom, fantasy, and privacy: a place distant from the adult world, a separate peace" (7). This child's world is a rich place for writing, and an opportunity that we English teachers often miss. And for those who, as Sanders says, "[sense] depths beyond the self," writing can become "a centering down, an inward listening for openings in the stillness, through which authentic words may come"—a rare and sometimes startling occurrence in many students' lives (*Writing from the Center* 167).

Moreover, Jane Dobisz writes, "When you sit for a long time and don't speak, stuff comes out of the closet in your mind that you forgot was ever in there" (64). For troubled students especially, this can be a slippery slope. What I witnessed at the CVEEC, however, suggested that nature can provide a focus, a ready set of metaphors, a grounding sensory experience, as well as a physical space where negative memories can be temporarily left behind if need be. In this space, I (and the other teachers) observed that students were more willing to approach difficult feelings, identities, and mental-emotional pain than they would in the typical classroom setting.

One sixth-grade student, whom I'll call Will, arrived at my poetry workshop with headphones trailing into the pocket of his baggy pants, his chin rhythmically jutting out to the sound of a beat even after he "un-plugged." Throughout pre-writing discussion, he appeared to be utterly bored. But when I delivered the prompt, he walked directly to a log overlooking a bog, sat down, and wrote. And wrote, and wrote. At the end of class, he was the first to stand up and read:

Out in the Wind

Some days just out enjoying the cold, cold wind
that whispers in my ear like a hummingbird,
I just sit there to think about the world
the things I've done, the bad things and things,
Just to think, think, and think.
I want to think about what I want to do in my life,
Or if I want a calm, cool wife,
I just have to think, think, and think.
I want to think about the bad things I've done to people
In the past, or will do in the future
Because we all know time goes fast.
I want to do right again
I want to just Think, Think, Think.
Have you ever had that feeling
That you did something wrong or right
You just couldn't figure out if it was wrong or right
Because you couldn't think, think, think?
— If you have a trouble,
or if you are going down
you can just sit in the wind
and Think, Think, Think.

When I nodded to Will after class dispersed, he said toughly, “That was cool. I think I might do that again.” In Will’s case, the spiral of thoughts toward stillness *is* the subject of the poem. The structure of the piece evidences the writer’s culture and simultaneously enfolds his inner and outer worlds. Through deep listening—to the wind that “whispers in my ear like a hummingbird”—the writer edges nearer to discovering an authentic self. For the students that enter our classrooms unable to focus, struggling to make sense of the world around them, or reluctant to write, deep listening in nature can provide a means to much-needed stillness.

Self-knowledge

*“The tradesman, the attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street, and sees the sky
and the woods, and is a man again. In their eternal calm, he finds himself”*

(Ralph Waldo Emerson “Nature” 196).

Today’s students face a myriad of distractions and obstacles on their journey to self-discovery. The cacophony of materialism, peer pressure, bullying, labeling, and social networking can easily drown out fledgling voices, particularly the one third to one half of our population that Susan Cain claims are introverts (255). In his article, “Bringing Language Back to Life,” Nelson discusses his attempts to counter the world’s blaring distractions by introducing his students to the concept of internal knowledge. “Early on,” he writes, “I introduce my students to their cerebral cortex, so they are aware that there are many ways to learn and that one way is to ‘be still and know.’ They begin to under-

stand that we humans know more than we know we know, so it is legitimate pedagogy to learn from ourselves” (17).

Nelson’s efforts are not singular. Though Western philosophy generally discredits intuitive and sensory ways of knowing, indigenous peoples have long taught their children to call upon self-knowledge, particularly what is felt in the natural world. As Western education scholars turn to nature-based pedagogy, more and more research suggests that nature-focused reflection provides a “path for self-development” (Sobel 17). In his anecdote, “Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright,” for example, Sobel relays a story about his six-year-old daughter, who taps into courage by imagining her “inner tiger” (15-17).

The students at the CVEEC frequently exhibited self-exploration through identification with plants and animals. In the poem below, for example, a sixth-grade boy transparently expresses his concerns about adolescence:

A Tadpole’s Future

I walk by the pond one day and see a tadpole,
its appearance incredibly different from the frog it will become.
I wonder if it is aware of the changes that it will endure,
and how it will accept them.

By using a metaphor that allows him to approach an otherwise taboo topic, the boy was able to explore his own fears, even allowing me to read his finished piece anonymously to the group (in which many responded with nods and pensive lip biting).

Some students’ work revealed painful attempts at naming themselves amid the pressures of gangs, racism and urban violence. Another sixth-grade boy, who labored over selection of details, turned to similes from the pond to help him construct a positive, unified self-portrait:

My Name

My name is Tre.
My eyes are like brown wood
My shoes are like black rocks
My skin is like this smooth water.

Another day I worked with a boy who at first resisted writing then became fascinated by the autumn phase of a thistle plant. He had never been in the woods before, or seen a bog, and when I asked him what drew his attention, he pointed to a thistle.

“What does it feel like?” I asked.

His eyes grew wide and his fingers curled back from the sharp points.

I sat with him, quietly, while he teased out its cottony center, examined its structure.

“How would you describe its outside?” I prodded.

“Spikey.”

“What about the inside?”

“Soft...” he looked up at me with uncertain excitement.

I suggested that he write down these ideas while I checked on other kids. When I returned, he had responded with this extended metaphor:

Teasel

I am like teasel

Soft on the inside, rough and spikey on the outside.

Unless I'm cracked open,

I'll never show my inside.

Merrilyne Lundahl writes that metaphor “is one vehicle for exploring inner and outer landscapes” that can “connect the personal with environmental” (46). Barry Lopez elaborates: “The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape”—a phenomenon I witnessed repeatedly at the CVEEC (65). In the following poem, for example, a sixth-grade girl grapples with the theme of death, working her way around big ideas with thoughtful metaphors and careful rhyme schemes:

Untitled

The cold, bitter wind blew against the open field

For all the grass was then killed.

The flowers were no longer in bloom;

They were locked up, like in a tomb.

Though some students gave background information for their pieces during the group read-aloud, most simply read their work then stepped shyly (gratefully) back into the cover of the circle, as this sixth-grade boy who draws a parallel between autumn and the temporal condition of life:

White Leaves

White leaves are drooping in the sorrow that winter brings;

They are as delicate as an old man's bones.

Their rustling sings a long, sad song.

Week after week, the teachers, students, and I were moved by the depth and authenticity of these unprecedented expressions, many of which were authored by the least likely candidates. Increasingly, it struck me that when we teach writing, we need strategies to help students overcome doubt, conformity, confusion.

In *Radical Presence*, Mary O'Reilly urges that we “need someone to listen to our stuttering, stammering plea to be heard. [We] need deep listening” (26). The natural world, I would argue, provides neutral space and fosters empathy among young audiences, which can be difficult to accomplish amid the pressures of classroom culture. Through deep listening in nature, English teachers can provide rich opportunities for students to tap into self-knowledge and develop self-expression in writing.

A Sense of Wonder

“A sense of wonder and joy in nature should be at the very center of ecological literacy”

(Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods* 221).

“Given the pressures on children in schools to factualize the world, to maintain a homogenized standard of thought,” Lewis writes, “a poetic way of perceiving experience

is simply ignored as an indulgence” (6). But the students who come to our classrooms void of curiosity, disassociated, apathetic, are precisely the students that need to recover a sense of incredulity. David E. Purpel suggests that one way we can “nourish critical and creative consciousness” is by inviting our students to “an examination and contemplation of the awe, mystery and wonder of the universe” (28, 113).

At the CVEEC, I witnessed the power of wonder as resistant students became risk takers. The source of this wonder might be the translucent gills of a tadpole, the curious wiggle of a larva buried at the center of a gall or grass that stood “blade by blade, shocked into separateness by an ice that held for days” (Toni Morrison, *Sula* 152). But more typically, wonder was incited by events as simple as snow flurries or carpenter ants. Written expressions of these observations took on impressive depth of language and unexpected attention to structure, such as the poem below by a sixth grade girl who builds familiar suspense:

One Leaf

One leaf stood out to me—
Red as an apple,
Better than the rest.
The only leaf
red as an apple,
One leaf blowing in the wind.

It finally broke off and I ran to catch it
so it wouldn't fall to the ground;
But when I did
My brain over-flooded
and I set it back down,
My heart beating in too much excitement.

In this poem, the girl describes, from a child's perspective, the wonderment of Martin Buber's claim: “All real living is meeting”: an initial noticing, building excitement at the inevitability of coming into relation, and finally, awed respect (24-25).

In the following poem, a sixth grade boy relays equivalent delight, rendering the drab down of a flock of geese then eloquently mimicking their hidden color by saving it for the last line:

Geese

Geese have white chins
that look like old men's beards
and brown feathers that end in black points.

They have no exotic colors,
yet when they open their mouths,
vibrant red fills their throats.

Of course, not every student at the CVEEC stumbled into wonder on her own. I encountered some challenging cases of boredom, shyness, writer's block, and fear. As I explored ways to coax and comfort, I found that equally important to asking questions

was listening—really listening—to students’ answers. Listening sometimes meant long, awkward pauses, allowing students to move beyond objectification of their chosen topic and into what Arthur Zajonc terms “subjectification and intimacy.” Zajonc asserts, this is a “patient, contemplative method that seeks ‘to hear what the material has to say to you’” (94).

Other times being a listener meant risking finding out what was beneath the surface a single line, or, in Georgia Heard’s words, “What’s not yet written?” (42.) I’ll never forget one fragile looking student, probably nine years old and meek in her speaking. Her spelling was atrocious, and she could only utter that she liked the daisies, shrugging when I asked what she liked about them. Finally she said, “I like them ‘cause they’re little,” fondling a few petals with impossibly slender brown fingers.

“They are, aren’t they?” I agreed. We looked at the petals. She smiled at me timidly.

“How little do you think they are?” I cocked my head.

She silently measured one against her hand. I nodded and asked, “Can you find some words to describe that?”

When I returned she had written, with great pride, a three line-poem:

So tiny
Baby daisies
So big as my thumb nail.

In this little girl’s case, *much* was not yet written, but she had victoriously found a point of relation, which was a start.

When children are exposed to the natural world, Mary Oliver writes, “Attention is the beginning of devotion” (56). Each day that I taught at the CVEEC, this seemed apparent as I watched urban children gain first (or rare) exposures to the natural world—tentative, then with increasing intrigue. Sometimes the beginnings of wonder even showed up as disgust. I recall one sixth grade girl who recoiled from touching a salamander but chose to write about him, describing his belly as “really smelly” and elaborating on his “little eyes,” “big toes,” and “stumpy nose,” only to expose her curiosity in the final line: “I wonder where he goes?”

To study nature is such a way, Marilyn Singer tells us, is “to become fascinated with the beauty and complexity of the world and to be filled with a sense of wonder. Wonder is an antidote not only to cynicism, but also to complacency, narcissism, and greed. It helps put things in their proper perspective. When we see ourselves as a small part of the whole, we become larger in intellect and in spirit” (42). But to hear the invitation to study—this is where we come in as teachers. “If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder,” writes Rachel Carson, “he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in” (45). For this reason, we must cultivate our own sense of wonder. During my time in the park, I watched as my own senses slowly came into focus. I recall one of the coldest nights that winter, hearing ice break in the creek below the farmhouse, then a few weeks later, my thrill at hearing birds, feeling like Thoreau when he celebrated robins, “the first I had heard for many a thousand years” (257). Away from the clamor of modern life, I could *hear* the natural world around me, and felt, not unlike the fourth grader in the poem below, that I was increasingly a part of its joyful expression:

The Sky and Me

I see the sky and it is blue,
I see the clouds, they are too.
The wind is blurry
The clouds are moving
I see me and I am blooming.

Playfulness and Humor

“Our challenge is to see with new eyes, to look at the familiar as though we’re seeing it for the first time. When we look closely and allow ourselves to be surprised by unexpected details and new insights, we develop an authenticity and humility in our experience of place, and wake up to its mysteries and delights”

(Ann Pelo)

Often, the journey toward deep listening at the CVEEC involved unexpected humor. I recall laughing with classroom teachers as students gawked at the bloated body of a dead salamander while we adults gawked at the writhing, mating, intertwined bodies of two live ones. I also recall an autumn morning trying to keep my students on task while a trail guide fled down an adjoining trail with gaggle of upset geese chasing him. One afternoon, I stood helpless and grinning as kids spontaneously walloped in snow banks. Another day the wind howled so strongly that we cupped hands over our ears and eventually moved indoors to “look deeply” through glass windows. When the weather turned, students struggled to listen to anything but their own physical malaise, and that distraction became part of our practice, as in this response by a sixth grade boy:

Untitled

The day is cold, frozen and wet;
Water and ice have met.

It is muddy, oh, so muddy...
The day is very cruddy.

Water is flowing and rain keeps on going
Until it’s VERY muddy, oh so VERY muddy!
And the day is now more cruddy.

One snowy afternoon I found myself ill-equipped to console a sixth grader who had fallen in the snow and was, more than anything, suffering from a bruised ego. He wanted to know if he could use bad words in his poem.

“What word are you thinking of?” I whispered as we huddled in the lodge to get warm.

“It rhymes with thump.”

“Ummm... I’m not sure what word you mean...”

Lowering his head and looking around, he hissed, “*Rump!*”

His final draft exhibited a decision to excise this “bad” word (its rhyming pair remains), but the poem maintains its frustrated tone:

Ice and Snow

I see a doe, fawn and snow—
Now which way do I go, do I go in the snow?
But as I jump I feel a thump;
Now I know,
It's ICE not snow—
I should have gone after the doe!

More than once throughout the year, I was reminded of a tale Jane Dobisz tells about a little brown mouse that wallows in her “outhouse” bucket for warmth, causing Dobisz to burst out laughing at the irony in her serious Buddhist meditations (98-100). As with any meditation, my attempts to engage students in deep listening were, at the moments I least expected it, met with humbling but funny roadblocks, such as the fourth-grade boy who could not settle in to listening because a bee was plaguing his head:

Yellow Bee

Yellow bee, Yellow bee buzzing by my ear:
Please, oh please get away from me there.
I know you like nectar but I am not a flower—
So please, oh please, Yellow bee
Get away from my ear!

Ironically (or perhaps not), these moments furthered the students’ and my sense of deep listening because they forced us to become open to humility and play. John Stark writes about “regression in the service of the ego,” or the ability to “let go and play, to be childlike” (80). Crucial to this perspective, he says, is a light heart. Raisuyah Bhagwan adds that adults may have lost this capacity but “children are pregnant with a special attentiveness to life’s precious miracles” (230). What medicine for writer’s block! When children respond spontaneously, “play can be an expression of soul and Creative Spirit” (Derezotes 155). Free play on the page through deep listening can dissolve performance anxiety, overcome perfectionism, cultivate the ability to laugh at oneself and allow for whimsical adventures, as in the poem below, by a sixth grade boy:

Cattails

I sit here on the grass watching the cattails.
They are so furry you could use them as a jacket;
They dance with the wind like they are having a party,
Bowing at me as if I am their king.
They talk to me,
Asking me to join and dance,
but I say I must go
and I will visit again.

Or this spirited piece by a fifth grade girl:

Cattails

The cattails
are scared cats

sticking up their tails
from a meadow.

Playfulness and humor are built into deep listening. When English teachers help students pay attention to these moments, we—and they—gain an opportunity to disengage our egos so that we might open to our awareness to a larger world and smile.

Awareness of Interconnectedness

“Because I am quiet, I can feel my connections to this tilting planet.”

(G. Lynn Nelson, *Writing and Being* 37)

One day, after a particularly successful workshop, I was tramping through the woods and fell in behind three boys. They were discussing the poetry they’d just written.

“No, no, man. That one wasn’t mine. Mine was the flower,” I heard one of them say.

“Who wrote about the wind?”

“I don’t know, she didn’t say.”

“Mine was the button.”

“The bachelor button?”

“Yeah.”

“Read it again, man, I didn’t hear it.”

The boy unrolled the paper in his fist and read as he scuffed through the leaves:

Bachelor buttons are beautiful,
I think you would agree,
The puddles of their centers, staring up at me
The middle of this flower looks like a cat’s claw,
Open and pointed inward, like a shark’s jaw.

“That’s sweet, man, that’s tight.”

In this scenario, the young author of “Bachelor Buttons” had concentrated on the flowers so intently that he saw a connection with other living things and wanted to share this discovery with his peers. “In the development of a consciousness which is attentive, awake and aware,” writes Sandra Finney, “concentrating on one flower or one worm can be enough to startle us into recognizing some aspect of our human selves or focusing upon the ultimately mysterious and deeply spiritual nature of all being. Such experiences also draw us into more deeply respectful relations” (42). Sanders describes this experience as our “birthright,” asserting that “a sense of communion with other organisms, with the energies and patterns of nature, is instinctive in children” (*Manifesto* 214).

At the CVEEC, it was not uncommon to watch students undergo transformation during the course of a single hour. Sometimes the experience was so personal that they would come to me and ask that I share their poem anonymously during our read-around, such as this fourth grade boy who, when I read his piece, moved twenty feet away from our circle and turned his back:

Family of Ducks

A family of ducks is in the pond
They're shaking their heads and twisting their necks
They swim together in a circle of love.
Now they're flying high above

Other students studied the patterns of raindrops on water or grooves in stones, searching, in the words of Gretel Ehrlich, “the history of the soul, the history of the mind descending and arising in the body,” seeking “to stumble on divinity” (31). One sixth-grade boy illustrates this profound observation of interconnectivity in a poem about the glassy surface of a pond:

Untitled

What are we but a ripple,
A shallow ripple, at that—
Seeking to touch another.
Each of our ripples is small,
Barely stirring the ocean of time,
Yet here we are.

In his essay, “Pedagogy of the Poetic: Nurturing Ecological Sensibility through Language and Literature,” Patrick Howard urges that “we must educate so we see ourselves as part of the web of life, as implicated in the world, not simply isolated, self-maximizing individuals” (191). Our methods, therefore, must be those that seek a *Gestalt*. “If we attend to separate parts,” writes Zajonc, “that is what we see. If we are interested in wholes and devise an experimental method to that interest, then wholes show themselves” (80). This phenomena, he says, arises in economics, physics, or medicine—and education. Zajonc suggests that we could heal the disparateness of our education system by teaching what Desmond Tutu calls *Ubuntu*: “I exist because of you” (78).

Deep listening in nature is inherently inter-connective. Because it is physical, it allows students to discover new knowledge with all five senses. Because it is both interdisciplinary and reflective, it invites students to explore this new knowledge in relation to already existing data and experience. And because it encourages reaching beyond the self to encounter other living beings, it can provide a gateway for budding compassion—which is a foundation for fostering responsible, caring citizens.

Conclusion

“‘Trees breathe,’ he told me. ‘Listen.’”

(Scott Russell Sanders, *Writing from the Center* 3)

As teachers in the 21st century, we are forced to grapple with a clamorous, headlong world. The nightly news parades through our living rooms with the echo of bombs and one-dollar cheeseburgers. Our students come to class with smartphones and iPods. Words flood onto their papers without much thought. It becomes easy to forget Thomas Newkirk’s important questions, “What kind of ‘self’ are we inviting students to become? What kinds of ‘selves’ do we subtly dismiss?” (6). If we examine our pedagogies from

an environmental standpoint, deep listening may be our only salvation. “The remaining, and most important, frontier . . .” argues Patricia Mische, “now may be the frontier of mind and spirit, the realm where ethics are shaped and responsibility is taken for the state of our lives and our world” (sect. 12 para. 4). Deep listening may not be an explicit bullet point in our current lists of “best practices,” but if we find ways to explore its impacts, it will prove itself. In his essay, “Sanctuaries,” Scott Russell Sanders urges that “We must find the desire, the courage, the vision to live sanely, to live considerately, and we can only do that together, calling out and listening, listening and calling out” (*Writing* 64).

For those who live away from wild places, locating nature for deep listening can present challenges. Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight” laments his childhood, “In the great city, pent ‘mid cloisters dim,” where his only connection to nature was “sky and stars.” For many children today, pollution may eliminate even this possibility. At the CVEEC, I often heard classroom teachers brainstorming ways to bring nature to their students once they were back at school. One teacher helped his students raise (and write about) orchids. Another scheduled trips to the planetarium to observe star patterns, followed up by a mini-unit on native astronomy. Others encouraged poems about city pigeons, got involved in garden-to-plate cafeteria initiatives, or took their classes on Friday walks around the building to write about shifts in wind, weather, light.

Sometimes, it is worth simply asking students, “Where do you find nature?” During a recent “place-based poetry” assignment with Upward-Bound students from Browning, Montana, (an astonishingly gray, littered, reservation town), I posed this question and one boy wrote an entire poem about kicking dust and gravel down back alleys where wild dogs scapped for food. Mary Rose O’Reilly relays an anecdote about an inner city Milwaukee teen who “wrote as precisely and enchantedly about grass and bugs as does Annie Dillard” (79). When O’Reilly asked him how he’d come to know these, he answered, “Oh, there was a freeway overpass near my house, with this little patch of grass . . . I would lie there day after day.”

However we can get them there, deep listening in nature raises consciousness and transforms children.

During my time at Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center, I witnessed this potential for transformation profoundly. With each group of students, I saw change. As we listened deeply to our natural surroundings, reluctance to write evaporated. Students created poetry that reflected stillness, selfhood, wonder, playfulness, and interconnectivity with a larger world. I, too, left the park a different teacher and a different person—one far more willing to pause by a pond with my students on a September morning and ask, like this sixth grader:

The sound of crickets
Hiding among the cattails—
When will I see them?

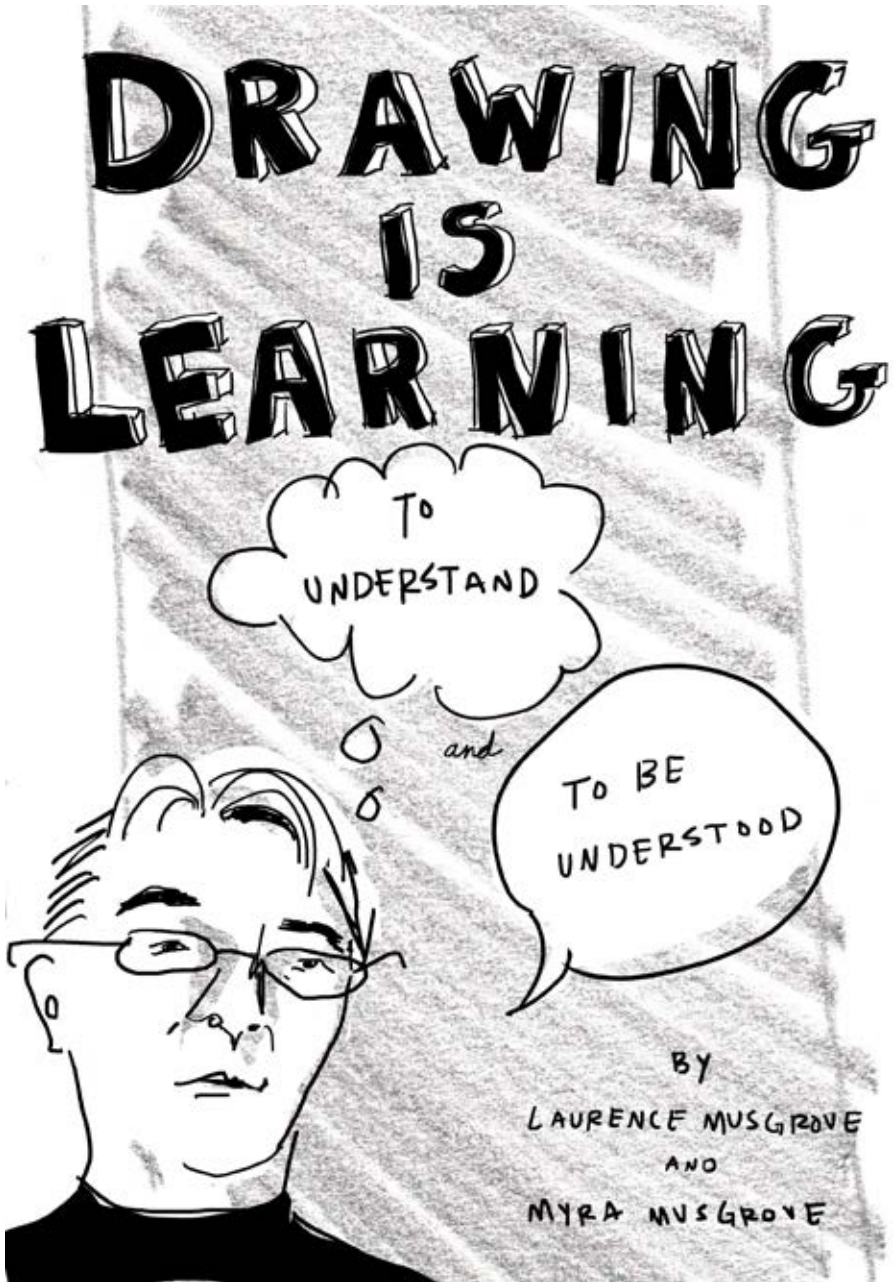


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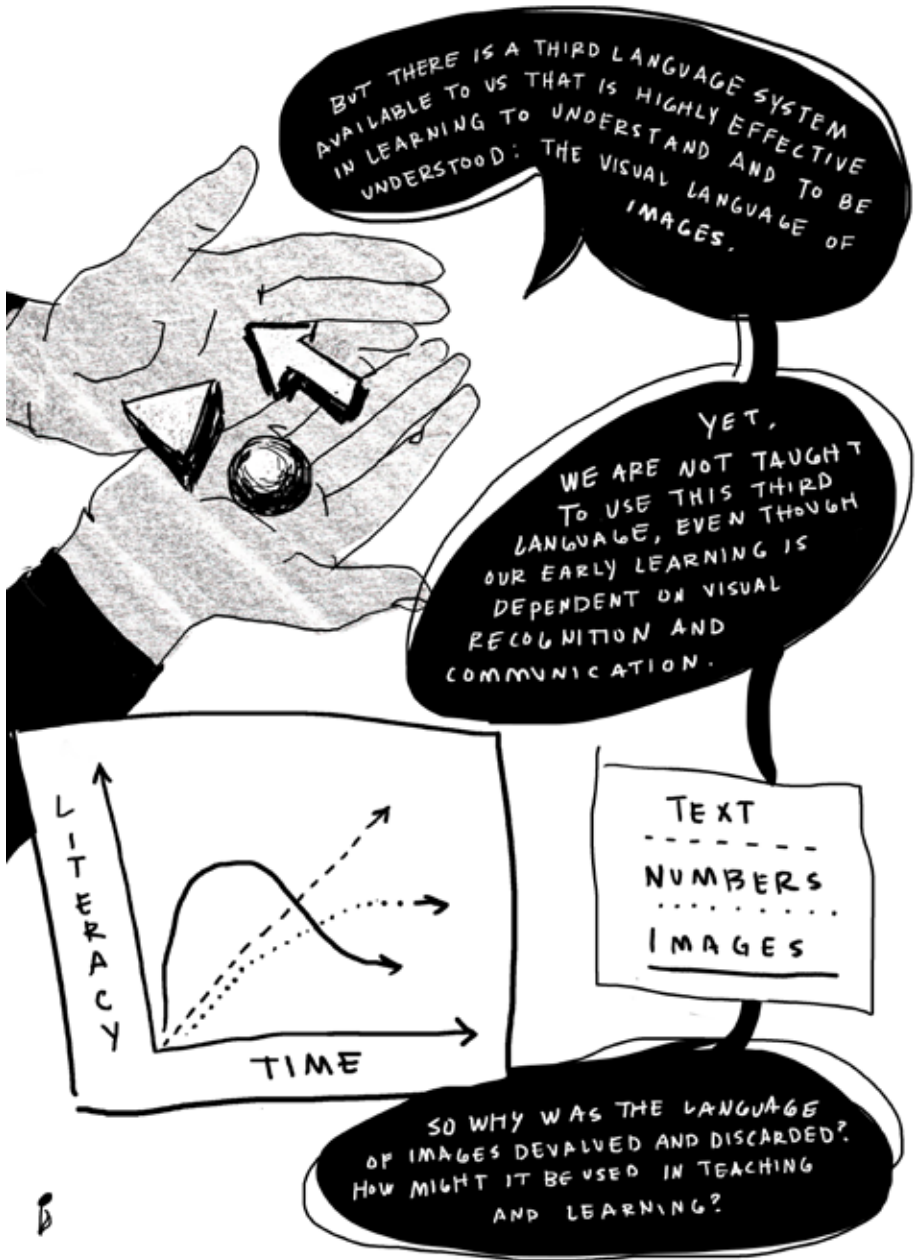
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OUT OF THE BOX



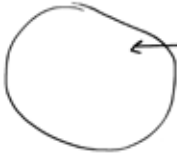




I BELIEVE THAT WE CAN HELP OUR STUDENTS BE MORE EFFECTIVE LEARNERS, IF WE CAN HELP THEM LEARN AND PRACTICE THIS THIRD LANGUAGE BY INTEGRATING IT INTO OUR SCHOOLS VIA DRAWING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM.

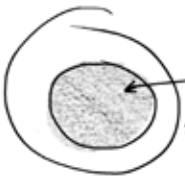


NOW,
LET'S DEFINE SOME TERMS



THINKING

= HOW OUR MINDS PROCESS INFORMATION
(WE REMEMBER THAT A FRIEND IS VISITING
TOMORROW)



VISUAL THINKING

= HOW OUR EYES AND MINDS PROCESS VISUAL INFORMATION
(WE LOOK INTO THE GUEST BEDROOM TO SEE
IF IT IS CLEAN)



DRAWING

= HOW OUR EYES, MINDS AND HANDS CREATE VISUAL INFORMATION
(WE SKETCH OUT DIRECTIONS TO THE STORE FOR
OUR FRIEND)

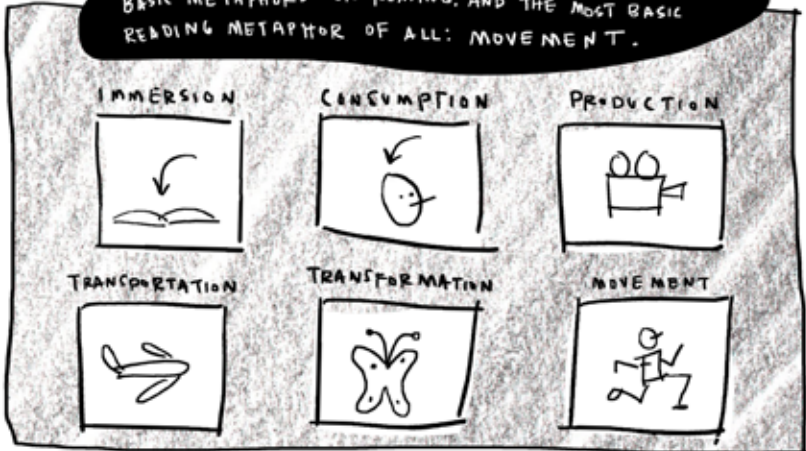


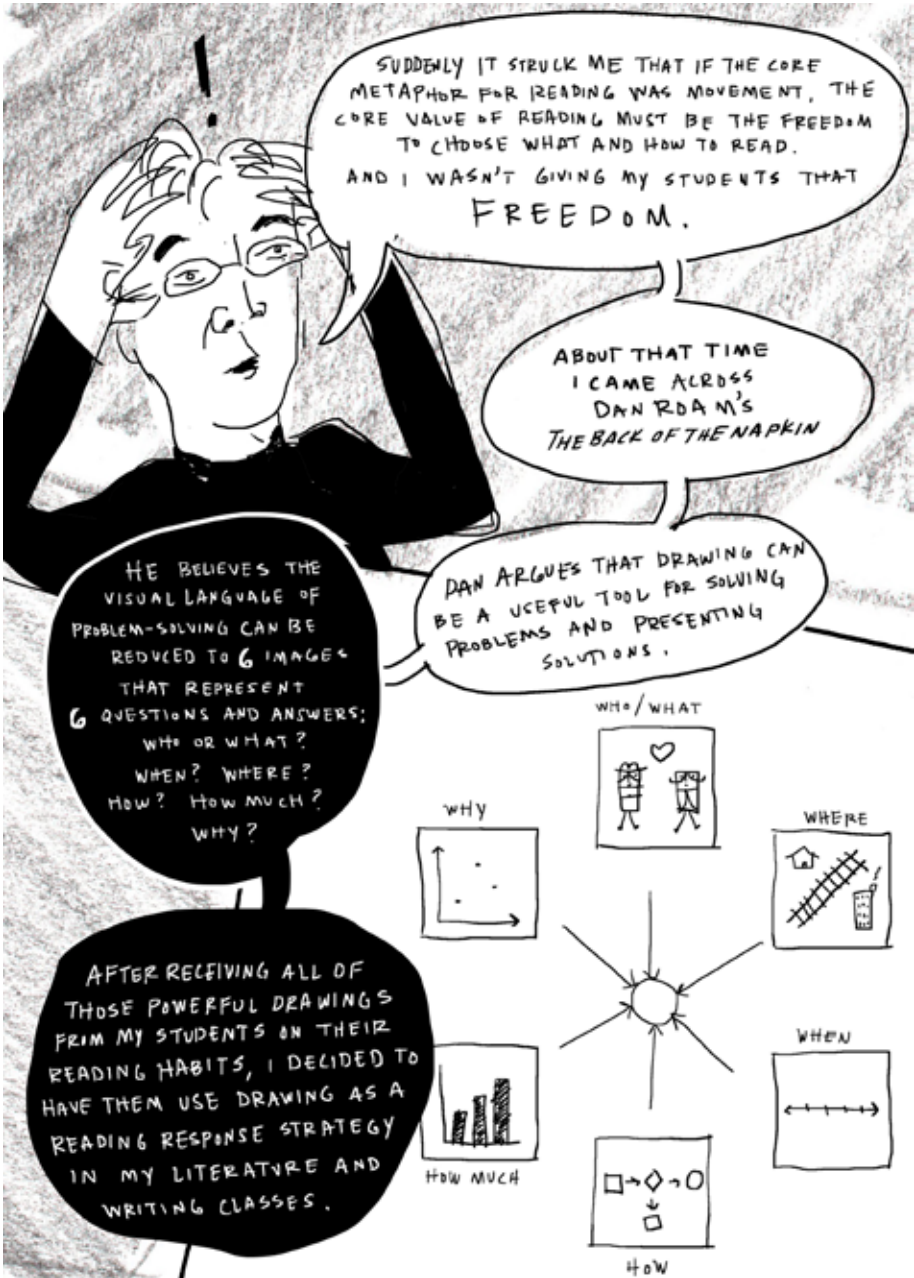


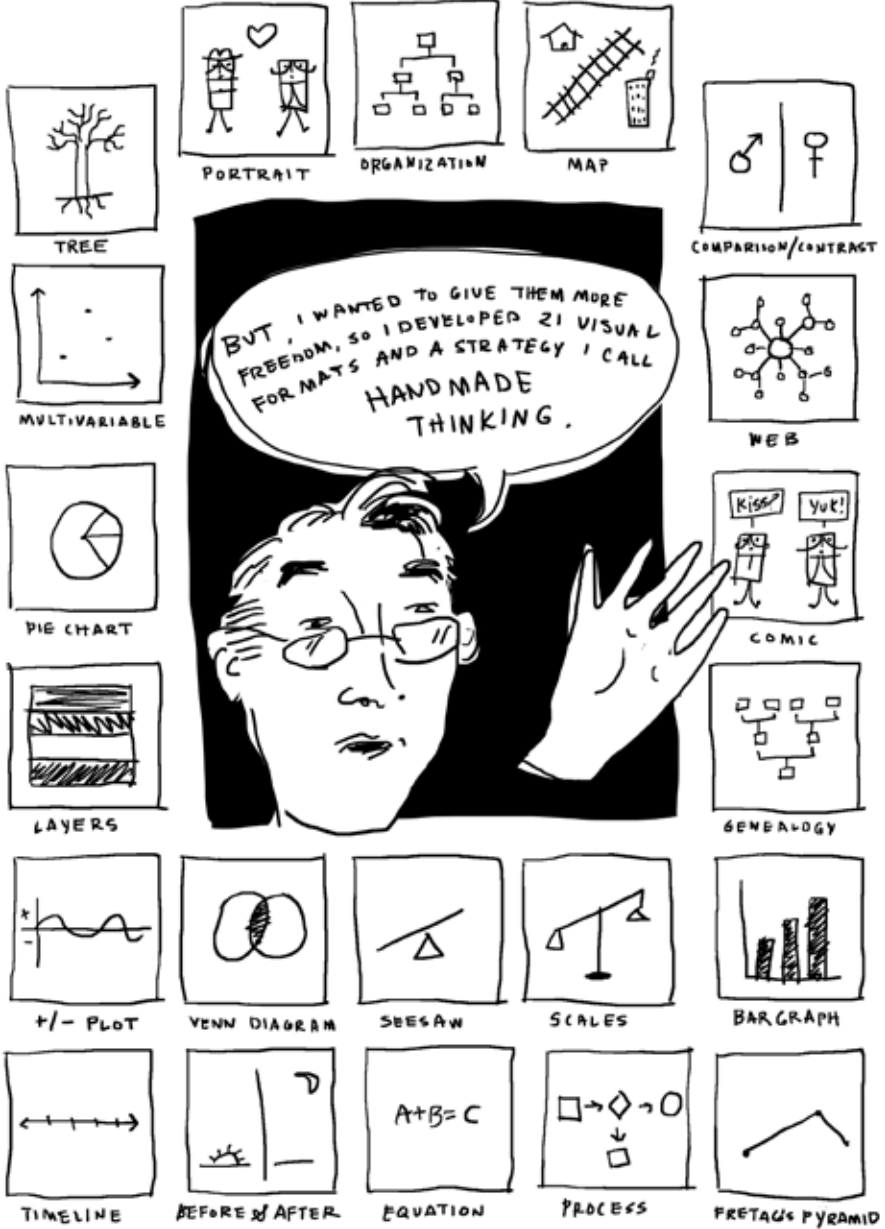
SO I ASKED MY STUDENTS TO DRAW A PICTURE OF WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THEY READ TO HELP ME UNDERSTAND HOW THEIR READING HISTORIES MIGHT BE INFLUENCING THEIR CURRENT ATTITUDES TOWARD READING.



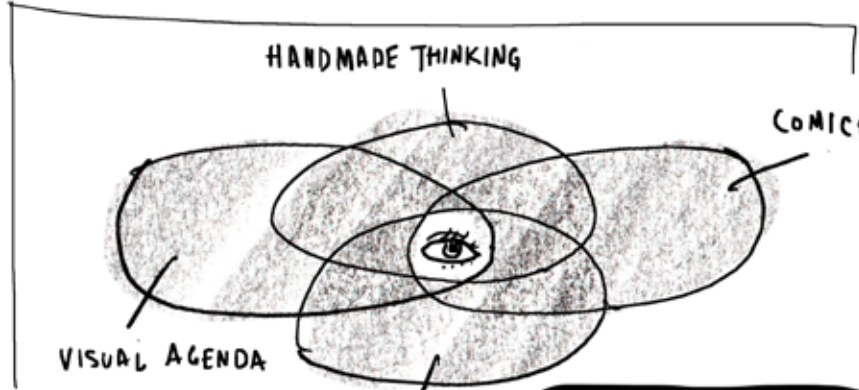
AFTER STUDYING MANY OF THESE DRAWINGS OVER SEVERAL YEARS, I SOON DISCOVERED FIVE BASIC METAPHORS FOR READING. AND THE MOST BASIC READING METAPHOR OF ALL: MOVEMENT.







BECAUSE I'VE HAD SUCCESS IN TEACHING HANDMADE THINKING AS A CHOICE-BASED LEARNING AND RESPONSE STRATEGY IN MY CLASSES, I'VE EXPLORED OTHER AREAS OF VISUAL TEACHING AND LEARNING.

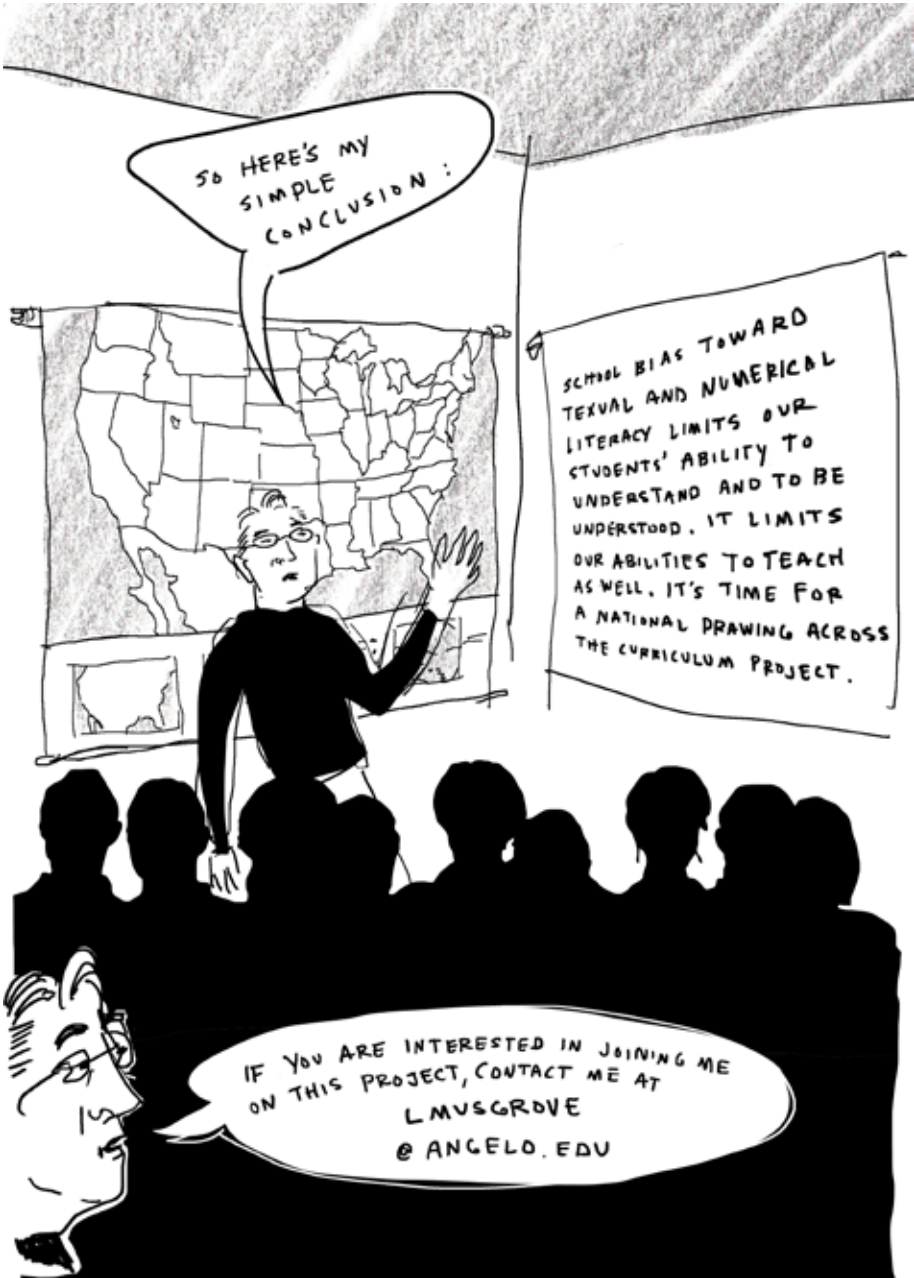


I DRAW THE VISUAL AGENDA FOR EACH OF MY CLASSES BASED UPON THE GRAPHIC FACILITATION VOCABULARY OF BRANDY AGERBECK IN *THE GRAPHIC FACILITATOR'S GUIDE*.

I TEACH STUDENTS VISUAL NOTE-TAKING BASED ON MIKE RHDIE'S *THE SKETCHNOTE HANDBOOK*.

I TEACH A GRAPHIC NOVELS CLASS BASED ON SCOTT McCLOUD'S *UNDERSTANDING COMICS* AND HAVE STUDENTS DRAW COMICS OF THEIR OWN TO LEARN THE SPECIAL VISUAL VOCABULARY OF SEQUENTIAL ART.





NOTES

§ SUNNI BROWN HAS A SIMILAR MULTIVARIABLE CHART IN HER EXCELLENT BOOK ON VISUAL, CREATIVE, AND CRITICAL THINKING, *THE DIDDLE REVOLUTION*, WHEREIN SHE FOCUSES ON THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN VERBAL AND VISUAL LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (6).

§ RUDOLPH ARNHEIM'S CLASSIC *VISUAL THINKING* IS A CLEARLY WRITTEN INTRODUCTION TO THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT AND VISUAL PERCEPTION, AS WELL AS CONTAINING A GOOD ARGUMENT FOR ART IN EDUCATION.

¶ *LITERATURE AS EXPLORATION* BY LOUISE ROSENBLATT CHANGED THE WAY I THINK ABOUT THE TRANSACTIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN READER AND TEXT AND THEIR OFFSPRING, LITERARY ENGAGEMENT AND RESPONSE. AN EXPANDED DISCUSSION OF THIS IMAGE OF READING IS IN MY *JAEPL* ARTICLE "WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE READ: PICTURING A READER'S RESPONSIBILITIES."

¶ SEE MY BLOG ESSAY "THE BELIEVING BODY" ON MY RESEARCH INTO THE METAPHORS WE READ BY (theillustratedprofessor.com/freedom-and-faith-in-reading).

○ SEE EXAMPLES OF MY VISUAL AGENDA, STUDENT SKETCHNOTES, AND STUDENT COMICS VIA THE MENU AT theillustratedprofessor.com.

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HER PORTFOLIO IS AT
GRADE-B.NET

BOOK REVIEWS**Beginner's Mind****Judy Halden-Sullivan, Book Review Editor**

As we proudly celebrate *JAEPL*'s twentieth anniversary, I believe the *ethos* that distinguishes our journal is what Suzuki Roshi describes as "beginner's mind": "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few" (21). At *JAEPL*, we are committed to dismantling preconceived notions; we want to stay wide-open to possibilities for teaching and learning. This issue's reviewed books are effective examples of that openness, reverberating within a lexicon made available in the past two decades. These studies seek to unsettle our understanding of gender, race, non-western wisdom traditions, and our home in the classroom.

For example, the gender wars: while a characterization made cliché in popular media, sadly, this strife is alive and debilitating in, of all places, elementary schools. Elizabeth French visits the gendered conflicts personified in graphic detail by Scott Richardson in *eleMENtary School—(Hyper)Masculinity in a Feminized Context*, a scalding narrative depicting the "boys club," divided female camps, and abused, ill-fated "others" who populate elementary school faculties. As Richardson reveals, a locus generally considered hyper-feminized is, conversely, home to resistant, domineering strongholds of uber-masculine male teachers who manipulate inexperienced new faculty and undercut the collaborative professional support that can foster students' success. Richardson seeks to establish, in French's assessment, "an effective teaching environment where teacher gender is translucent"—a light, French declares, that permits instructors and students to see both themselves and other possible worlds.

The shock of recognition Richardson that makes palpable in his study of gender identity in cultural context is similarly pungent in Wendy Ryden and Ian Marshall's book, *Reading, Writing, and the Rhetoric of Whiteness*, reviewed by Brad Lucas. Ryden and Marshall demonstrate the many ways that whiteness studies, as they are drawn into the teaching of rhetoric and composition, can become a distorting filter, subverting manifold possibilities for thinking. As a matter of fact, whiteness studies, the co-authors contend, seem to persistently undermine their own intentions—to trip over themselves. Lucas affirms this in his review's introduction, noting that "to draw attention to the invisible, oppressive, marginalizing presence of whiteness is to make it visible, but paradoxically that process then places whiteness as the center of attention, dominating that field of vision." Ryden and Marshall address this conundrum, Lucas explains, with provocative explorations of whiteness studies in many contexts: the popular narrative testimonies of liberal white subjects—well-received by whites; gender studies; scripted, much repeated public enactments of whiteness that bespeak not disclosure but instead the "rhetoric of kitsch" (69); *logos*-driven, western European epistemologies devoid of emotion; the unspoken imperialistic motives of Basic Writing; and the "schizophrenia" that erupts from the simultaneous call for both multiculturalism *and* color-blindness. This demanding, far-reaching critique, Lucas claims, prompts us "to keep our analyses ongoing and tempered with voices other than our own."

Conflicts, entrenched stances, persistent blindness—what to do? Can we speak together without mangling the dignity of diverse others? How can we advocate for meaningful change in such a contentious world? Barry Kroll provides surprising Eastern possibilities in *The Open Hand: Arguing as an Art of Peace*. In his study, Kroll details the structure, assignments, and activities he employs to embody non-adversarial approaches to argumentation. As reviewer Candace Walworth explains, herself a student of both Zen and tai chi, Kroll draws from a rich array of non-western wisdom traditions—Asian pedagogies, kinesthetic modes of learning found in the martial arts, meditation practices—to craft a four-hour first-year seminar that makes argumentation visceral, that speaks to students’ minds *and* bodies. Kroll describes his seminar as “a series of conventional classes punctuated by weekly lab sessions devoted to contemplative as well as kinesthetic learning” (114). Walworth analyzes Kroll’s extensive and practical class plans, sample student writing projects, and students’ reflective notebooks to affirm the efficacy of Kroll’s non-traditional stance toward argument. In her review, she asserts that Kroll’s strategies help to re-envision dialogues that engage not just academics, but all of us “in our roles as parents, adult children, citizens, neighbors, friends, and lovers.”

Each of these reviewed books asks us to reconsider the place that animates these complex issues: the classroom. All paths, however innovative or resistant or political, bring us home. As Jeremiah Conway makes clear in his deeply personal testimony, *The Alchemy of Teaching: The Transformation of Lives*, teachers, often preoccupied with the mundane mechanics of instruction, must correct “our blindness to the event of human change” available in the classroom—the little moments of students’ transformation (7). Inspired by his long career as a professor of philosophy, Conway paints poignant vignettes of everyday moments with students that he does not want to forget. His stories, as reviewer Caleb Corkery elucidates, remind us that we sometimes must learn the simplest things last, that we must, in Corkery’s words, awaken in the classroom to “explaining our ideas, listening to each student, watching for where to find the center of the lesson.”

Home to the classroom. This is the locus somehow rediscovered in *every* book review I have assigned in the last ten years. In the midst of continuing theoretical and technological metamorphoses, the classroom, however construed, is the constant: the place of remaking and becoming. I confess I hope this exploration never ends. I mention this particularly to my colleague Dr. Julie Nichols, Associate Professor of English at Utah Valley University, whom we welcome as *JAEPL*’s new Book Review Editor. You may recall Julie as a frequent *JAEPL* book reviewer herself. To all of my reviewers and to all of the editors with whom I’ve had the honor of working in the past decade, thank you for being my guides, my teachers. Now it’s time to start again: Julie, please enjoy being a “beginner”!



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Elizabeth M. French, Lebanon Valley College

From individuals to families to communities, in the workplace, the market place, in education and in politics, gender equality and its ensuing dynamics have been hotly debated. Strong opinions on both sides have been pronounced and dialoged. It is a most interesting and compelling conflagration when gender relationships are discussed in the context of an arena that is traditionally feminine and silent: the elementary school. That is precisely what author Scott Richardson examines in his book, *eleMENTary School—(Hyper) Masculinity in a Feminized Context*. This personal narrative of his experiences sheds light onto the masculine perspective of the teacher and administrator in the elementary setting.

The grey covered book provides the typical title information, with an emphasis on the word “men” in *eleMENTary* and a picture that covers half the page of a partially depicted young mustached, bearded man with his tongue sticking out. His eyes are not visible. While the letter collage in the book’s title is attention-grabbing, the picture is distracting and can, in fact, be a deterrent to reading the study. On the protruding tongue are two metal symbols; one is star-shaped, and one is an exclamation point. This photographic illustration is misleading and does not provide an obvious connection to its content. Even after reading the book, the cover photo is unclear. Who does the face represent: male teachers, the “boys club,” the students, or perhaps they are embodiments of the many expletives within the text? The symbols on the tongue are open to interpretation. The cover may not invite potential audiences to read the book.

The narrative, however, is gripping. This study provides a glimpse into the experiences of a male, elementary teacher, Richardson, who felt bullied out of his teaching career because he did not fit into the “boys club” (23). The author’s descriptors and rules for the “boys club” echo reflections in both Michael Kimmel’s study *Guyland: The Perilous World Where Boys Become Men* (2009) and Deborah Sarah David and Robert Brannon’s book *The Forty-nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role* (1976), both of which set the stage for Richardson’s experiences and relationships described throughout his narrative. The rules of the “boys club” include: have a penis (151); be hypermasculine (152); engage in “borderwork,” in other words, support gender inequality (152); allow only for the value of one’s own masculinity (153); defend the man as expert (157); and never challenge traditional rules of masculinity (157). Richardson was able to develop relationships with male teachers who were in the boys club and those that were not. He also narrates his experiences with female faculty.

Female faculty members were categorized in two ways: those who taught prior to 2002’s No Child Left Behind legislation—pre-NCLBers—and those who taught after, post-NCLBers (43). The pre-NCLBers were more experienced teachers who, according to Richardson, brought teaching to every child in a situated, hands-on way, unlike the post-NCLBers—less experienced instructors—who taught to a test and were data driven (43). Although teaching differences and opinions existed between the two groups of women, they were willing to work and coexist together in a positive way. Both groups

sought to work with all faculty, either to maintain positive relationships or to satisfy their supervisors (44). The post-NCLBers were more accepted by the boys club because these younger female faculty members needed to feel a part of and be pleasing to the existing faculty and administration. Men who did not fit into the boys club were labeled as the “others.”

In regard to the fate of the “others,” Richardson discusses the experience of Owen, a college friend of Richardson’s. Owen, an openly gay English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) teacher, struggled to interact in the school with his masculine colleagues because he did not fit into the accepted “real men” category. His teaching was genuine and effective, and he had a deep concern for children, but his interaction with the male faculty was unbearable and degrading, leaving him with little confidence. Owen felt anxiety and stress in the workplace. His male colleagues would neither listen to nor accept him, which made Owen feel isolated, alone, and marginalized. At the end of the school year, Owen left teaching for another career.

Conversely, Richardson details the experience of another faculty member, Dru, who had similar issues in regard to acceptance, but whose professional trajectory was somewhat different. Dru was considered a geek—gay and feminine—by the boys club. However, the larger faculty liked and accepted him as a leader. Dru was very athletic, a heterosexual, and liked to take charge. But he was the librarian, which was not considered a “real man” position. The boys club bullied him continually, even though he tried to work with his masculine counterparts. Dru sometimes challenged them; this brought consequences and belittlement. He was an effective faculty member with other staff and took his job very seriously, while persistently showing his concern for the students in the school. This was unnerving for the boys club. They did not consider his role as librarian and technology expert to be valuable boys club vocations. They also believed that Dru, by performing his job well, was actively intending to usurp their power. During one incident, Dru had a public confrontation with a boys club member over an educational programming suggestion. As a result, his ideas were sabotaged by the boys club, preventing his recommendations from being carried out. Although Dru did not back down from this and other confrontations, he suffered emotional consequences from this relentless struggle. He was isolated and verbally belittled.

In contrast to the exasperation and marginalization of “others,” Richardson depicts Alex—the new teacher—one of the most unsettling characters in this narrative. Richardson cites Alex as an example of a first-year teacher becoming a member of the boys club while at the same time losing his focus on why he selected the teaching profession in the first place. Without seeking the support of those who could guide a first-year teacher to a successful year, Alex instead chose or accepted the role that the boys club advocated for a fellow member. From the beginning of the first day of class until the school year’s end, Richardson follows Alex’s teaching path. He examines his decisions about students, his personal choices that echo those of the boys club, and his lack of ability to manage his class and teach. As an example, Alex had difficulty guiding his classroom from his first days of school due, in part, to trying to use control and humor, a typical male authoritarian teaching behavior, as noted by Richardson. This strategy backfired. By the end of the school year, his classroom was out of control. In fact, throughout the year, he continued to seek advice from the boys club, which only exacerbated his instructional

and management struggles. His difficulties were later noted in his end-of-year evaluation. Alex was deflated and defeated after his first year of teaching, but he still took his solace from his boys club association. Richardson even wonders if Alex *likes* teaching, as there appears to be no evidence affirming this supposition. Alex questions this himself. Richardson also notes that Alex might have had a more positive year had he sought help from other colleagues and was assigned a qualified mentor. This suggestion is problematic because there is no evidence, according to Richardson, that the school ever addressed this shortcoming or the other situational problems noted. Alex becomes the poster child for the elementary school's culture of hyper-masculinity and its debilitating impact on teaching.

In ways Richardson carefully articulates, each character involved in his experience either contributed to or diminished the entire faculty's main goal of teaching. This goal is reaching all children by caring for and educating each to their highest potential. Collaboration and communication are essential as all educators move together toward the same end. Gender should never, and does not need to ever, get in the way of this accomplishment.

This book is thought-provoking for any educator or leader in this field. One would think that we have moved past our patriarchal moorings when we are instructing children. However, Richardson challenges our minds to survey masculine and feminine roles in the elementary school in a new light. We, as educational leaders and models, need to wake up, become aware, and cultivate an environment of care in the elementary school that fosters an effective teaching environment where teacher gender is translucent: providing a special light through which students see possible worlds (160). Silence is not an option. Richardson's is a splendid study of "eleMEntary" school culture, a microcosm of society in need of humane, productive change.



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Ryden, Wendy and Ian Marshall. *Reading, Writing, and the Rhetorics of Whiteness*. NY: Routledge, 2012. Print.

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One of the central paradoxes for whiteness studies, one that stifles their attempts at social change, stems from their emphasis on the white subject as they seek to reveal the pernicious, dominant ubiquity of whiteness. Put another way, to draw attention to the invisible, oppressive, marginalizing presence of whiteness is to make it visible, but paradoxically that process then places whiteness as the center of attention, dominating that field of vision. Throughout their book, Wendy Ryden and Ian Marshall confront this problematic of re-centering the white subject and all the complexities it entails. In doing so, they challenge themselves to work through such paradoxes in their own writing, showing us by example ways to do the same.

Rather than canvassing the scholarly terrain of whiteness studies, Ryden and Marshall offer in their introduction a succinct overview, encouraging readers who are new to (or well-steeped in) whiteness studies to consider the book in the context of our so-called “post-racial” era, “to begin a mapping of whiteness as an interdisciplinary epistemology” that contends with its paradoxes and possibilities, “specifically centered on matters of writing, pedagogy, and classroom practices in a university setting” (9). Ryden and Marshall then alternate authorship for the six chapters that follow, reinforcing their inquiry as an ongoing dialogue about whiteness in rhetoric and composition. First, in terms I will qualify in the upcoming discussion, Ryden interrogates narrative testimony from positions of liberal subjectivity; she teases out the theoretical affinities between whiteness and gender studies; and she situates whiteness studies within the emotional or affective domain. For his part, Marshall challenges the motives of Basic Writing and its conspicuously absent critical discourse on whiteness; he traces the institutional perpetuation of language hierarchies in Basic Writing and its roots in New Criticism; and he examines critical pedagogy alongside the “schizophrenia” resulting from the discourses of both multiculturalism and color blindness.

Chapter One begins with a personal account from Ryden’s childhood, a narrative point of departure to discuss Jill Swiencicki’s idea of the “awareness narrative,” an authorial rite of passage in which authors situate their lives (14-15). According to Ryden, narratives revealing an awareness of racism comprise a rhetorical tradition she calls the “whiteness confessional . . . a prerequisite act of self-actualization that seemingly lays the groundwork for dismantling white racist identity, a kind of ‘truth and reconciliation’ strategy of responsible owning of experience from which one can move forward to become a member of the group of antiracist workers” (15). As Ryden has it, the constructed subjectivity and authenticity in such confessionals can help us understand the pedagogy and scholarship surrounding the personal essay (17-18). To that end, she compares Thomas Newkirk’s and Douglass Hesse’s (separately) published accounts of teaching George Orwell’s essay “Shooting an Elephant” to show how the essay typifies the whiteness confessional. Ryden then considers the dynamics of “coming out” and “closeting” narratives with the whiteness confessional, explaining how “the closet” serves both LGBT and white identity as a metaphor for invisibility; however, the former comes

out to embrace a subjugated identity whereas the latter comes out to shed a racist identity “for a new and improved one, thus producing the reclaimed white subject” (27-28). Ryden shows how such confessional narratives create a space for a “ritual reclaiming,” which may account for why white audiences find such narratives so appealing (37).

Marshall begins Chapter Two with a childhood anecdote, illustrating how his British “white” accent overruled his “dark skin color” in the United States (40). Pointing to the absences of African-American Language in the academy and mass media, he argues that Basic Writing “still carries the essential nature of its racist beginnings as a project to sanitize the language of ‘the other’ . . .” (42). Revisiting the so-called crisis of open admissions in the 1970s, Marshall traces how Basic Writing was racialized and linked with political activism, how its mission became “a kind of colonial enterprise to mimic the language and habits of the white established power structure” (50-51). Targeting the whiteness of critical pedagogues (in representation and practice), Marshall follows with a critique of “bidialectalism,” the argument that students should simply learn Standard English despite their linguistic backgrounds (53). Marshall uses the teaching of a Charles Chesnut story to illustrate the challenges to identity and individualism faced by bidialectal students (65). Troubling the concept of dialectical hybridity as an alternative, Marshall ponders whether “basic writers, if allowed to exercise their own language in a reimagined course which takes seriously the notion of multilingualism, would contribute to an institution’s integrity and uplift” (67).

In Chapter Three, Ryden argues that our academic discussions of race, of whiteness, too often “turn into scripted recitations rather than dialogue,” discussions “governed by a rhetoric of kitsch” (69). Through one student’s resistance, she illustrates the “alienating and bankrupt discourse” of liberal multiculturalism propagated by the media (through emphasis on the trivial, ephemeral, and sensational) which privileges the “white dismissal of racism’s continued relevance in American society and serves as a locus of white identity formation” (73). However, like the problematic re-centered white subject, the attempt to define whiteness as *kitsch*—“as false, empty, hollow, *inauthentic*—becomes its own variety of kitsch, essentialized and mired in melancholy, a self-conscious manifestation of its absent presence” (73; italics Ryden). Ryden turns from the classroom to the 2007 media spectacle surrounding radio personality Don Imus and his racist comments about the Rutgers women’s basketball team. However, moving beyond the “scripted” public response, Ryden instead views Imus through the lens of “camp,” revealing him as a self-caricature—a reading not possible by a public adhering to kitsch discussions that prevent meaningful, critical conversations about race (80-83). Challenging kitsch responses to racism, Ryden suggests, can provide us with the critical tools to understand how whiteness manifests itself in our public, institutional, and classroom conversations.

In Chapter Four, Marshall recounts his struggles with colleagues who advocate a writing pedagogy indebted to New Criticism and middle-class notions of correctness: whiteness perpetuated by institutional structures that determine classroom practice through required texts and reliance on contingent faculty. Such retrograde views of language and pedagogy participate in the hegemony of whiteness, what Marshall calls an “enthymematic relationship” in which “the unspoken goal is to maintain the unspoken structures of power and privilege” (107). Such enthymemes also play out in student discourse that “talks back” to the institution, as Marshall shows through the cases of two

students: one who sends a campus-wide email with a racially charged poem about his struggles adapting to college life and another who challenges white identity expectations through reflecting on her working-class background and her concerns about the future (108-14).

Marshall continues the theme of “talking back” in his final chapter, focusing on resistance he faces as a black professor from his white students who “see my examination of race and racism as already implied in everything I say even when the lines of discussion I invite them to pursue do *not* specifically include race” (141). Here, too, Marshall returns to earlier themes, showing the impact of the schizophrenic discourses of multiculturalism and color-blindness. In her final chapter, Ryden also invokes earlier discussions to challenge pedagogies that neglect the affective domain and its role in whiteness studies. She observes that “attempts to confront white racism often evolve around a *logos*-centered epistemology devoid of the emotional considerations that Aristotle and Freire appear to identify as essential to the project of human knowing” (121). Looking to the social dimensions of emotion—as a discursive and rhetorical phenomenon—may indeed provide a way to better understand the production and circulation of whiteness and, perhaps, to enact social change by helping to “move the transformative potential of critical whiteness studies beyond the limitations of a rhetoric of rationality” (135).

Through a combination of theoretical prowess, personal history, and forthright critique, Ryden and Marshall confront the many ways that whiteness pervades rhetoric and composition, encouraging us to rethink and reimagine the practices that contribute to its ongoing production. At first glance, a book-length project on whiteness studies might appear passé, a late addition to the proliferation of whiteness scholarship and its subsequent post-whiteness critics. However, Ryden and Marshall pursue a range of situations that reflect the larger enterprise of rhetoric and composition, ranging from the student writer to the institutional and cultural forces that perpetuate racism. While I appreciated the alternating perspectives from chapter to chapter, I was surprised to find so little discussion *between* them, a missed opportunity for dialogue that doesn't appear until the brief Afterword. The form of *Reading, Writing, and the Rhetorics of Whiteness*, then, falls somewhere between a co-authored book and an edited collection, but I don't think the shape undermines their project. Instead, Ryden and Marshall prompt us to keep our analyses ongoing and tempered with voices other than our own.



Kroll, Barry. *The Open Hand: Arguing as an Art of Peace*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2013. Print.

Candace Walworth, Naropa University

I'm sure I'm not alone among *JAEP*L readers in my desire to design courses that speak to the head, heart, and hands, engaging students in collaborative explorations of "real world" challenges. Yet obstacles to this vision abound: fear, disciplinary habits, institutional roadblocks, and a dearth of practical examples. Occasionally, a pioneering book emerges, illuminating an innovative, integrative approach to teaching such courses. Visionary and field-tested, Barry Kroll's *The Open Hand: Arguing as an Art of Peace* is such a book.

Kroll is the Robert D. Rodale Professor in Writing at Lehigh University, his home base for investigating alternative ways to conceptualize and teach argument. Over five semesters, from 2007 to 2012, Kroll taught "Arguing as an Art of Peace," a first-year seminar, which served as a laboratory in which to explore non-adversarial approaches to argument—"with an open hand, as an art of peace" (2).

In the opening chapter, Kroll introduces three modes of learning—conceptual-procedural, kinesthetic, and contemplative—which are at the core of his course. His course (and this study's subsequent account) is based on an innovative use of a "fourth-hour," a one-hour weekly lab where he teaches mediation, mindfulness, and kinesthetic exercises based on his study of Japanese martial arts, primarily aikido and tai chi. Kroll describes his writing-intensive course as "a series of conventional classes punctuated by weekly lab sessions devoted to contemplative as well as kinesthetic learning" (114).

Kroll's highlights of distinctive characteristics of the course actually provide an excellent summary of the book. For instance, Kroll's first-year seminar *and* his study:

- Include rhetorical tactics and modes of arguing that offer alternatives to the familiar thesis-support patterns of arguing
- Encourage students to analyze their interpersonal conflicts along with controversial public issues, grounding the study of rhetoric in real life conflicts
- Emphasize Asian practices and modes of analysis that expand the usual Western approach to composition pedagogy
- Employ a kinesthetic modality of learning, encouraging students to explore the art of arguing by practicing martial movements
- Incorporate contemplative practices and meditative arts as way to cultivate awareness and equanimity in the midst of conflict (3)

Because the book's five chapters follow the course outline, readers are introduced to key concepts and assignments in the same sequence as Kroll's students. This provides a felt sense of the dramaturgy and choreography of the course. Following the introductory chapter entitled "Clapping In," Kroll includes three chapters based on three assignments, each demonstrating a distinctive approach to argument: "Reframing and Deliberative Argument," "Attentive Listening and Conciliatory Argument," and "Mediating and Integrative Argument." In the final chapter, "Bowing Out," Kroll re-visits the three

modes of learning, providing further discussion of each and examining the impact of the course on students.

I began reading *The Open Hand* with a professional eye, as I was immersed in designing and teaching undergraduate seminars and seeking pedagogical inspiration. As a Zen and tai chi student, I was eager to learn how Kroll incorporates contemplative and kinesthetic learning into a seminar focused on arguing, which on the surface seems neither contemplative nor kinesthetic. Soon I found myself reading for pleasure, relishing the descriptive detail and superb pacing of this 138-page narrative, beginning with “clapping in” on the first day of class, ending with “bowing out” in silence on the last day. As I read, I began to notice my habits as a citizen and family member, observing, as Kroll’s students did, the extent to which I, often unconsciously, resort to the tactics of the closed fist, reproducing the dynamics of an “argument culture” (Tannen). Finally, I discovered common ground with Kroll and his students, working toward the goal of resolving “conflicts nonviolently, protecting everyone (even one’s opponent) from harm” (3).

Although Kroll reports a life-long interest in Asian ideas and practices, he did not begin to study aikido until age fifty-seven, a detail that may inspire readers who, like Kroll, identify themselves as “underdeveloped” kinesthetic learners. Recognizing “the power of kinesthetic inquiry” to teach him (and his students) about argument and conflict, Kroll developed a low-impact version of movements based on aikido and tai chi for classroom exploration. He makes clear to students and readers that he is not an aikido master teaching aikido but rather an English professor who has incorporated kinesthetic and contemplative learning into his teaching and scholarship.

Kroll presents meditation and mindfulness as “practical arts that [enhance] one’s effectiveness in the world, especially in difficult conversations, interpersonal disputes, and arguments about divisive issues” (13). He urges students in “Arguing as an Art of Peace” to move toward rather than avoid controversial issues, asking, “*What can mindfulness contribute when we engage in conflicts and arguments?*” (22; italics in Kroll). Students choose their own topic and stick with it for each of the class’s three papers and modes of argument. As readers, we learn about Kroll’s method in part through excerpts from student notebooks. In these notebooks, students reflect on day-to-day conflicts, examining non-Western concepts such as *yin* and *yang* (receptive and assertive), and applying what they learn to analyze arguments. They also tackle some of the most polarizing conflicts of our times—the global energy crisis, marriage equality, abortion, and stem-cell research, among others.

Kroll’s book helps to dispel a misconception about contemplative education: that it exclusively nurtures solitary activity—retreating to a cave or ascending to a mountain-top—rather than existing on a continuum, ranging from solitary activity to contemplative activism (Coburn qtd. in Grace and Simmer-Brown 6).

Rather than a traditional literature review, throughout the book, Kroll introduces readers to the wide range of influences on his thinking and classroom practices. He embeds his discussion of relevant scholarly sources into the overarching narrative arc. Some readers may be drawn to Kroll’s dramatization of classroom dynamics, others to theoretical linkages in the body of the text and footnotes, while still others will gravitate to the wisdom teachings, as I did.

In the chapter “Mediating and Integrative Argument,” for example, Kroll tells a version of a story about two cooks arguing over an orange. Both cooks insist they need the orange to complete a meal. A third cook enters the kitchen and ends the disagreement by slicing the orange in two and giving each cook half. It seems like a fair deal until we learn that one cook needed only the rind and the other only the juice (95).

Kroll links the dilemma of the cooks, who identify with their “positions” rather than their underlying interests, with the challenge of finding “creative ways to lead opponents from conflict to cooperation . . .” (96). While he acknowledges that some occasions require strong advocacy and confrontation (the closed fist), his purpose is “to counterbalance the emphasis on confrontational argument in [students’] previous training and experience” (126).

One of the book’s strengths is that it reveals the strategies of the open hand in diverse, sometimes surprising, geographical and contemporary locations: in editorials written by local and nationally syndicated columnists; in conflicts students experience with parents, roommates, and professors; in American poetry (like Emily Dickinson’s “Tell all the truth but tell it slant— / Success in Circuit lies”); and Asian literature and arts. This approach grounds the book’s more theoretical discussions, offering a “boots on the ground” appeal to classroom teachers.

The Open Hand concludes with two appendices. In the first, a series of photographs, Kroll’s students demonstrate the movement sequences associated with each of the three modes of argument. I found the photographs and accompanying narrative helpful and think other visual learners will, too. While some of the movements central to aikido—pivoting around and circling in—are challenging to visualize in still photographs, Kroll’s detailed, lively prose helps readers make connections between the movements depicted in the photographs and the “search for less adversarial ways to argue” (12).

The second appendix features three complete student papers, one each of the three assignments, along with assignment guidelines and brief commentary. While Kroll quotes judiciously from student electronic notebooks and feedback on course evaluations throughout the book, I was eager to read examples of complete papers associated with this innovative pedagogy, papers he describes as “some of the best” arguments students produced (149).

Impressive as the final papers were, I was most inspired by the insights Kroll excerpted from the reflective notebooks, which demonstrate students’ struggles with the tactics of the open hand—“reframing, attentive listening, and mediating”—and their breakthroughs (5). For example, a young woman, locked in destructive conflict with her father about the challenge of paying for college tuition, steps out of the habitual fight or flight pattern, beyond “the closed fist of confrontation or the passive hand of avoidance,” demonstrating an ability to balance assertiveness and receptivity (131, 133). Kroll notes that these seemingly small shifts in perspective are surprisingly powerful. This example, among others, demonstrates how his teaching strategy of focusing “on the continuities between everyday disputes and argumentation about social issues” can affect change (6).

The Open Hand merits wide readership among liberal arts faculty, as it contributes to the fields of rhetoric and communication, conflict resolution, composition, and contemplative pedagogy. It is especially relevant to those teaching college-level courses on argumentation. As Kroll addresses learning to “make thoughtful *choices* about how

to argue with others, especially those who oppose or disagree with us” (124; italics in Kroll), readers beyond academia can also benefit. In our roles as parents, adult children, citizens, neighbors, friends, and lovers, we all face these challenges that Kroll mindfully articulates.



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Conway, Jeremiah. *The Alchemy of Teaching: The Transformation of Lives*. Boulder, CO: Sentient Publications, 2013. Print.

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Inspirational stories about teaching are familiar to us as educators. Narratives convey our work in ways that quantitative measures could never express. And classroom stories have proven to be persuasive. As movements to assist poor, such accounts as Samuel Freedman's *Small Victories*, Tracey Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren*, and, of course, the film versions of written accounts from urban classrooms, such as *Dangerous Minds* or *Stand and Deliver* have inspired marginalized school districts. Teach for America, on its tenth anniversary, communicated its successes by publishing their stories of helping students in disadvantaged communities.

Narratives about human transformation have helped fuel a missionary zeal for equity in education. But isn't such dramatic potential always present in our classrooms? Do we need to have students rescued from isolating poverty and racism to recognize the power of human change in the classroom? Jeremiah Conway, in his recent book *The Alchemy of Teaching* challenges educators to recognize "our blindness to the event of human change" (7). Conway presents incidents that awakened in him the "enormity of the educative act, the ways in which teaching intersects with lives" (7). But he brings a pressing exigency with his recalled experience. Since education research is dominated by factual reports and theoretical models, stories of change go unspoken (11). He worries that "the human transformations occurring at the very center of teaching are liable to slip like water through our fingers" (11). Conway aims to remind us of the true power of what we do.

Excavating classroom experiences to refocus the profession is nothing new. It would be hard to name a teacher-scholar who hasn't invoked classroom experience to influence the rest of us. And who can even keep us teachers from recounting our weighty deeds? Conway's contribution is unique, though, since he doesn't focus on himself. Instead of explicating pedagogy, he captures his interactions with students and their unexpected results. He's not portraying noble deeds; he's witnessing serendipity. His message: great teaching moments can happen when you stay tuned in. Though his examples come out of his experience teaching philosophy, he provides a broader context to help us connect his observations to our own disciplines.

Conway uses Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* to frame his purpose. The painting, reproduced in the book, depicts a routine moment in 16th-century Holland. We see a farmer plowing, a fisherman casting a net, a shepherd tending a flock. We see ships passing by. Amid these focused pursuits are the legs of Icarus as he plunges into the water. No one notices. As Conway describes, "his death [is] hardly a ripple on the ocean's surface" (3). Icarus, from mythology, had tried to escape the tyrant King Minos with great ingenuity, making wings of feathers glued with wax. When he soared too close to the sun, his wings melted, and he plunged into the sea. Conway describes the story as one of transformation—"the human endeavor to overcome what imprisons us, the courageous flight to freedom, the overlooking of limits, and the terrible plummet we risk" (4). But in the painting no one notices the boy. This spectacular lesson has no

impact on the rest of us; we're too busy doing our jobs. Conway relates this scenario to our students, who make dramatic leaps and also fail spectacularly, yet we pay them no mind. He describes the print as issuing a warning: "if educators merely instruct (that is, ply students with information and tools without paying attention to the people who will use them), then institutions of learning may succeed only in creating more clever tyrants, more aggressive Minotaurs, more cunning labyrinths" (7). We must notice how our students are attempting our lessons, observe their experience and join in with them. He points this out for our own benefit: "Teaching is an act of service, and service cannot be sustained without resentment unless there is deepening awareness of what factors make such desire to serve possible. Disconnect teachers from human transformation, and the love of teaching diminishes" (9).

The chapters of this book tour us through classroom moments Conway does not want to forget. We see the narrator observing a young woman's turn around in class after personalizing Socrates's cave story; trying to maintain communication with a student who perceives Conway as a secular humanist unable to see Truth in the Bible; observing a terminally ill student pursue her degree—to name a few. These incidents reveal the struggle and resulting change that learning brings. We see Conway encountering students who seem disaffected, frustrated, or sad. We watch him navigate the interactions that lead to a meaningful outcome, for both student and teacher. But he's not giving us a master lesson. He's showing us examples of staying engaged. Sometimes he's part of the challenge to be overcome; sometimes he helps guide the student through. What's important is that he *notices*. Conway demonstrates how attentiveness to the student's experience brings opportunities to witness and assist the great leaps our students undertake. He helps us see where the openings might be around us. For instance, we see a student unprepared for a class presentation show up in his office the day the assignment is due. Conway reframes the task by focusing on a single character in the reading. The student agrees, though feeling forced to accept. But, after the presentation, she confesses to poignant insights she made connecting the character to herself. This marginal student even remained in contact with Conway years later about her development in relation to this character. One sees in Conway's examples a discernible attitude rather than a distinct pedagogy. As Conway explains, "Educators enact such care in having the time to talk and the patience to be silent, in the observance of faces, in the willingness to alter plans in order to better engage the students in one's midst" (134).

Conway's advice channels the power of the humanist tradition. He invokes the individual's drive toward self-awareness and creativity as a guiding principle for good instruction. He also places wonder at the center of transformation as students deepen their understanding of a subject by recognizing their ignorance and prejudices. He frames this message as a warning to our confidence in technology: "Cultivate the humanity of the young or the advancement of technology will do us little good and considerable harm" (153). These are refreshing, well-timed messages to temper today's press toward online teaching and statistically quantifiable learning outcomes.

One critique Conway briefly addresses is the problematic power of the teacher. Though educators are in a position to influence students, they do not always know what is best for their students, such as which transformations are important to their lives. Critics such as Stanley Fish claim that the power differential thus directs the students'

choices and behavior. Conway responds that the teacher role is suggestive and assistive. He concludes this discussion by returning to his main point, "Participation in such transformation is one of the great delights and responsibilities of teaching" (134).

However, Conway does not address the significance of the instructor's power in shaping the student's response to the course. Students may interpret Conway's classroom stance as an expectation to please his eye for transformation. Students may be eager to interpret and deliver on the teacher's subtle expectations of student performance. Asking students to connect their personal lives to the course could exert such pressure. Rhetoric and composition scholar Anne Ruggles Gere points out this problem in personal writing genres. As Gere explains, students perceive and deliver on the expectation that their "narratives carry a certain revelatory kick . . . perceived as breaking pernicious silences" (204). Providing openings for transformation may only bring out a *performance* of change.

None of Conway's examples suggest students "gamed" him by performing a change to succeed in the course. However, Conway's depiction of student transformations draws on totalizing universals, without accounting for how family and ethnic culture might influence the meaning of education and self-development. Assuming universal values of transformation through education can put minority and first-generation students into more marginalized positions. Lisa Delpit calls these assumptions "additional codes of power" that prevent students from succeeding who do not already possess them (294). Conway might consider how his conception of transformation could be seen through the eyes of students less familiar with the humanist tradition.

The Alchemy of Teaching offers a valuable contribution to current thinking about higher education. Simply committing these stories to scholarly literature helps to expand, if not correct, the current conversation about the goals motivating educators. Additionally, Conway taps into the optimism that inspires many of us to join this profession. We must revel in the subtle yet abundant growth of the people we teach, both to cultivate our students' progress but also to marvel at our fruitful work. Through the pressures to meet university strategic goals, accreditation standards, and satisfactory student evaluations, Conway reminds us that our achievements are in "the trenches": explaining our ideas, listening to each student, watching for where to find the center of the lesson.



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CONNECTING

Widening Circles

Helen Walker, “Connecting” Editor

Here I go again. Just last week, I used these same lines from Rilke to introduce my sabbatical research presentation:

I live my life in widening circles
that reach out across the world.
I do not know if I will complete this last one,
but I give myself to it.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Book of Hours*

I lived and taught at a Kenyan university for the five months of my sabbatical, so Rilke’s lines rang true. What I see clearly in *JAEPL*’s 2014-15 collection of teacher narratives is just how much teachers must reach out now: across a bridge, a barrier, a culture, a social class—or even across oceans and continents. There is always a distance to navigate, a new place to arrive.

When I was a student in the traditional (product-based) classrooms of the 50s and 60s, teachers knew what knowledge students needed to learn. Students knew, too. They knew they could sit in rows and, if attentive to the authority before them, they would get it. They would also get the grades to prove they got it.

Then a movement washed over us. Its current is so strong now. The surface is not stable; sometimes waves break over it and into our life rafts splashing us square in the face.

This movement became even more palpably present, visible, to me in Kenya as I looked through the eyes of a researcher. The classroom where I taught my section of the required writing course at Daystar University was surrounded by classrooms whose instructors were teaching writing straight out of my 50s-60s Ohio high school. My sabbatical research project was to teach “the new way,” which meant a student-centered, process-based curriculum. Daystar’s faculty was rooting for me. They had asked me to come because their students didn’t like writing, were bad at it, and the whole faculty was complaining and blaming them for the bad papers they had to read. To make a long story short, some of my students crossed the barrier and discovered, let’s call it, the “secret” of the movement. They learned to give themselves to it, as Rilke says, and enter the widening circles to which the movement leads. And because they did, their discoveries led them to write wonderful things.

Other students gave themselves to that movement too, which has brought forth the stories that the authors of these “Connecting” narratives tell: living a life in a widening circle, reaching out across unstable waters with an uncertain destination. Why? Why indeed! This is a new world where widening circles are what we have. This is the new narrative for teachers. We can’t claim to know what we need to know as teachers anymore. Now we must become model learners ourselves because it is how we think and

interact, how we discover and how we share—that is the knowledge that students can learn from us.

The first two pieces in “Connections” are, appropriately, from Kenya. Two faculty from Daystar University—Wandia Njoya and Ann Wachira—tell stories about reaching out to their students, to bring them closer to the uncertain newness of an untried writing pedagogy. Then comes David Bedsole’s wry poem. A dog’s bark may never sound the same to you again, as it shifts from the background to the foreground of Kenneth Burke’s theory of motives, widening the narrow circle of scholarly study. “Connecting” ends with W. Keith Duffy’s tale of the assumptions we make about our place in higher education. His long-ago experience in a grocery store gives us a sharp insight into how we look to people who don’t share the privileges that we take for granted, forcing us to widen our circles even when we don’t want to.

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Miracles Happen

Wandia Njoya

By the time I graduated with a Ph.D. in French, I had become a regular writer. I published blog posts commenting on current affairs and historical events regularly on *The Zeleza Post*, which was a website that united a number of university scholars who brought their academic expertise to bear on current events. I had seen the power of writing through meeting people in Kenya and beyond, who said that they had read a number of articles. But somehow, I was never able to make that experience influence my teaching of writing at Daystar University in Kenya.

So, truthfully speaking, I did not quite internalize the rationale for teaching students to write. All I knew was that we were providing students with the knowledge to write term papers in their other classes. In other words, the students were learning to write not for themselves, but for others.

Another reason I did not quite grasp the major impact that a good writing class has on students was that at the time, word was circulating in the university that departments whose majors had few students—especially our department, then called the Humanities Department—were a liability to the university because we were teaching subjects that were “irrelevant” to the “market.” We had already had a scare with staff retrenchment, so we felt that we language teachers had survived by a whisker and were not yet out of the woods. For me, the writing classes were our cash cow, our department life line, and I did not want to rock the boat by questioning the curriculum. So I instinctively felt that we were teaching the classes to all undergraduate students so that we could hang onto our jobs. Again, the focus was elsewhere but not on the students.

As Head of the Department, I was unable to provide academic leadership in really rethinking the curriculum, despite the fact that semester after semester, I was disappointed by the writing projects submitted by students. Frankly speaking, the projects were characterized by boring topics and linguistic expression that made the papers drudgery to read. Despite spending two whole sessions teaching students how to cite

sources, rarely did any get it right. But the structure of the curriculum was just as difficult. The class was made up of about 12 weeks of lectures on topics such as choosing a topic, writing a thesis statement, the APA system, and different types of writing, followed by two weeks of consultation. After all this lecturing, the freshmen handed in a ten-page final project. As I write this, I realize for the first time that the class was also drudgery for the students because during each lecture I had to grapple with students' heads nodding off to sleep. At that time, I was philosophical and self-righteous about it, justifying that the students were dozing because they wouldn't know a good thing even if it hit them in the face—not because the class was just plain bad.

When Professor Walker came, she said something that changed my life. In her discussions with the faculty, she often said that most students want to write well. Frankly speaking, I did not believe her, and I may have responded with something to the effect that Kenyan students were different. But the idea of students writing for themselves out of themselves had changed me.

That next semester, I approached the class differently. During the first class, I gave the students a free-writing assignment that would launch their final research essay. That assignment freed us from the syllabus which I had previously followed like dogma in all the previous writing classes. One of the most dreaded topics was the thesis statement because students were not allowed to continue writing until I had approved their thesis statements. I now told students not to worry about it because the thesis would be easier to frame once they decided what they knew they wanted to write. For the first two weeks they wrote about a personal experience, and for the next four weeks they refined the essay and added reflections on how that experience fit into a larger picture. Their thesis statements were written when the projects were halfway through, and by that time, I was just pointing it out to the students who were surprised to find that the thesis statement was already in the essay.

I'm a little sad that in successive classes, students still grapple with writing, citation and grammar, and I regret that the huge class sizes prevents me from putting in more time in mentoring the students individually. But while the essays have several structural weaknesses, they are powerful in terms of their spirit and content, for the simple reason that the essays reflect the personal journeys of the students, rather than my effectiveness as a teacher. My students are empowered, and that empowers me. Because of the students' writing, I am now more conscious of learning being a process that affirms our humanity, and of the students as human beings and even friends, rather than as customers and vessels to pour knowledge into.

So yes, miracles happen.



Using a Model

Ann Wachira

In most high schools in Kenya, where I have spent most of my teaching career, teachers go to class and tell the students what, not how to write. First, I would ask them to write a narrative essay after an introductory session that did little to prepare them

how to do so. In my mind, I knew what I wanted. But I was never able to successfully pass that idea on to them. Moments like these were very frustrating to me as a teacher.

The second writing project was no better. Now the assignment was to write an expository essay. The drill was the same. Most times I was more bored with the writing classes than my students, as I felt I had nothing much to offer. I was under the impression that if I showed my students how to write in a fashion that more closely imitated examples of expository essays, I would be encouraging them to copy my writing or someone else's.

It was worse when I joined the university where I had contact with students only for a semester and had very little time to encourage their own writing styles or help them develop. This situation was all to change when I met Professor Helen Walker, a visiting faculty from Messiah College.

In one of our interactions, she talked about modelling writing to students as a way to teach writing. I decided to try it in one of my classes. It worked like magic! I went with an essay to class and read it through with the students. We reflected on its strong points and its weak points. Finally, I highlighted phrases which were to act as guidelines for the students to use as they wrote their own essays. The end product was excellent for most of the students.

The feedback I got from them was so encouraging that for the first time in my very many years of teaching, I felt I had delivered a writing lesson successfully. I went away, singing silently in my heart.

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To the Dog Next Door Who Barks All Day

David Bedsole

This is not a hate note, dog next door—after all, you are a dog, and barking is to dogs as squeaking is to wheels or, dare I say it, babbling is to humans. And you could not know that I am trying to read Kenneth Burke, and to keep his lines of thought straight is hard enough without the constant Yip! Yip! Yip! you offer. I read somewhere, once, that the closest human translation for a bark might be something like Hey! Hey! Hey! Which makes a lot of sense, because what else could a dog be saying? A bark is a plea for connection, for notice, for touch, for consubstantiality. But here I'm back to Burke, and you are back to barking. My student thinks his cat uses rhetoric; there was a time, in my late twenties, when I wrote a poem about my wife's dog, accusing her of the same. But I doubt rhetoric is the right word for barking, for this poem, for any of it—it's just what we've got, a bark at a blank wall, a quiet neighborhood, an endless, merciless ticking of the wall clock. So, dog next door, though I doubt you can read, and Burke is making me wonder if I can either, I hear you. Hey.

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Aisle Four: Ice Cream, TV Dinners, Humility

W. Keith Duffy

I stood there in Kroger's freezer section, frozen in place. "I didn't mean it like that!" I insisted. My voice went up an octave. "But . . . but I'm not even like that!"

These emphatic declarations didn't matter though. My words were bouncing off the back of his head. He had already turned and walked away, already dismissed me. Slowly kneeling, he continued stocking the shelf with frozen peas. A nearby shopper furtively glanced over the top of his Fudgesicles box, trying to determine why I was yelling, and who the hell I was.

The answer: I was a fourth-year doctoral student in the rhetoric program at Bowling Green State University trying to survive the lean, mean Ohio summer. Other than the constant grind of reading and writing, life during the fall and spring semesters was relatively easy. There was always teaching, always a meager (but welcomed) stipend to buy food, pay rent. However, when the summer came, the sidewalks were rolled up, many classroom doors were bolted shut, and that teaching assistant's paycheck evaporated. I dreaded the onset of summer. Doctoral students were still required to take courses to complete the Ph.D. on time. And occasionally, one or two leftover, first-year writing courses were tossed into the pit where we grads would scramble for them like ravenous dogs. But if you weren't feisty enough, too bad. Yes, summer always brought a nervous uncertainty in the "grocery money" department.

Jesus, I had no idea how incredibly privileged I was. Having entered into the dissertation stage of the program, I was spending most of my days reading books of my own choosing and writing paragraphs of my own design. The grand title: *The Role of Spirituality in Re-envisioning Writing Pedagogy*. How I actually convinced my dissertation director to agree to that topic, I'll never know. Yet I had enthusiastically embraced my role as a lowly teacher of remedial writing, as a rugged representative of the most ghettoized specialty in English studies—Composition. Some called it "Bonehead English," but to me it was the most important discipline being taught at the university level. I was a member of the underdog pack and damn proud of it. And the dissertation work was cracking me wide open as well. I was breathing in the ideas of spiritual thinkers and leaders from a variety of doctrines, becoming freer and less prescriptive in my teaching, seeing my chosen discipline in a completely new, transformative way. I was slowly relinquishing my judgmental habits, confronting my will to control students' writing, acknowledging my fragmented nature, and understanding a central paradox: wholeness and strength comes from embracing weakness, honoring brokenness, and speaking our stories. And all of these insights being given to me would change my way of *being in* the writing classroom in powerful ways. Heady times, indeed.

But I still needed to eat. That's why I was in the freezer section at Kroger's grocery store looking for cheap dinners. Summer was a month away still, so my cyclical fear over being penniless from early May to late August was not yet a reality . . . but I was getting nervous.

Looking up from the frosty Banquet Salisbury Steak packages, I saw one of my grad school colleagues, who was a year behind me in the program. We struck up a conversation—frankly, the only conversation that ever seemed to happen this time of year:

“Hey! How’s the dissertation coming?”

“I hope this doesn’t sound like bragging, but it’s going really well. It just seems to be happening on its own, as long as I get out of its way, if you know what I mean.”

“That’s good to hear.” A pregnant pause, a raising of the eyebrows, a little grimace, then: “Hey, what’re you gonna do this summer?”

I knew what he meant. This was the same question on all our lips. I just didn’t want to have to think about the answer yet. So, I played dumb: “You mean for work?”

“Yeah. What’re you gonna do for money?”

I exhaled deeply, and glanced over my friend’s shoulder. Six feet away, a thirty-something man, black hair, in tan khakis and an apron (sporting a characteristic blue “K” for Kroger) was kneeling down. He was methodically stocking shelves. I focused back on my friend and shook my head.

“Oh hell, I don’t know. I may be doing THAT this summer.” I motioned casually to the shelf-stocker, sighing and laughing a bit at the same time. “Who knows?”

My friend nodded. “Okay. Well, I’ll catch you later.” He wheeled his cart away.

I started to return my attention to the frozen rectangles of dinners, but I already knew something was wrong. It was a sharp, tight, angular feeling. Something was terribly, deeply, disturbingly wrong.

And that something was me.

But before those thoughts had really coalesced, before I had articulated the problem internally, my peripheral vision caught an image of that tan apron with a blue “K,” that 30-year-old man with black hair, rising and advancing toward me. I turned to him, all of it in slow motion and out-of-focus. I tried to smile, but my face didn’t seem to want to work that way. And then, I got what was coming to me:

“Listen, buddy.” His voice seethed, barely a whisper. He was standing within inches of me. His index finger pointed at my chest. There was spittle on his lower lip. He peered directly into my eyes. He wanted to punch my lights out. In one unbroken sentence, he said: “I may not have a lot, but I have two daughters and a wife who I love, and I provide for them just fine by doing this job and doing it right. But having to hear uppity shit like yours doesn’t help at all.”

His eyes narrowed further. Then he spun on his heels and walked six feet away. That was it.

As I watched him kneel and grab a bag of frozen peas, I struggled to breathe. Slowly, as the world came back into focus. I knew things were no longer the same. I knew my place in the universe a little better . . . certainly more than any dissertation was ever going to teach me. I still blurted out my idiotic protest: “I didn’t mean it like that! I’m not even like that!”

But I knew I was lying. *I did* mean it like that, and *I was precisely* like that.

I’ve carried this humbling incident into the classroom for 15 years. I can relive and re-feel that sense of shame and despair on cue. That vacuum where I had no way to salve the wound that my words had made. That irony of thinking I was enlightened and free, when in fact I was just blind to my own privilege.

The sting of this incident brings me clarity. It makes me small. There's one vital lesson I've learned: when I recall that this life is truly not just about me, then real learning can take place inside and outside the classroom.

For this, I am grateful.



Contributors to JAEPL, Vol. 20

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Authors are responsible for double checking all references for accuracy in page number citation, as well as the accuracy in the details of title, publisher, etc.

Avoid second-hand references to a primary source. Find the original citation and double check it for accuracy. If citing an indirect source is necessary, explain why.

Any use of student writing or classroom research should be processed through the author’s institutional IRB committee for approval. Authors must obtain written permission from the cited student writers.

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Title page: Title of Article; Name; Address; E-mail; Phone; Institutional Affiliation

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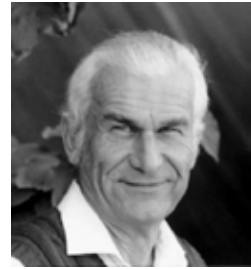
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James Moffett

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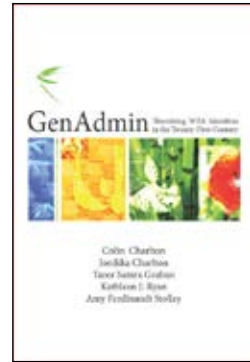
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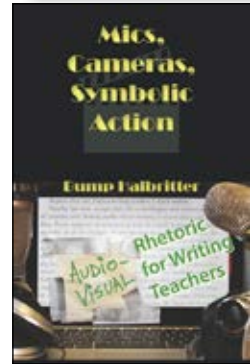
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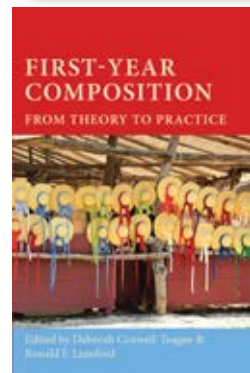
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