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The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

Teaching on the Slant:

Celebrating Mythos in

Reading and Writing
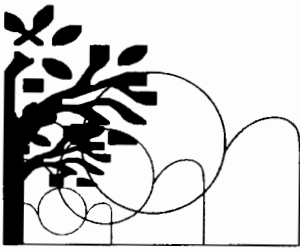
The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

Executive Board

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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 traditional disciplines and methodologies.

The purposes of AEPL, therefore, are to provide a common ground for theorists, researchers, and practitioners to explore ideas on the subject; to participate in programs and projects on it; 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,* meets this need. It 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 cutting-edge 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, and moral intelligence; archetypes; body wisdom; care in education; creativity; felt sense theory; healing; holistic learning; humanistic and transpersonal psychology; imaging; intuition; kinesthetic knowledge; meditation; narration as knowledge; reflective teaching; silence; spirituality; and visualization.

Contents

Essays

In one of Moffett's final presentations, he traced parallels between literary criticism and the study of scriptures from various traditions. He explained the development of his Points of View *spectrum as a response to his high school teaching experiences and presented an updated version of the spectrum.*

After tracing the history of learning by heart, this essay explores its advantages and suggest that we restore this time-honored practice which can enrich our students' relationships with words and books and empower their personal lives.

The article examines the spiritual dimensions of recovery programs and explores some of the ways the rhetoric of these programs as well as the structure of twelve step meetings may illuminate the nature of composition classes and particularly of peer writing groups.

Although most literature courses teach students to focus on textual analysis, this essay argues that students should be given opportunities for exploring their emotional responses to the text.

Often we expect students' experiences with assignments to reflect our own or those of previous students, but we may blunder when we base our teaching on past successes. By deflecting such assignments and constructing unexpected identities, students and instructors alike learn and teach.

Reviews

Editors' Message

In his essay "Two Kinds of Thinking" Carl Jung describes direct and indirect thinking. Associated with language, direct thinking's premier ability is parsing and defining reality so that we might work on that reality and act in the world. Associated with imagery, dreaming, and story telling, indirect thinking taps the realm of *mythos* where we dwell in fantasies and paradoxes. Indirect thinking is neither a contradiction nor denial of rationality. Rather, it is thinking that operates by a different logic, one capable of offering different insights, different versions of possible realities.

Jung's two kinds of thinking reflect a similar division in teaching: direct and indirect. Direct teaching is forthright instruction in the processes, canons, and rationality of writing and reading. Indirect teaching, far less privileged because far less accessible to quantification and to clear articulation, is teaching on the slant, teaching that accesses the mythic dimensions of writing and reading by inviting stories, courting paradoxes, and contradicting systems. In this issue we celebrate *mythos*, the realm of indirect thinking, and the value derived from teaching, thinking, reading, and writing on the slant.

Mythos bears a special power in Western culture. Once upon a time in ancient Greece, our classical forebearers organized their lives around reverberations of imagination, resonating to the power of narrative. Characteristic of the sophists, truth was created not out of Aristotelian hypotactic logic, but out of the analogic, mimetic logic of stories, of indirect thinking (see Jarratt). In the early 18th century, a time dominated by Cartesian rationalism in education, Giambattista Vico ascribed a central role to *mythos*, for only within imagination can young minds discover new and original thoughts. The tug of *mythos* unravels the neatly woven fabric of Western rationality to the extent that James Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin claim it as the fourth *pistis*, the fourth proof, rounding out the Aristotelian trio of *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. They argue that "[t]he mythic seeks [. . .] to unite, to synthesize, to assert wholeness in multiple or contrasting choices and interpretations. *Mythos* thus offers a synthetic and analogical, as opposed to analytic, mode of proof, one that discovers—indeed, celebrates—the diversity of truth" (106). *Mythos* affords insight into truths unavailable through other more direct modes of knowing, holding the hope of transcendence, of healing, of serendipity.

The essays in this issue celebrate *mythos* and emphasize the necessity of teaching on the slant. We open with James Moffett, "Lit Crit and Holy Writ," a keynote address presented in 1995 at the first AEPL summer conference held in Snow Mountain, Colorado. Edited by Charles Suhor, Moffett's exploration of the connection between literacy criticism and religious exegesis emphasizes the transcendental quality of stories, the ability of stories to move us above and beyond our current lives. Gina Briefs-Elgin in "Something to Have at Heart" highlights the role of memory in just such a transcendental endeavor. Briefs-Elgin argues that entrusting beautiful writing to heart enriches and empowers life, providing our students and us with new ways to shape and cope with life.

Protean as it is, *mythos* offers insights into the healing, as well as the tran-

scendent, power of stories. As Baumlin and Baumlin argue, *mythos* is iatrological, "a healing story, a means of participation in the rhythm of the universe, in its contrasting joys and pains" (107). Christopher Weaver in "The Rhetoric of Recovery" and Brenda Daly in "Stories of Re-Reading" explore the connection between healing and narratives, finding in story telling the rituals and emotional resonance necessary for healing and for effective teaching. Tapping his own struggles with addiction, Weaver offers the rituals of Alcoholics Anonymous as a template for teaching transformation through writing. In her concern with her students' emotional engagement with fiction, Daly explores and advocates the value of disclosure, of interweaving literature, response, and life stories as a means of fostering connections and insights.

The third value that *mythos* offers is the gift of surprise, the gift of serendipity, or happy discovery. Devan Cook in "Successful Blunders" points to the importance of mistakes in the classroom, arguing that through our "blunders" we may stumble on our most teachable moments. Terrance Riley in "The Accidental Curriculum" explores the importance of accident, of mythic indirection, in curricular reform, arguing that neither preparation nor organization will ensure "the bright moments" of learning we hope will happen. Instead, we must rely on an element of chance to animate our teaching and our students' learning.

Finally, *mythos* invites us to participate in the world differently, to listen to ourselves and others with an intensity that opens us up to the voice of the soul. So argues Robbie Pinter. In "The Landscape Listens—Hearing the Voice of the Soul," she draws on Mary Rose O'Reilley's concept of "radical listening" to advocate a classroom approach that enables students to "listen to their lives."

Weaving through language and rhetoric, *mythos* does not deny the law of logic or the constraints of reality; rather, it offers an alternative logic, an array of different, possible realities. Manifested in poetry, in narrative, in performances of art, in all acts of dreaming, *mythos* enables us to think, teach, write, and read on the slant, affording us insights otherwise unavailable through the frontal assault of *logos*. This gift is indeed cause for celebration. 🖂

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James Moffett's Lit Crit and Holy Writ

Edited by Charles Suhor

James Moffett, a major figure in educational and rhetorical theory and a co-founder of AEPL, died in 1996. One of his last appearances was at the first annual AEPL conference in Estes Park, Colorado, in August 1995. At that time he brought new perspectives to the influential ideas articulated in works like Teaching the Universe of Discourse, *the* Active Voices *series, and* Coming on Center. *With the encouragement of AEPL leaders and Jim's wife Jan, I worked from transcriptions of the keynote session to produce this record of his ever-evolving ideas. I did not try to recast the informal presentation into an academic style. Readers who knew the gentle cadence of James Moffett's speech will be warmly reminded of his presence as they read the text. Those who were not fortunate enough to know him might get a sense of the spirit of the man from the rhythm of his talk.*

—CS

Well, what I would start today is something called "Literature and Holy Writ," or sometimes, "Lit Crit and Holy Writ." Anyway, we'll focus on literature, or on literary criticism. I'm going to start with some similarities that have occurred to me, and maybe they've occurred to you, between literature and spirituality and the role of English teachers. I've always felt that English teachers were the soul-tenders of the curriculum. I'm not saying there aren't soul-tenders in other subjects; to be sure there are. But this is more; it goes with the territory, perhaps, of English teaching.

It's interesting that somewhere in the 19th century, in American schools English came in as a separate subject—it wasn't a separate subject before—and religion as a subject went out. It wouldn't be quite accurate to think of one supplanting the other. We would say it was a coincidence. But, in any case, what happened is that English came in about the time religion went out.

It's interesting that church services and English classes have certain things in common. You're all laughing, aren't you? Well, I'll see if this fits with what's in your mind. Both use a liturgy. That is, the liturgy in the English classroom is

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the performing of texts—vocalizing texts out loud, which caricatures, if you want, or parallels, some of the church services where there are antiphonal things going on between the minister or reader and the congregation; or simply, they're all together vocalizing, either reciting or reading or singing. All right, so there's something liturgical that goes on in English classrooms, from taking texts to vocalizing them, performing them, whether it's poetry reading or reading of plays or whatever.

The other main thing that goes on in both is exegesis—typical commentary, analysis, interpretation, construing of the texts. In the church, of course, the minister does a lot of that, takes the sermons for the day and interprets the passage, sometimes in great detail. And the literary hierophants do something like that—teachers who tell you what the passage is about , or the short story—the explication of text. So I'm saying there's a direct connection between exegesis, which is the explanation and interpretation of holy writ, and the interpretation that's traditional with literary texts—a very direct parallel. I think that people good at one tend to be good at the other one.

Also, I think there are some direct parallels in kinds of lessons, concepts of lessons. I started teaching in prep school back East. In the old times there, if you asked them how many times a week their classes met, they said, "We have three recitations a week." *Recitation* was a synonym for *class*. The whole concept of memorizing and reciting, I think, goes back to church techniques of teaching. There were people who virtually memorized the Bible or long passages of it and recited it.

The whole concept of themes goes back, I think, to the assignment of writing topics called themes. I know you don't assign these anymore, but we know that's in our tradition, where the teacher decides what you're to write on or what's an assignment. There's a book, a Buddhist book, of meditation themes. The Jesuits in the Christian tradition had a whole series of themes that was appropriate to meditate on involving the phases of the life of Christ . [. . .] So I think the idea of themes was somewhat preconceived by the establishment, either the Church or the school. It's sort of a design for meditation; for the writer, the assignment is a parallel. I think we took over some of these things very consciously.

In certain concepts of "canon" there's another similarity—what's in and what's out—literary canon. I mean, why did we pick that term? Say, you are the hierophants of literature: we are to literature as they are to religion. Of course, there's a canon that's apocryphal—all the stuff that's left out as being unworthy. Well, most of the world's writing is apocryphal, as far as that goes.

Those are some parallels that occur to me between the teaching of literature and the teaching of holy writ. And both are basically incantatory. The first Vedas are really poems. There's a lot of poetry certainly, in the Bible, in the original particularly. I think this kind of writing is meant to be incantatory: it's meant to be literally *entranced*. We use terms now in a romantic vocabulary like *entrancing*, *spellbinding*, and so on. Those all had a literal meaning which we've romanticized and trivialized—part of a natural, sort of, debasing process.

But I think the reason that both holy writ and literature acquire so much exegesis is that they are multi-leveled texts, working on many different levels, one of which is incantatory (as well as semantic), dealing with their rhythm, their

poetry in a rather basic sense. In fact, the first holy writ, it seems to me, is always poetic.

You get more into the poetry as you get more into exegesis. I don't know Jewish traditions very well, but my understanding is that the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, is basic holy writ. And the Talmud consists of a sort of exegesis on the Torah, and the Midrashim, a sort of exegesis on both the Talmud and the Torah. And the Vedas had the Upanishads later—they take the Vedas and explicate. And later on you had the Mahabharata and things like that which are still working over basic material, going back to the Vedas.

Or you can take whatever holy writ you want. For the Greeks, it's got to be mythology, genealogy of the gods [. . .] and then Homer. Of course, Plato himself became the subject of exegesis. The Neo-Platonists regarded him as holy writ. When we say all philosophy footnotes Plato, we're saying what they were saying—we're in a way regarding it as holy writ, which needs to be enhanced; all the seed ideas have to be explicated through exegesis. But that's because these texts, literature and holy writ, are what they are. The nature of them is different from other texts—they are multi-leveled.

Moving now to the lit-crit-holy-writ, I think you could see an outsider from another planet coming onto what we call literary criticism and wondering—what's so literary about it? It seems to me it's cultural criticism, social criticism. It's theological, sometimes. And my understanding from people that are far more into lit crit than I am is that its modernness sort of dates from Nietsche, who was a great cultural critic—but also on all planes at once psychological, cultural, theological, and metaphysical—who said "God is dead." Well, once God is dead, you can't fool around with holy writ any more. What are you going to work with? What secular version?—Literature. And so, from then on, it's not overtly theological or religious, it's literary -critical.

Then you have Freud coming along interpreting literature in his way, the unconscious. And he tried hard to be a really good materialist—poignantly hard. Outwardly, he succeeded. [But] I think he was a very spiritual person. And to me his insights were from his literature and from a kind of spiritual understanding. [. . .] But his reading of literature is a big part of modern literary criticism.

But what I'm saying is that [lit crit] is really a kind of secular continuation of what used to be religious, theological, metaphysical, cosmological concerns. And, once God is dead, the modern person has to do this through other texts, in other ways. And this, in a way, has elevated literature in modern consciousness to a place superseding holy writ.

The art of hermeneutics has made much today, rightly, out of very sophisticated, subtle, exquisite kinds of analysis and interpretation, really grounded in Alexandria, the first century or so. There was a tremendous ferment of this great multicultural seat where there was Philo Judaeus, who's really the father of this subtle, metaphysical hermeneutics. He was interpreting the Old Testament, Jewish traditions, in very far-out ways, very extreme, radical interpretations, of the Old Testament.

At the same time, the New Testament was being written—first and second century. In this atmosphere the Gnostics were very active in Alexandria [. . .] Hellenistic thinking, Neo-Platonists; and Origen, the great Christian theologian

of the second century, was going to the same school as Plotinus, which is stem-
ming again from Philo Judaeus—a very subtle, sophisticated, metaphysical,
hermeneutic interpretation of text.

So you had these pagan Hellenistic exegetes, the Jewish exegetes, and the
Christian writing. The New Testament you can regard as an exegesis on the Old
Testament. You know Christ and others in there referred to things in the Old
Testament. And then in between the two essentially is holy writ, maybe, but it's
holy writ bordering on itself being exegesis.

I think of two of our great literary critics in our era who recognized part of
what I'm trying to say. One was Northrop Frye whose culminating work was *The
Great Code: The Bible and Literature*. (He's an ordained minister, by the way,
did you know that?); and Kenneth Burke—*The Rhetoric of Religion*—which I
touched on briefly in *Harmonic Learning*. With all his complicated analogies
between literature and holy writ, Frye is offering the scripture as a basic way to
understand the literature and the notion of holy writ as a master code by which to
understand language and literature. Now that's exactly the way the Muslims have
always regarded the Koran. Everything goes back to the Koran in [their] litera-
ture and language, not just the religion.

Kenneth Burke said the best way to understand verbalization is to look to
theology, the supreme model, because, through words referring to the natural
world, it manages to refer to the supernatural world. And this is why he's saying
the rhetoric of religion has the most to teach us about any language or literature.
So I want to remind you of those critics.

And what I'm saying is there's a code, the code that Northrop Frye is talking
about. He's absolutely right: it's in the scripture. But that scripture's generally
understood exoterically, and it's difficult to understand entirely what it's about.
You have to bring in the esoteric dimension, and I think, if we understand the
esoteric literature, we have the "code to the code."

I'll get personal for a moment—my own literary way of getting onto the
spiritual path. I grew up in Mississippi among Southern Baptists. They weren't
the most fundamental kind. We were in the city of Jackson; out in the country
they were really far out. But, anyway, I grew up a Southern Baptist. Later, when
I got into college, none of that made any sense to me. I turned my back on all of
it. And, of course, down there it was mixed with racism and all sorts of things,
and I could begin to see the contradictions, and so I just rejected all of it. Then
later, I was a young teacher, and I was reading Salinger in *The New Yorker*, back
in the days before most of you can remember, when Salinger was writing rou-
tinely in *The New Yorker*. And "Franny and Zooey" and those stories were com-
ing out. And we waited breathlessly, we intellectuals in the fifties, for the next
issue of *The New Yorker*.

Anyway, he was dealing in a very popular literature, very vernacular in style,
and so on. He was dealing with real spiritual issues in a way I hadn't run into
before in my time. It was not called religion, and so, you know, I could accept
that. [Franny was] repeating this prayer of the heart, which she got from a book
called *The Way of the Pilgrim*, which is repeating an old Christian mantra, " Lord
Jesus Christ, have mercy on me."

He was in touch, Salinger was. He had a way of understanding spiritual is-

sues and how they come up for contemporary folk. She [Franny] is throwing up in the ladies' room, and the readers are wondering, "Is she pregnant or not?" See the next issue of *The New Yorker*. Or, "Is she throwing up because of the awful things this guy's saying to her during dinner?" But he related these contemporary behaviors to real spiritual issues, and he brought in Zen. I had never heard of Zen before. So I got to reading Zen from reading Salinger.

 Okay, so we see the progression from literature, sort of, back to spiritual sources. And I didn't really understand. Zen, of course, itself means literally "meditation." But I didn't know what meditation was, so I didn't know what Zen was. And I read it for years. But it improved me, I think; it was worth it. But this is one way in which, through literature as a secular holy writ, I got interested again (despite my earlier youth) in the spiritual path and spiritual issues.

Another way—this is going to involve a handout I'm giving (See Appendix A). When I was teaching at Exeter prep school—I was there for ten years at the beginning of my career—there was no curriculum. There was nothing I had to do. I was teaching my first year; I could do anything I wanted. Private school, no state curriculum. There wasn't even a departmental curriculum. They just said, "Look, if you read Julius Caesar do it second year, because we don't want kids reading it two years in a row." I mean, THAT'S the departmental policy. And there were no textbooks, no grammar books. And this was great tremendous freedom, except that also you are really scrambling in your first year of teaching—though I could get help when I wanted it.

But, anyway, I was trying to work out a lot of teaching—of short stories, fiction, and teaching writing and literature at the same time. There were all boys at Exeter in those days; it's gone coed since. I was trying to work on some way of structuring the course a little bit so there'd be some sense to the order in which we did things. And I thought, "Well, you're going to have them read a lot of fiction; should it be totally random?"

I eschewed completely thematic connections—that's predigesting the literature for them. And I didn't want only plot, theme, character. I was trying to find some way to get continuity for them without relying on things that I didn't believe in. So I started arranging short stories by point of view, first and third person and the like. At the same time, and this was part of it, I was writing fiction and playing around with points of view considerably. [. . .]

I was trying to use writing in my life, so I was very interested in the differences between coming on something first-person or third-person—or theatre, no narrator at all. So I was interested in that for personal reasons, but also as a professional trying to find good ways of teaching the students. So over a number of years I evolved this kind of spectrum of points of view, which you have there in schematic form (Appendix A). Some of you may be familiar with the anthology, *Points of View*. The only reason I'm going back to this is that I have some new overlays in recent times that are more germane to the subject today. The spectrum—what you have there—is a table of contents of a revision of an anthology of short stories, *Points of View*, which Ken McElheny and I brought out in 1966. It's been going since. We revised it recently because it very badly needed a more multicultural representation.

The arrangement of the stories was meant to be itself an experience beyond

the great experience of each story individually. And this goes back to trying to
find a way to put things in some sort of relationship, instead of just ending up
reading samples of fiction randomly. I'm not saying there's anything wrong with
randomness, but I was a young teacher trying to find some way to order them.

This is a spectrum, it turns out, delineating more things than I knew at the
time. I'll tell you about what I was thinking of when we first put the book out.
The stories start with interior and dramatic monologue. It's rather hard, as a mat-
ter of fact to find short stories that attempt these because they really belong to
the theatre. Interior monologue, the soliloquy, dramatic monologue is very com-
mon in theatre, you know, going back to Greek drama which routinely alternated
soliloquies, colloquies, dramatic monologues, and so on. In interior monologue
you are simply overhearing somebody's thoughts.

Dramatic monologue—you're overhearing one person talking uninterrupt-
edly to another. And those have been ways to tell short stories, but fairly rarely
because they tend to be claustrophobic. And there have been authors who sus-
tained entire novels. In fact, one that suggested interior monologue to James Joyce
was a French novel, about 1887, Edouard Dujardin, an entire novel very expertly
done with interior monologue; Joyce knew of that. He translated this "We'll to
the Woods No More." A literal translation is "The laurel trees have been cut down"
(*Les Lauriers Sont Coupes*). But that's a kind of *Cherry Orchard* symbolizing.
You might want to know about this because very rarely do authors attempt whole
novels in interior monologue.

Dramatic monologue—Eudora Welty did one called *The Ponder Heart*.
Camus' *The Fall* is entirely dramatic monologue. But they are sort of rare. From
hereon in the spectrum, these purport to be documents, purport to be letters,
series of letters, an exchange of letters, or to be a series of entries in a journal or
a diary. These are a lot more commonly found as short stories or whole books.

Then a segue from that on into a first person narration that you can call
"subjective." That is, most readers would agree—of course you're in a gray area—
would agree that the narrator herself's conversation is missing something, that
is, telling a story other than what she really thinks, which is of course true of all
of them up to now, all of these called subjective narrative. That is, we're not sure
we can rely on what the narrator is saying, or the narrator's interpretation. It may
be biased. Incidentally, it's interesting that in looking for stories in that category,
we found most of them (the narrations) are by teenagers, adolescents. [. . .]

Okay, with detached autobiography you're into what's the most common first-
person technique, where you have a narrator that you regard as reliable. Now
cases of cultural bias of course are found: you never get a really reliable narra-
tor—depending on what depth you want to go. But it's generally assumed this
narrator's telling you everything the author knows or understands. Now the au-
thor may be biased—that's another thing. So this is one of the more commonly
used techniques to tell a story—I'd say the second most popular, because you
have a reliable guide and you have a personal focus.

There is one other third-person technique, memoir, which is a hinge between
first- and third-person. It's a very interesting technique where some "I" is telling you
about some "he" or "she"—not "I" about me, like autobiography. With memoir the
author's talking about someone else. Why would somebody use that technique? Look

at *The Great Gatsby* or *Lord Jim*. Look at the titles—the GREAT Gatsby and LORD Jim. It mythifies the person you're talking about. There are great issues of empathy and resonance between the "I" and the person that the "I" is telling the story about. It's a very interesting resonance, and you have that state of transition between the "I" and the "he" or "she," the first and third person.

From here on, my distinction, which I found worthwhile making, I call "anonymous narration." This is where the narrator does not identify himself or herself—a so-called third-person story, third because there's no "I." But there are a lot of differences in third-person stories, and it seemed to me you could sort them out by how many characters' minds you're allowed to go into—points of view, in that sense. And this turns out to be very significant.

Now the first one is the single character point of view. I'd say this is the most popular fictional technique, the one most often used, I think because you have a host—a guiding narrator who explains, guides you around to everything, puts it all together for you. If you have the focus on only one person, then people seem to like that, for obvious reasons. So you focus on one individual that is fully explained—or guided, not necessarily fully explained, but you have a mediator, a host between you and that character.

Then there's dual character point of view—all of the stories there—you go in the minds of two people, and the whole question is, "Why are we going into these two people's minds?" And it's almost always because there's a play-off of tension and contrast. Margaret Atwood's "Uglypuss," for example, is a classic discrepancy between male and female lovers' points of view. But in T. Coraghessan Boyle's "Sinking House" it's an older and a younger woman. There's always a reason why the author goes in only two minds, or in one.

Then, the multiple character point of views—three as opposed to anything beyond three. Once you're up to three points of view, it's just multiple. And authors don't very often, in short stories particularly, go into that. Something like Katherine Ann Porter's novel, *Ship of Fools*—taken from a Breughel painting— in itself tells you this is about a whole society. But, in short stories, it's rarer.

My logic here is in counting one, two, three, zero. In the last category, there are no personal points-of-view of characters that you enter in. This makes it much more impersonal or transpersonal, depending on how the story's aimed. And it's rarer, because most people want a personal point of view, and they don't want a lot of peoples' points of view because it breaks up identification. It's hard to identify with a lot of characters at once.

See now, that's the basic way I laid out the spectrum originally, and I saw it as doing a number of things at once. But in arraying storytelling techniques this way, these stages also correspond with stages of discourse development and human development. That is, children start off with a kind of inner speech babbled outward, without any distinction between inner and outer speech. They also begin to distinguish the listener as a separate person. "You" is born from the rib of "I" is the way I would put it, and the subject gradually distinguishes itself. In other words, a small child's play prattle is about oneself and the objects, and it's to oneself and maybe to other people. In other words, there's no clear distinction between "I" and you for them—first, second, and third person, which is the whole basis of this spectrum.

If you follow child development and discourse development, now, with letters and diaries [there's] a transition from oral language use into writing. The first kind of writing is informal, and then more formal writing is there with subjective narration, on into more objective third person—writing more for publication.

I'm going very sketchily here. But what I'm calling discursive development goes along with a kind of decentering, that is, a sort of broadening of the egocentric point of view. Piaget was using "decentering"—to gradually become aware of one's egocentric point of view, to gradually sort of overcome it, not sort of becoming less of an ego, but more aware of an egocentric point of view. Egocentricity is a really big issue here because the first narrators, as I say, the first five [on the spectrum], are not necessarily reliable. And as readers, we have to sort things out for ourselves. We have to decide what the story is and what the truth is.

And that's part of the fun. For example, in dramatic monologue, often the author's intention is to let the speaker hang himself, just talk until you decide, "Oh, well!" You match your perspective against that of the speaker's, then decide. But in any case, there's a real issue of decentering. In the letters and diaries the person is telling events that just recently happened, and so they didn't have much perspective. Whereas in detached autobiography you often have a much older narrator, like in *David Copperfield*. He's a middle-aged person by the time he's telling the story of little Davey. There is tremendous time span, and that's a big issue.There's also a kind of "levels of abstraction," regarded as a realistic sort of reporting. The narrator of each of these has to subsume greater and greater material over time and space in order to tell the story about it. By the time you get to the last one [anonymous narration], which tends toward the mythic or the whole cultural point of view, a lot of digesting or abstracting is going on compared with those at the beginning [of the spectrum].

Now in more recent times for me, the spectrum tends to move from passion—the hot-blooded interior and dramatic monologues, and the journals and the diaries, still very close to the heat of experience, not much time-space separation. Passion moves to compassion, [. . .] like the memoir narrative, where you have this empathy and identification. Somebody's telling somebody else's story. Why? Because there's tremendous resonance—compassion with a resonance. And that's how they're able and want to tell this other person's story.

And then on into third person, ending with the last one, which tends to be used for sort of mythic purposes, like the Eudora Welty story "Powerhouse"—a wonderful kind of mythological story in modern fiction form. And she doesn't go into the minds of any people. There's no need to; everything comes out of their behavior, so they are sort of types. But they don't need any explicating; you don't need to know their thoughts, because they're universal, they're mythical. And there's where I think you have the transpersonal focus—passion, compassion, dispassion—that's the way I see this now, toward the end.

Question from audience: Does the spectrum parallel the maturing of the individual's development of narrative voice? And also, does reading the stories in sequence help students make that maturing and development?

I fooled around with this a lot with my own students, and I felt it important not to be too rigid about the sequence. It's good for them to maybe read some

stories in the sequence, not everything. You experience something reading this sequence you wouldn't any other way, but it's not the way to read all the time. I think it helps make, say, adolescents aware that not everybody's head is like theirs. I haven't fully learned that yet, either; they say it's a life-long continuing adult education.

For example, in reading stories that are subjective, some students see them as subjective and some don't because they're still into [the narrator's] point of view. And other students in the same class are beyond that point of view, and so they see things that the subjective narrator doesn't. And those make for great discussions. I would, say, read those along with "Dear Abby" letters, where somebody says, "My problem is my wife." When you hear that sentence, you know what you're in for—subjective narration. So it's fun to read real life confessions or real kinds of problems like that; the sort you get in these advice columns are good stories of this kind. Then thrash out the discrepancies rather than making it a generation gap of "you see something, ha-ha, that they don't" [in a short story], which is a real turnoff.

Question for audience: The way you explained it, it seems as though there is some sort of emotional or developmental movement throughout this sequence as a whole. And since you end up with dispassionate, I wonder if there is some sort of implicit privileging of compassion as a compassionate stance one should take or one is more sophisticated in taking?

Yes, it's as if this fictional spectrum describes in its own way a kind of consciousness development or evolution. And in order to arrive at a really dispassionate rather than an indifferent state, one would have to have gone through presumably something like the stages here—that is, hot involvement and then some distance on this, and some resonance with other people's experience, and hearing a lot of other points of view. Part of what Piaget was saying—we decenter by incorporating others' points of view. Assimilation and accommodation is a two-way process: as we accommodate to the outside, we assimilate what I call "hearing out the world." You hear out what everybody has to say, and if you do enough of this, it swells your point of view. It becomes cosmopolitan and maybe even cosmic. But it's a lot of incorporation, and I feel that's kind of embodied in the spectrum. [. . .]

I want to invite you now to run backwards in the spectrum. This I did not have in the original book. These were thoughts that occurred to me that have gone into the revision. If you go backward, you have a kind of a recapitulation of literary history. It's very helpful here to refer again to Northrop Frye. You know, he has five stages in describing the history of literature in terms of genres, shifting genres. And the shifting genres correspond to the shifting concepts of the hero or protagonist. I'm not going to attempt to use his language exactly, but this is the raw material.

I'd say the first is myth and the subject is divine—gods, originally. Now, of course you also have mixtures in the myth—demigods and demimortals; those are kind of transitional to epic. In going down on the five stages—myth, totally divine—[then] epic, [where] you have human heroes who have divine connections, and they may even be semi-divine. Or they have the ear of, they have a

hotline to one of the gods. They may be superhuman; they're human but they are beyond ordinary mortals—the epic. Think of any epic of any culture you want.

Folk literature—this is all, I think, part of what Frye calls the romance. But his folk tales, all narratives of that sort—it might include parables and fables— they keep open the connection between the spirit world and the human world. So you may have mostly mortal figures, but you have magicians mixed in there. And the supernatural is playing in and out, and there are supernatural events. They're not excluded, they're all a part of it, mixed together. So you may have a fairly realistic thing about peasants and so on, but then suddenly something magical happens. And the connections are definitely still open between the spirit world and the human world.

The fourth one going down, that is going toward us and our bourgeois realism, is the rise of fiction and the novel in the 17th and 18th centuries, out of prose epics, mock prose epics. And here you have a disconnection from the spirit world. Even though looking back, we might say some of those early novels were not terribly realistic, still the connections are cut, and it's a cultural world, a totally human world. The divine comedy is shifted to the human comedy.

The last one is the anti-hero, underground. Dostoyevsky—he and Poe, they were first. Dostoyevsky was first—*Notes From Underground*—the anti-hero; and then Kafka picks him up and then Celine, and they have a whole literature now. It's not only human, but it's sort of subhuman, a metamorphosis—a bug.

This is the scale of five stages sort of roughly that Northrop Frye dealt with, and they seem to me to apply [to the spectrum] very well, but I didn't realize this until later. I wasn't thinking literary history when I did this, and it's reading backwards that you get to it. I'm not bothering to work this out. I think you can do that for yourself if you start at the back [of the spectrum] with those transpersonal stories that have no inner point of view. But they're the closest modern fiction can get to something like myth or epic or legend. And you need to move forward toward interior monologue, which is often used, say, to show up dramatic monologue, and it's claustrophobic.

Also, following back-to-front in this sequence—it's kind of evolution of consciousness, from what I read, in trying to describe the evolution of human consciousness, and Richard Bucke is one [whose work I've read]. *Cosmic Consciousness* is the book. He knew Walt Whitman and he considered Walt Whitman a fully realized person who achieved cosmic consciousness. He describes it kind of classically, as you get it in esoteric literature. It's a consciousness in three stages. First is animal consciousness that all the creatures have. That is, they are sensorily aware of the environment and themselves. Then there is a human kind that includes self-consciousness of the sort animals don't have. You're aware of who you are in your existence and of your separateness. And the third one is cosmic consciousness, which he says a few individuals have achieved in the past, and he names Christ, Buddha, and so on, and Walt Whitman. He says more and more people are achieving this.

This is the general esoteric view, I think, that moves from a group soul—say, animals have a group soul as a species. Humans may also have that, but they have personal individual souls. But at the beginning, human consciousness is like a herd mind; it's a collective consciousness. You can see that history, cer-

tainly in the West, has been a history of the development of the individual—through Protestantism, capitalism and all sorts of ways—to the point where we now speak of the modern individual as being alienated. And so there is some sort of movement away from the original unity, a harmony of human consciousness, toward greater and greater individualization and fragmentation and alienation. And modern neuroses, and so on, come from that.

But it may be part of the growing pains of individuating. It seems to me the spectrum here, if I read backwards, is following that development of consciousness. We have a splintering off in these stories, particularly if you get into journals, diaries, and monologues. Consciousness is splintered off. We have these individual solo voices, as if there were some sort of common or communal voice in the beginning that got fractionated through this, and along with that, increasing self-consciousness, increasing sense of isolation. To begin, when the child first becomes aware at some point that they're separate from everybody else and separate from the world, they lose that original sort of mystic community which is totally spontaneous and unconscious. They lose that and become increasingly, themselves, conscious.

There's a kind of evolution of consciousness in that direction. And it's creating difficult problems, but they're not necessarily bad. We have a very difficult period of growth, where you have selfishness as a result. Everybody says, "Oh, let's go back to collective consciousness. We'll have a core curriculum. We'll have Great Books. We're falling apart; let's go back to a community." And we want to get it in a cheap fascist way, which you can't do, can't possibly do. You've got to go forward, only through; there's no other way. When evolutionary development has started, you have to go all the way through. You can't get scared in the middle and backtrack, which is what people are doing now. They're getting scared, and they want to go back, and they can't go back.

Question from audience: Are you familiar with Ken Wilber's book Sex, Creativity, and Spirituality? *The subject of that book is spiritual evolution. It's pretty challenging.*

Right, he's one of the people who would be among those operating from an esoteric point of view. So I'm partly offering this and my later thoughts on it, because they do go more with the subject of the conference, spirituality and literature. [Earlier] I thought I was dealing with levels of abstraction. I had been under the influence of the general semanticists who worked a lot with that back in the 50s and 60s, and they were very, very far ahead of their time. But they helped my thinking when I was working with fiction to translate levels of abstraction in *Points of View*.

 Anyway, that's the way I was thinking at the time. Since then, I realize I feel there was a spiritual impulse working through—that I was working with Jacob's ladder, maybe as much as a ladder of abstraction. I see Jacob's ladder, by the way, as one of those efforts to put into metaphor this kind of spectrum of multiple realities, multiple levels we talked about; to put it in the simple form of a ladder, up which and down which is a lot of traffic and angels and so on. I think that's a very esoteric image, Jacob's ladder. And again, it gets you away from mere dichotomy—it's a spectrum.

Anyway, I think I was working more with that than I realized, and I think maybe this happens with a lot with people who are in literature, of strong literary consciousness, and then into the spiritual aspect of it, but haven't quite surfaced a lot. It was surfacing more with myself. So, in writing the Afterword to *Points of View* this time, I brought in some things I hadn't before. It is as if this [spectrum] also moves from the Tree of Life, which is at that original unity, the one the child has with the world, and maybe the one that earlier in our consciousness we had.

What Rudolph Steiner [*Occult History*] was talking about, and Manley Hall [*The Secret Teachings of All Ages*], was that in earlier times we hardly knew we were in the physical realm and we were naturally clairvoyant. This is why I value this earlier art. You can see clairvoyance leaves after awhile as we incarnate more fully and materialize more. We lose this initial affinity or resonance that gave us this clairvoyant vision.

Children may be clairvoyant. There was a teacher, Jim Peterson, in the San Francisco Bay area, who was working with children. He had Rudolph Steiner training, including teaching how to draw in a vibratory way. His kids were drawing pictures of people, including him, with lights coming out of their bodies, auras, and he hadn't taught them that. All he had taught them was to draw what they saw. Some of these pictures were on the cover of *Learning* magazine back in the 70s.

I'm just saying children may recapitulate some of that early state of total attunement with the world about us, and this naturally gives you the clairvoyance. And we gradually lost that attunement, as Yeats saw—the falcon no longer hears the falconer—the image he had there, and in a lot of Yeats, who had this esoteric background. He was very deep into it, this sense of loss, that whole mythology of lost paradises, no longer hearing the voices of the gods.

So you have to go to some rare sybil or seer, a prophet who still has that attunement. He or she can tell you; but we don't always have it anymore. And then there are freaky psychics, who have no control over it whatsoever, [and they] may tune into it every now and then. But they are not particularly spiritual; they don't know what they are doing, and they are atavistic throwbacks. Spiritual teachers like mine [Sivalingam]—they don't get involved with mediums.

Okay, so this is the sense of where human community moved from, toward the splintering and so-called modern alienation—where there is no longer a shared consciousness, not only with each other, but also no longer with the rest of the world. And so they don't tune into the consciousness around them anymore. So there was a movement that way, and I would say the original was the Tree of Life, and the Tree of Knowledge is the dispersal and fragmentation of the individual consciousness straying off in different directions.

Comment from audience: There is a Howard Gardner book, Artful Scribbles*, where he shows that in all cultures youngsters write circles with spokes out from them and spirals and so on. This is characteristic of children in all countries.*

How does Gardner interpret that?

He doesn't [. . .][though] it's part of his multiple intelligence theory.

Gardner is someone who has experimented with a lot of children's drawings.

It would be interesting to try to talk with Gardner sometime in the context where you try to draw him out about some of that. How do you think he would react to the esoteric point of view? Would he be turned off?

Well, I'm still curious whether he would, because I got him to speak at a conference [. . .] and one of my students asked if he didn't see some parallels between his work and some of Joseph Campbell's. Gardner said, "I didn't come here to talk nonsense."

I think that answers my question. That's too bad, because he's somebody with such an enormous experience, and he's interesting. It's a shame. And in the matter of reading minds, children very often seem to read minds. Freud, interestingly, came around to believing that. He wrote papers on it, but Ernest Jones wouldn't let him deliver them. [. . .] So they were published posthumously. Freud didn't want to believe that sort of thing at all, but he felt it was the experience of his patients. He ultimately decided there was a psychic communication that explained that.

Well, if you read the spectrum both ways, I came to looking at it backwards and both ways at once. People have to develop in a narrowing direction, which is from back to front, ending with interior monologue, the most narrow perspective.

The other direction is the expanding. Once you're incarnated here, life is kind of a succession of commitments—material commitments, you know. Commitment as you grow to mate, to work, so on, all these commitments. So in a way you become more deeply involved in matter. And that has to happen. But at the same time, there has to happen—if one is going to survive psychically and spiritually—this expansion that [moves outward], in the other direction. [. . .] After awhile, you know, the ego becomes more located in the center of communal consciousness and then eventually, in cosmic consciousness.[. . .] [Oliver Wendell Holmes} was really tuned into these things with his wonderful image of the chambered nautilus. "Build thee more stately mansions, oh, my soul." The metaphor and the knowledge keep building, a little bit bigger chambers. You get one, slice it through and there's a marvelous pattern. "Build thee yet more stately mansions"—I think that's what is going on from the front to back of the spectrum.

At the same time the narrowing of material commitments is going the other way, which recalls the esoteric concept. They say that first there is involution, and then there is evolution. Involution is a disembodied spirit incarnate that gets entangled in materiality more and more deeply. [. . .] The involution is the process of becoming involved in the material world—the spirit being drawn in more deeply.

And in terms of cultural evolution, it's as if we reach a nadir, a point of greatest materialism. I'm sure we all say that's where we are right now. It's like a swimmer diving down holding breath. This is my image. You reach a certain point where the buoyancy of the air you're holding in [causes] a loss of momentum, and the increasing pressure sort of forces you to come back up. [. . .] This is the evolution, coming back up; the involution, down to the nadir and then, evolution. And people writing on spiritual evolution say we've reached the nadir, and we're turning around. And so it's a difficult time.

But I see, again, the spectrum as going in both directions at once. Back-to-front is the spirit sort of drawn in and then, in a more and more narrow way, increasing involution. And then back out is the evolution, back out to a more

communal and more cosmic involvement. In a sense we return to a communal consciousness, but it's not the original herd mind which was totally instinctive and totally dictated. But we go back to a communal consciousness with an awareness of our consciousness that's quite different from where we started. △

Appendix A: James Moffett's Spectrum — *Points of View*

INTERIOR MONOLOGUE
Dorothy Parker, "A Telephone Call"
Tillie Olsen, "I Stand Here Ironing"

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE
John O'Hara, "Straight Pool"
Katherine Mansfield, "The Lady's Maid"
Joyce Carol Oates, "...& Answers"

LETTER NARRATION
Rosellen Brown, "Inter-Office"
Henry James, "A Bundle of Letters"
Alice Munro, "A Wilderness Station"
Ambrose Bierce, "Jupiter Doke, Brigadier General"

DIARY NARRATION
Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"
V.S.Naipal, "The Night Watchman's Occurrence Book"
Lorrie Moore, "Amahl and the Night Visitors"

SUBJECTIVE NARRATION
Danny Santiago, "The Somebody"
Truman Capote, "My Side of the Matter"
Cynthia Marshall Rich, "My Sister's Marriage"
Langston Hughes, "Why, You Reckon?"
John Updike, "A & P"
Grace Paley, "Distance"

DETACHED AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Toni Cade Bambara, "Christmas Eve at Johnson's Drugs N Goods"
Francisco Jimenez, "The Circuit"
Frank O'Conner, "First Confession"
Ralph Ellison, "A Coupla Scalped Indians"
David Wong Louie, "Birthday"
Durango Mendoza, "The Passing"

MEMOIR, OR OBSERVER NARRATION
Amy Tan, "The Voice from the Wall"
Jayne Ann Phillips, "Country"

Louise Erdrich, "Scales"
Raymond Carver, "The Bridle"
Toshio Mory, "The Eggs of the World"

ANONYMOUS NARRATION—SINGLE CHARACTER POINT OF VIEW
John Cheever, "The Five Forty-Eight"
Gina Berriault, "The Stone Boy"
Ann Petry, "Doby's Gone"
Irwin Shaw, "Act of Faith"
James Baldwin, "Come out the Wilderness"

ANONYMOUS NARRATION—DUAL CHARACTER POINT OF VIEW
T. Coraghessan Boyle, "Sinking House"
Sarah Orne Jewett, "The Only Rose"
Alice Walker, "Strong Horse Tea"
Margaret Atwood, "Uglypuss"

ANONYMOUS NARRATION—MULTIPLE CHARACTER POINT OF VIEW
Shirley Ann Grau, "Fever Flower"
James Moffett, "The Suicides of Private Greaves"
Merle Hodge, "Inez"

ANONYMOUS NARRATION—NO CHARACTER POINT OF VIEW
Nicholosa Mohr, "A New Window Display"
Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery"
Eudora Welty, "Powerhouse"

Something to Have at Heart:
Another Look at Memorization[1]

Gina Briefs-Elgin

> *"That's what misery is / Nothing to have at heart"*
>
> —*Wallace Stevens*

"Throwing the baby out with the bathwater"—when I was little, I loved to hear my parents use this comic metaphor. Forty years later, thinking about the lost practice of "learning by heart," this expression comes back to me: as educators, we threw the baby out with the bathwater. I'd like to trace memorization's venerable—and sometimes ludicrous—history in education, recall its fall from academic favor, explore the ways it can enrich our students' relationships with words and books, and empower their personal lives, and encourage its return to our classrooms. Memorization was vital to our pre-literate ancestors, the only reliable way they could keep track of and pass down to their children any kind of knowledge. What wasn't learned verbatim might be forgotten or perhaps fatally misremembered, so, as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi explains, "Lists of edible herbs and fruits, health tips, rules of behavior, patterns of inheritance, laws, geographical knowledge, rudiments of technology, and pearls of wisdom were all bundled into easily remembered sayings or verse" (*Flow* 121). After societies became literate, memorization continued to play a central role in education. In the western world, well into the beginning of the twentieth century, memorization of the Greek and Roman epics, of poetry, and of celebrated prose passages formed an important part of a student's work.

Traditional religious education has always involved memorization, even among those religions which so venerate their scriptures as *written* words that they are called "People of the Book": Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Memorization was a central practice in the education of Jewish boys. Teacher: "Would you first like to recite something from the Torah?" Child: "Of course, that is what I was created for" (Brumberg 92). In the Hasidic *yeshivas*, the tradition of

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[1] The genesis of this paper was my presentation "The Uses of Memory" at the 1995 College Reading and Learning Association Conference.

learning by heart continues: "You see them studying, usually in pairs, the great tomes of the Talmud spread before them on desks or tables. Rarely do they use a pencil while studying, instead storing in their minds endless passages of Jewish law and tradition" (Arden 294).

Memorization of Biblical material was once an important feature of American education. Vignettes from scripture were learned by heart to enliven the alphabet. From *The New England Primer*, first published around 1690 and used for the next two hundred years, students learning their W's would memorize "Whales in the Sea / God's Voice obey," and their Z's, "Zacheus he / Did climb the Tree / His Lord to see." Even in a history class, students might be expected to respond to their names with a perfectly recited Bible verse. And, of course, until recently, parochial schoolchildren spent hours every week memorizing scripture, prayers, and the answers to catechism questions. Even today, a search of *memorization* reveals dozens of Christian educational web sites dedicated to the memorization of scripture.

Daniel Wagner and Abdelhamid Lotfi note that traditional Islamic education is often referred to by "a more specific term, 'Qur'anic' education or schooling, because many students spend a great deal or all of their time learning the Qur'an" (238). An extreme example of learning sacred texts by heart can be seen in Muslims of certain non-Arab tribes who do not understand Arabic but who, through repetition, memorize the entire Qur'an in this sacred language of Islam (Harmouch). This first stage of learning the sacred text by heart is then followed by exploration into the meaning of the memorized words and verses.

But it wasn't just religious educators who stressed—and in some cases, still stress—memorization. *Teaching Literature in the Grammar Grades and High School*, an education textbook by Emma Miller Bolenius published in 1915 under the aegis of Harvard University, lists the materials students should memorize: hymns, patriotic lyrics, folk-songs, poems set to music, nature lyrics—to be divided under three heads, autumn, winter, and spring—and "character-building poems" ("children's minds are more open than you may suspect to the influence of big ideas. Store their growing minds, then, with bits of philosophy on life, which will act as safeguards long after you are forgotten" [66]). "It is amazing," Bolenius writes, "how much good literature can be stowed away in young minds if the teacher goes about it systematically" (62).

The many references to memorization in children's classics remind us how much educators of earlier times respected learning by heart as a pedagogical tool. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* reveal the importance of memorization in a Victorian child's education and parody the excesses that helped lead to its decline.

Stand up and repeat "*Tis the voice of the sluggard*," said the Gryphon.

> "How the creatures order one about, and make one repeat lessons!"
> thought Alice. "I might just as well be at school at once." (100)

Victorian schoolchildren grew up to be adults who delighted in learning by heart and reciting. In several scenes, patient Alice has recitations inflicted on her. This exchange occurs when she approaches Tweedledum and Tweedledee to ask directions out of the wood:

"You like poetry?"

"Ye-es, pretty well—*some* poetry," Alice said doubtfully. "Would you tell me which road leads out of the wood?"

"What shall I repeat to her?" said Tweedledee looking round at Tweedledum with great solemn eyes, and not noticing Alice's question.

"'The Walrus and the Carpenter' is the longest," Tweedledum replied, giving his brother an affectionate hug. (161)

Nor can Alice escape Humpty Dumpty's recitation:

"*I* can repeat poetry as well as other folk, if it comes to that"

"Oh, it needn't come to that!" Alice hastily said, hoping to keep him from beginning.

"The piece I'm going to repeat," he went on without noticing her remark, "was written entirely for your amusement." (191)

Later, the avuncular White Knight imposes lines on her.

"You are sad," the Knight said in an anxious tone: "let me sing you a song to comfort you."

"Is it very long?" Alice asked, for she had heard a good deal of poetry that day.

"It's long," said the Knight, "but it's very, *very* beautiful." (213-14)

Since the second half of the twentieth century, memorization has almost disappeared from mainstream American classrooms and lives. Edward Casey speaks powerfully about the decline in prestige of learning by heart: "Memorizing, once a standard pedagogical tool [. . .] is no longer emphasized in the early years of education. True, children are still occasionally required to memorize a poem or a brief prose passage, but this serves more as gesture than substance" (6). There are a number of reasons for this loss, some emerging from latter twentieth-century educational theory, some having to do with attitudes and lifestyles. Five seem to me most important: 1. the discouraging research on the "exercise theory" of memory; 2. the ludicrous excesses of rote learning; 3. the pressure from industry and the space race for more technologically based education; 4. the cultural disillusionment that derided the staples of the Victorian learning-by-heart canon; 5. the information explosion accelerated by the computer revolution.

The first reason was a discovery about the way memory works, or, rather, doesn't work. As Morton M. Hunt notes, since ancient times people have visual-

ized the memory as a sort of muscle and considered learning by heart as a way to exercise that muscle:

> Children were [. . .] made to memorize masses of material—poems, Shakespearean soliloquies [. . .] dates of wars and treaties—because it was thought that the effort spent in memorizing these materials would make the children better able to remember any and all other kinds of subject matter. The exercise theory of memory was taken on faith and not subjected to scientific test until less than a century ago. It was William James, America's first psychologist, who, using himself as a subject, first tried measuring the power of memory before and after a period of exercise to see if, indeed, there were any change. (93-94)

James timed himself memorizing 158 lines of a Victor Hugo poem. Then he memorized the first book of *Paradise Lost*, expecting in so doing to strengthen his powers of memorization. But when he timed himself memorizing another 158 lines of Hugo, he discovered that the opposite had occurred: "Exercise, he concluded, hadn't increased the power of his memory, but diminished it, at least temporarily" (94). Of course, strengthening the memory "muscle" was not the only reason educators had promoted learning by heart, but with this reason debunked, memorization lost some of its pedagogical gloss.

Excesses are a second reason for memorization's eclipse. A glimpse into a New York City school at the turn of the last century helps explain the revolt against "learning by rote":

> The chief maxim was "Save the minutes." The method was to see how the greatest number of answers could be given in the smallest number of minutes. [. . .]
>
> A student was taught to pop up and say quickly and loudly, "A note is a sign representing to the eye the length or duration of time." As he was sitting down, the next child arose for a similar performance. (Wirth 33)

As the twentieth century progressed, a third reason for the decline in memorization emerged. Employers in American industry increasingly demanded that employees have hands-on understanding of process and critical thinking skills rather than heads full of memorized facts. Russia's successful launch of Sputnik in 1957 further spurred educational change: if America was to win the technological race, the focus must be not on memorizing facts but on learning how to apply them. Later twentieth-century studies abound discrediting learning by heart as stultifying to critical thinking, some going to great lengths in that cause. Abdelhamid Lotfi and Daniel Wagner offer the examples of researchers who attempted to discredit memorization of texts by investigating Qur'anic education in Morocco.

I believe a fourth reason memorization fell out of favor in the latter part of the twentieth century had to do with contemporary attitudes and world views. Much of what used to be memorized in the great Victorian age of learning by

heart seemed naively idealistic in an era deeply suspicious of heroes and of he-
roic sentiment. It wasn't possible for us to take seriously poems like Kipling's
"If," Longfellow's "Excelsior," Henley's "Invictus"—staples of the classroom
earlier in the century—not because there was anything wrong with them in and
of themselves (we could use more "If" today), but because these poems grew out
of the great Victorian belief in the perfectibility of humankind. This belief crashed
in what the poet Elizabeth Bishop once described as "our worst century so far"—
a century defined by world war, concentration camp, atomic bomb, and the con-
flict in Vietnam.

The fifth reason is that the computer revolution has made it unnecessary for
us to memorize all practical information—and the information explosion has made
it impossible. It's an old maxim that one can either know something or know
where to find it out. A millennium ago, educated people could carry a good part
of their world's knowledge around in their heads. Today with the explosion of
knowledge, we must, of necessity, train our students to be the second kind of
knowers. Edward Casey notes that memory was considered by the Greeks to be
the Mother of the Muses (12, 13). Now, he writes, "Where once Mnemosyne was
a venerated goddess, we have turned over responsibility for remembering to the
cult of the computers" (2).

Let's grant, for argument's sake, that learning by heart doesn't strengthen
the memory muscle, that it can be (like anything else) subject to absurd excess,
that it doesn't build industry or win the space race, that it once associated itself
with a literature that may now seem naively idealistic, that it can't match com-
puters for storing facts. Done. We've looked its failings in the face.

But now I'd like to argue that these shortcomings are only *half* the story and
that it's time to take another look at the ancient practice we have dismissed from
our classrooms and lives. I'd like to argue that to learn things by heart is a deeply
rooted human impulse for good reasons and that by teaching our students this
time-honored skill, we will bestow on them a number of important pedagogical
and psychological advantages.

That we humans like to keep valued texts near at hand, not only in their gist,
but also in their exact wording is obvious from architecture, interior design, and
ephemera. We put inscriptions on public buildings, samplers on cabin walls, morals
and maxims on Arts and Crafts Movement mantels and wallpapers (as design
writer Julie Iovine predicted a decade ago, "writing on the wall" has become
popular again in architecture and interior design), stickers on bumpers, posters
on office walls.

Further, as t-shirts, tattoos, medals, medicine pouches, amulets, scapulars,
and Roxane's blood-stained letter from Cyrano testify, we want to get the words
actually onto our bodies, over our life pump, our hearts. But of course the ulti-
mate closeness of literal words is not *over* the heart but where they can never be
taken or torn or worn away: *in* the heart, memorized (that's where Cyrano carries
the letter). In English we use the expression *learn by heart*. It's the same in other
languages, for example, in Spanish (*aprender de memoria y de corazon*), in French
(*apprendre par coeur*), and, I'm told by a Chinese student, in Chinese. These
phrases make explicit the connection between memorization and love.

We find in world religions the most compelling evidence that people want to

learn treasured words by heart. As we've seen, even after those the Qur'an calls "People of the Book" *got* their book (Torah/Bible/Qur'an), learning what was in it by heart—in a sense, making the physical book redundant—was central to their spiritual practice. This curious fact suggests that what we as humans most value, we feel a compulsion to memorize. We may treasure the *hard copy* form of the sacred words so much that we call ourselves "People of the Book" and wear phylacteries containing Hebrew scripture strapped to our arms and foreheads during morning worship (Buber 333-34) or carry the gospels in our glove compartments or keep small, well worn copies of the Qur'an tucked in our pockets as does "every shopkeeper in the Muslim world" (Belt 83), yet we still feel the compulsion to have the treasured words *stored in memory*. If learning by heart were merely a trivial or mindlessly mechanical pursuit, human beings throughout history would not have felt such a need to memorize the words or texts most precious to them, those that connect them to their image of the divine. Human impulses related to what we most cherish are built into our psyches for reasons important to our flourishing as human beings.

And so let's look at some of the numerous ways learning by heart can enhance our students' relationships with language and empower their personal lives.

One of the reasons learning by heart fell from favor was the realization that memorizing factual materials was not effective practical learning. Students can know factual material only through analysis, by dismantling the original text. But the opposite is true of literary texts. We have agreed that we can't separate content and form in poetry, and yet the poem or passage is dismembered by analysis and left to decay out of consciousness. Nothing remains but a bloodless précis and a few scattered images and words. Of course I'm not denying the importance of analysis in studying texts, only suggesting that we embrace the text as a synthesis as well. And the most satisfying way to do this is to commit it to memory.

It is good when memorization can precede analysis. Once students "own" a piece of writing through memorization, they feel connected to it, pleased to learn more about it. Learning by heart is particularly useful for developmental students, who, lacking the English language literacy of more privileged students, are often shy of texts. Developmental students who've learned by heart can kick off their shoes with a difficult poem or passage, let down their hair. And those from cultures with strong traditions of learning by heart may have, here, a confidence-building advantage.

A related virtue of memorization is that it takes students backstage in the creative process. In the art world, students learn to paint by copying the masters. One parallel in the written world is memorizing, repeating the writer's performance. Even the way the words or lines one by one hesitantly emerge out of consciousness gives insight into the creative mind at work.

Memorizing each murder scene completely in all its insignificant details enables Sherlock Holmes to have epiphanies, perhaps weeks later, that dazzle Scotland Yard. When we memorize a poem or passage, we are remembering every word choice, turn of phrase, and image, even those that appear unremarkable or of little meaning. Memorization thus makes possible on-going epiphanies. Old-timers knew this. In *The Teaching of English in the Elementary and Secondary School*, Percival Chubb notes how memorized poems "graft themselves deep in

the affections and reveal gradually, as the child grows, their music and meaning" (50). More recently, Sara Neilan writes in *The Times Educational Supplement* that a child "may learn something by heart and not understand it (hence those sneers about 'parrot-fashion'). But one day, perhaps years later, he will suddenly see what it means. If he hadn't learnt it by heart, he might never know it at all" ("Survival," 25); "its full significance will gradually become apparent, perhaps years later. This is one of the great delayed-action joys of learning by heart: the poem opens like a flower in your head" ("Hook," 27). I experienced this during a very serious illness of my mother. When I was a child, a family friend taught me Psalm 23. In adulthood, one line, "He leads me beside still waters," had always puzzled me. Why *beside*—shouldn't it be "*to* still waters"? But now, during weeks of round-the-clock anguish, I understood the preposition. Being led *to* still waters is a one-shot deal, but being led *beside* them suggests an always accessible source of stillness and refreshment, running quietly parallel to our path.

Csikszentmihalyi claims that "the normal state of the mind is chaos" (*Flow* 119). He continues, "When we are left alone, with no demands on attention, the basic disorder of the mind reveals itself. With nothing to do, it begins to follow random patterns, usually stopping to consider something painful ordisturbing" (119). Perhaps this chaos is the mind's default only because we live strained, artificial lives. Whatever the case, material learned by heart can provide the un-occupied mind with a restorative activity, a sea-wall against chaotic thoughts. "A person who can remember stories, poems, lyrics of songs [. . .] biblical passages, and wise quotations has many advantages over one who has not cultivated such a skill," notes Csikszentmihalyi. "The consciousness of such a person is indepen-dent of the order that may or may not be provided by the environment. She can always amuse herself, and find meaning in the contents of her mind . . . Such a person is also a much more cherished companion" (*Flow* 123-24). A friend who sails reports a case in point: a five-hour night watch sitting on a dark boat deck turned merry when her watch partner began to recite an elaborate very long poem by Ogden Nash. But the practice of learning by heart does more than merely stave off the chaos of random or depressing thoughts. Csikszentmihalyi lists learn-ing by heart as one of those activities that can bring *flow*, that euphoric feeling of timelessness, accomplishment, and growth that rewards us when we stretch our bodies or minds by focusing all our attention on a difficult but personally mean-ingful activity (*Flow* 3; *Evolving Self* 179-87). The act of memorization brings flow and so does the performance—for oneself or for others. Csikszentmihalyi writes, "My grandfather at seventy could still recall passages from the three thou-sand lines of the *Iliad* he had to learn by heart in Greek to graduate from high school. Whenever he did so, a look of pride settled on his features" (*Flow* 123).

Lewis Carroll pokes fun at the excesses of Victorian memorization, but be-hind the parody lies truth: what we memorize does in fact form part of who we are, part of our identity in this Looking-Glass world. When Alice tumbles down a rabbit hole, she believes she's been changed into someone else. To reassure her-self of her identity, she inventories what she knows by heart:

> "I'll try if I know all the things I used to know. Let me see: four
> times five is twelve [. . .]. London is the capital of Paris, and Paris

is the capital of Rome, and Rome — no, *that's* all wrong, I'm certain! I must have been changed for Mabel! I'll try and say '*How doth the little* — '" and she crossed her hands on her lap, as if she were saying lessons, and began to repeat it, but her voice sounded hoarse and strange, and the words did not come the same as they used to do. (28)

Since what she once knew by heart now seems confused and strange to her, Alice feels estranged from her own Aliceness. Perhaps she's turned into her slow-witted classmate Mabel who lives in a "poky little house" (29)? A few chapters later, Alice confides her fears to the Caterpillar after she attempts to recite a poem for her:

"That is not said right," said the Caterpillar.

"Not *quite* right, I'm afraid," said Alice timidly: "some of the words have got altered."

"It is wrong from beginning to end," said the Caterpillar." (53)

What we know by heart proves who we are — the banker asks for our mother's maiden name — and forgetting rocks our sense of identity. Indeed, in the next three pages, the borders of her Aliceness collapsed, Alice shapeshifts, nibbling the Caterpillar's mushroom. Again and again in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Alice's failure to recite correctly poems that she once knew by heart is symptomatic of her loss of identity.

Contrariwise, what's safely remembered can be very reassuring. In *Through the Looking Glass*, poems she's learned by heart help Alice orient herself in encounters with unfamiliar, even bizarre situations. For example, when she meets Humpty Dumpty perched precariously on a high wall, she repeats softly to herself, "*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall*" (184). And when she turns a corner and stumbles upon Tweedledum and Tweedledee standing like wax-works,

the words of the old song kept ringing through her head like the ticking of a clock, and she could hardly help saying them out loud:

"*Tweedledum and Tweedledee Agreed to have a battle.* " (159-60)

Stories reassure us, in disorienting experience, that we're not crazy or alone: our experience is not an aberration. Memorization is a way of carrying these universal patterns of human experience in our hearts, not on some distant bookshelf or computer screen, but immediately accessible.

In the past, the individual was shored up from the inside by powerful content of consciousness. Think about what people used to carry around inside: their ancestor lists, epics, scriptures, creeds, hymns, poems, passages from drama, speeches, manifestos. Now all they carry around may be a few advertising slogans — this Bud's for you! — and numbers: ID numbers, phone numbers, ATM numbers. Meanwhile, never before in history have people been so barraged from the

outside with overwhelmingly trivial and often ugly clutter for the mind: commercials, talk shows, bombing bulletins, Doublespeak, celebrity gossip. If this were a physics lesson, we'd expect internal collapse. But learning by heart can give our students a way to bolster themselves internally against outside media pressure. By teaching memorization, we can help them be like the Alice of the second book, who could identify herself and steady herself with what she knew by heart as she passed through her bizarre Looking-Glass adventures.

And learning by heart can save minds or even a life should adventures turn ugly. Sarah Neilan writes about how poems learned in school helped her survive an attack of meningitis, days of "black blankness lit by lurid pain" ("Survival" 25). At the hospital, she writes, "I was sure death would come soon. 1 couldn't move, feed myself, or read" (25). "But," she continues, "I could recite to myself, and did, and because I had a vast repertoire, it kept up my morale" (25). As another example of the psychological advantages of learning by heart, Neilan notes that among Hungarian refugees who experienced lengthy solitary confinements, those who had memorized material to recite and ponder survived without mental illness. Csikszentmihalyi reports further stories of concentration camp prisoners relying on memorization for psychological health. Tortured and sent to a Stalinist camp where ragged inmates ate slops and suffered whippings and frostbite, Hungarian poet Faludy used poetry—and memorization—to protect his sanity and the sanity of his prison mates. He created and memorized, poem by poem, a whole book of prison poetry:

> Faludy's oeuvre [. . .] was not written down, for the simple reason that pencil and paper were not available in the camp. At first, Faludy memorized each of his poems. Then, to avoid losing them through death or forgetfulness, he had fellow prisoners learn them by heart as well. In one case, [. . .] He composed a long elegy for his wife, and each part of it was memorized by different inmates. Some of these prisoners were freed before Faludy, and went to visit his wife, to bring news of her husband and to recite the part of the poem they had memorized. At the end of the recitation, they would typically announce: "That's all I learned. But in a few days Jim Egri should be released, and he will come and tell you the next twenty verses."
> (*Evolving* 212)

Csikszentmihalyi cites another example from the camps: the poet Tollas Tibor and his prison mates distracted themselves from the horrors of solitary confinement for months with a poetry translation contest. The inmates knew Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!" by heart. Each translated it into Hungarian, memorizing as they went along. Tollas wrote and memorized his translation a line at a time on the bottom of a shoe smeared with soap (*Flow* 91-92). Such survival stories suggest what a tremendous gift learning by heart can be for our students— whether or not they ever find themselves in straits as dire as these.

"For a person who has nothing to remember," Csikszentmihalyi notes, "life can become severely impoverished" (*Flow* 123). We're impoverished when the words that mean the most to us are outside of us. And that's pretty much our case today, all of us, students and teachers. Today, when we need words for joy, wis-

dom, comfort, courage, we have to dig out the book, log onto the Net, or drive downtown to the cafe bookstore. We no longer stock our hearts with life-shaping words. Young and old, we lack an inner world of beautiful, powerful, significant language.

At the start of a new century, let's offer that world to our students again: let's ask them to learn by heart. We can find good material everywhere—favorite pieces from each student's own personal canon, powerful writing we as teachers fell in love with last week, passages from our multicultural anthologies. Students lucky enough to be bilingual can ask their elders to teach them traditional pieces, Spanish, Tewa, Vietnamese. We can seek out the best English renderings of new or old poetry and lyrical prose from around the world (Coleman Barks has taken our breath away with over twenty-five years of Rumi translations [Moyers 43-58] and has proved that sometimes almost nothing "gets lost in the translation"). Of course, while we want our students to enjoy memorizing for the classroom, our goal should be, above all, that they acquire for themselves the lifelong habit of consigning to memory the words that matter most to them.

I like to read Wallace Stevens' "Poetry Is a Destructive Force" as a manifesto for learning by heart. After defining misery as having "nothing [. . .] at heart"—no red-blooded words, just "spit"—Stevens describes what it is to have at heart powerful words. It is like having our body privileged by animal spirits, vibrantly alive, that make us strong and confident to press against the world:

> That's what misery is
> Nothing to have at heart.
> It is to have or nothing.
>
> It is a thing to have,
> A lion, an ox in his breast.
> To feel it breathing there.
>
> Corazon, stout dog,
> Young ox, bow-legged bear,
> He tastes its blood, not spit.

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The Rhetoric of Recovery:
Can Twelve Step Programs Inform the
Teaching of Writing?

Christopher C. Weaver

The more we insist upon the mystery of the writing process, the more we abandon teaching for preaching.

—*Irwin Hashimoto*

May we all find salvation in professions that heal.

—*Shawn Colvin*

Twelve step programs and the recovery movement in general have become such widespread cultural phenomena as to require little or no introduction. The rhetoric of recovery programs has saturated the mainstream culture. We're familiar with it from bumper stickers such as "One Day at a Time," from innumerable self-help books, and, perhaps most famously, from Al Franken's portrayal on Saturday Night Live of Stuart Smalley, the "recovery guy" whose "Daily Affirmations" show begins with Stuart gazing into a mirror and reciting hopefully, "I'm good enough; I'm smart enough; and, doggone it, people like me!" This cultural familiarity, even to the point of parody, points to the prevalence and influence of recovery programs across the country and even the world, and the laughter evoked by Stuart Smalley also indicates that such parodies touch a nerve—that the issues of addiction and recovery resonate with an audience far wider than members of twelve step groups. For many of us, addicts or not, there is something compelling about both the trauma of addiction and the possibility of transformation that a recovery program presents.

It's a drama that has at times attracted the attention of compositionists. In a 1990 article, Paul Heilker analyzes the rhetoric of popular meditation books and discusses how he has students use the conventions of this genre to write their own meditations, reflections, and affirmations. In a 1992 panel at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (later printed in *CCC*), Beth Daniell

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examines the use of journal writing as an integral part of the recovery process of several women in Al-Anon. And, in his recent book *Storytelling in Alcoholics Anonymous*, George Jensen examines, among other things, the way members of AA meetings interact and how storytelling enables them to reconstruct their identities. What these scholars share is a recognition that the rhetoric of recovery offers a way to connect individuals to a kind of power that is not accessible through other kinds of discourse—particularly, as Heilker and Daniell argue, through academic discourse. Daniell describes this power as not only "cognitive, intellectual, social, political, and economic," but also "spiritual" (Daniell 240).

Tthis last adjective unsettles academics whose ideas about teaching are rooted in a tradition of skepticism and is particularly problematic for those theorists who view all knowledge as social, political, and economic and for whom references to an intangible and indefinable power smacks of Romanticism. Is it possible to reconcile the sort of spiritual power recognized by Daniell and Heilker with hostile academic skeptics? By way of answering this question, I want to recount some of my own experiences as a recovering addict and my own struggle to reconcile my atheism with the spiritual requirements of a twelve step program. These experiences have led me to reexamine some of my teaching practices and my beliefs about the writing process and about the power of groups—both writing groups and recovery groups. While in many ways, the recovery process has confirmed my commitment to the primacy of personal experience in the writing classroom, it has also caused me to consider how a greater emphasis on ritual in writing groups may help students tap into a group identity which allows them access to the kind of intangible "higher power" that is integral to twelve step groups.

My own interest in the rhetoric of recovery is both personal and professional; in fact, it is in the intersection between these two parts of my life that I have made the discoveries that I intend to discuss in this article. I have been attending twelve step meetings off and on since I was a graduate student, but my involvement intensified several years ago as a result of a period of personal crisis which sent me back to meetings and led me, for the first time, to begin to "work the steps." The twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.[1] (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 59-60)

The first step—admitting that I was powerless and that my life had become unmanageable—was relatively easy, but I faltered at the second step, "came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." I was and am an atheist, and I grew up without any religious instruction, tradition, or ritual. I had come to the point where I recognized the need for a higher power in my life, but I hadn't the faintest idea of how to identify that power, nor, more importantly, how to begin to feel it as a presence in my life.

It was during this time when I was grappling with the "higher power" issue that a young man in my "introduction to literature" course came into my office to conference about a writing project with which he'd been struggling. I looked over his rough work and made some suggestions for revisions—mostly areas he might explore and expand on. But, although he nodded at what I had to say, I could see by his expression that he was still troubled in a way that my suggestions weren't addressing. When I asked him about this, he confessed that, although my advice sounded reasonable, he didn't think it would help. He said that he felt as if his writing just wasn't good enough. I assured him that this wasn't true—that his rough work showed promise, that he had some interesting ideas, and that he just needed to give himself enough space and time to explore them. He only looked more pained. He said that every time he tried to write the

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[1] I've cited the original steps from the 1939 "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous. In more recent publications, and depending on the organization, the exact language of the steps may vary somewhat. For instance, in *The Twelve Steps:* A Way *Out*, a more general recovery book, "sanity " has been changed to "wholeness," alcohol has been changed to "effects of addiction" and non-gendered language has been used to refer to God. It's also important to recognize that the twelve step definition of "addiction" includes people who have unhealthy and enmeshed relationships with addicts. Thus, there are twelve step groups for addicts (such as Alcoholics Anonymous) and groups for partners and family members (such as Al-Anon). There are also twelve step programs that address destructive behaviors involving sex, gambling, eating, narcotics, and probably more that I haven't heard of. For my argument in this article, these distinctions are not important. Indeed, AA meetings are not the ones that I attend, but I use AA language since it is the oldest, best known, and most established.

piece, he was frustrated by how useless his words seemed. He said that he was afraid that the more he wrote, the more he would find out how bad his writing really was.

For the remainder of the conference, I found myself talking to him about the need to let go of that fear and to trust the writing process. We talked about the unknown—the part of writing, and of life—where you give up control and face your own worst fears about who you are and what you are and are not capable of. I told him that I thought it was impossible to face this unknown without some kind of faith—some giving over of your will to some part of yourself and the universe that knows just how things are supposed to turn out. I told him that I thought this was true not only of writing but also of learning and of life in general and that finding the faith to face his unknown was probably much less important for this particular writing project than it was for other aspects of his life. In short, in talking about his writing anxieties, I found myself using the rhetoric of recovery. And I found that I really did believe in a higher power—and that, for me, this higher power was most palpably present in my conception of the writing process.

I don't know how much good our conversation did my student. He did manage to complete his writing project, but I don't know whether or not this success had anything to do with what I had said. I do know, however, that this was the point at which I began to connect my own recovery process with what I believed about writing and teaching, and from this time on I began, increasingly, to think about the connections between these two aspects of my life.

Every important piece of writing—including this one—forces me to face fears that are potentially debilitating. Each and every time, I begin with part of me convinced that I am an utter fraud and that I have nothing valuable to say, that any previous successes I have had were merely flukes or times that I've gotten away with faking it, and that *this* time the fraud that I have thus far perpetrated has finally caught up with me. The fact that some other part of my brain recognizes that this isn't true is of little consequence. It is not until I have mostly given up hope of things going well and that I might as well just put something on paper and get it over with that things start to come together and I can begin to trust the process—to find my higher power.

I don't know if this never-ending cycle of anxiety and redemption is equally true for most writers, or if it's only those of us in recovery for whom it is quite so acute, but I do know that, as painful as this process is, it is necessary to me not only as a writer but also as someone in recovery. Writing teaches me to draw upon my higher power and to bring some sense of order to a feeling of internal chaos. It also teaches me that what seems at first to be inadequate is, in the end, enough. It teaches me to have faith. And so I go through the process again and again, half of the time cursing myself for choosing a profession in which my fears and inadequacies are so mercilessly exposed and the other half realizing that, of course, this is no accident and that I have chosen this profession (or rather, my higher power has chosen it) because it has something to teach me.

Working the twelve steps has led me to reconsider the writing process in spiritual terms. Like many matters concerning religion and spirituality, recovery begins with a paradox—that power comes from powerlessness. This paradox,

which may well be the central element of recovery, is played out in the first two steps. The first step says, "We admitted we were powerless over the effects of addiction." So recovery begins with an admission and an acceptance of powerlessness, with the recognition that something greater than willpower or repeated resolutions to change one's life is necessary. This renunciation of ego is humbling but also freeing because it allows the addict to let go of the responsibility for changing her life through her efforts alone and to let go, as well, of the shame and hopelessness of repeated failures. The second step leads to the paradox. It says, "We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to wholeness." The paradox is that once you let go of that power, you get it back. Once you understand yourself as being something more than ego, as being connected to much larger forces (however you may define them as your "higher power"), then you can begin to allow those forces to act through you. [2]

The writing process contains this same paradox. In my writing classroom, I use a textbook written by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, which begins by saying to students, "Writing is hard. Writing is easy" (xxvii). This is, I think, a great truth—I would even say a *spiritual* truth. Writing is hard because it is such a complex and idiosyncratic process, and this is the reason it eludes the simple categorization and formulaic advice of so many bad composition textbooks. It is hard because it is something that we can't control. It puts those of us uncomfortable with uncertainty or uncertain of our talents to shame. It is hard because for many of us it is inextricably linked with evaluation. We may feel writing as a test of who we are and of how good we are, whether our audience consists of our teachers, colleagues, or even our own expectations. Writing is hard because it confronts us with our greatest fears: with nothingness and oblivion, with the fear that when we come face to face with the white page or the blank computer screen that there will be nothing inside us to fill that emptiness.

But writing is easy as well. And, just as in recovery, this ease is part of the paradox of power and powerlessness. Often writing is most powerful when it is easiest: when we let go of trying to be in control, when we freewrite, or when we've been at the process long enough that it takes us over. Writing is easy if and when we trust that there is some guiding force, some *higher power* that, in spite of our fears and botched attempts to control the process, leads us to get it right anyway, in spite of ourselves. Writing, like recovery, works when we give ourselves permission to be who we are and when we accept our flaws and thus accept the creativity and self-worth that are locked away behind them. Beth Daniell provides a nice example of this when she interviews women in Al-Anon who are keeping recovery journals. Daniell reports on one woman who is struggling with the writing process because of her expectations of what a recovery journal is supposed to look like. This woman says of her journal-writing experience, "I had to let go of it being perfect and then it became perfect" (Daniell 243).

Many writing classes also share something else with the recovery process: both occur in the context of groups of people sharing their "texts." In recovery, people go to meetings where they tell their stories. Storytelling is important because people in recovery have lived their lives in shame and fear. Addiction and

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[2] The twelve step slogan for this is "Let go; Let God."

co-addiction are built on individual and family secrets, and telling these secrets, usually in the form of stories about one's self and one's past, is an important part of the recovery process. The group context is important because something powerful and spiritual occurs when people come together to share their stories. In hearing other people's experiences and in sharing their own, people at meetings come to recognize problems, patterns, and insights that have resonance for their own recovery, and often they are given a chance to see something of their own recovery process reflected in someone else's story. But, beyond this cognitive benefit, people sharing at meetings seek to connect with an intangible power—a feeling that involves belonging and connection but that somehow goes beyond these things—that is greater than any rational insight.

The dynamics of sharing at twelve step meetings may have some interesting implications for teaching writing. An important element of group sharing is the prohibition of direct feedback. In the "group participant guidelines" that are usually read at the beginning of meetings, people are asked to "refrain from 'cross talk." Cross talk is defined as "two or more people engag[ing] in dialogue that excludes others." In particular, participants are admonished not to give advice (*The 12 Steps: A Way Out* 224). The assumption underlying this prohibition is that meetings bring us face to face with people at different stages of their recovery and different levels of insight into their own process. If we believe that we have useful advice to give them, then either: 1. We may be wrong, or 2. We may be right, but our observation will not help them. Each individual needs to come to her own insight on her own. Each person's recovery is different—just as each person's writing process is different.

Giving feedback of any kind is a central feature of all writing classes and especially of those that utilize group work and peer conferencing. However, participating in twelve step meetings and observing the dynamics of sharing and storytelling in those meetings have led me to question the importance of giving feedback to students' writing. At twelve step meetings, the focus remains on the primacy of someone's story, not on other people's responses to it. What power exists in these groups comes from telling one's story in front of others and from hearing other people's stories, not from any person's response. Indeed, most often, responses are limited to the formulaic (and often parodied), "Thank you for sharing."

There are times, of course, both in writing and in recovery when direct feedback and even advice is appropriate. In recovery, an addict often seeks out feedback and advice from a sponsor: an individual with whom she develops an ongoing relationship and with whom she meets regularly to share "step work" and to report on her problems and progress. But I am suggesting that we reevaluate the primacy that feedback has even in writing groups and that we consider that the experience of sharing may be more powerful in the absence of any feedback at all. Perhaps, after all, the most appropriate response in a writing group really is, "Thank you for sharing." When I do give my students feedback, my involvement in twelve step meetings reminds me that my insights about a student's writing may be of limited value to that student. I need to offer them tentatively and humbly, not substituting my own answers for those of the student. In recovery parlance, to point out to someone how she may be falling

short of the ideals embodied in the twelve steps is to "take someone else's inventory,"[3] the equivalent, perhaps, of compositionists' warnings not to "appropriate someone else's text."

Another aspect of twelve step meetings that may merit attention from writing teachers is the role of ritual in shaping group dynamics at these meetings. In *Storytelling in Alcoholics Anonymous*, Jensen examines the ritual element of meetings in some detail. He points, for example, to the complex interaction involved in the ritual statement that begins an alcoholic's story, "Hello, I'm Bill. I'm an alcoholic," and the ritual response of the group, "Hello, Bill." Jensen explains:

> By offering only his name, Bill is working out of the organization's tradition of anonymity, which facilitates honesty as it discourages "a cult of personality," an inflation of the individual's sense of importance. The salutation is quickly followed by a confession, the first of many, that establishes a sense of community. As he says, "I am an alcoholic," he says, "I am one of you." As the audience responds, "Hello Bill," they say, "We too are alcoholics; we will accept what you have to say without judging you." (Jensen 79)

Bill's words here are more than a way to convey meaning; they are a way of submerging his individual identity and taking on a group persona: that of the recovering alcoholic. His utterance is "a rhetorical act that transforms" (Jensen 79).

Obviously, the motives and the circumstances that bring together a classroom of freshman composition students are quite different from those of members at an AA meeting. Our students, however, are not altogether different in that we are asking them to adopt identities—those of writer or college student—with which they are largely unfamiliar and which may be uncomfortable for them. Ritual, then, may be an important element in helping a student to take on a new identity—that of a writer sharing in a group of other writers. Moreover, while peer writing groups may share many other elements with twelve step meetings, ritual is probably one ingredient that is largely absent.

This semester, in a basic writing class I teach, I have begun to experiment with ways of structuring writing groups through rituals of sharing, responding, and reflecting. [4] When we get into writing groups, I begin by asking students in the group to read a document called "Guidelines For Sharing Writing" (see Appendix A). I've loosely modeled this document on the "Group Participant Guidelines" which are read at the beginning of each twelve step meeting (see Appendix B). As in twelve step groups, the guidelines are meant to insure that individuals are able to share in an atmosphere of safety and respect, but my pur-

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[3] The reference here is to the fourth step: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

[4] Although I happened to be teaching a basic writing course this semester and therefore experimented with this approach there, I don't believe that more experienced and sophisticated writers would find it any less useful. In fact, my experiences so far with graduate students suggests to me that they are as hungry as anyone for the kind of writing community that I've tried to create with my basic writers.

pose in introducing them to my writing class is as much ritualistic as pedagogical. I have always given my students directions about how to (and how not to) respond to each other's writing. But by writing these guidelines down and having students take turns reading them out loud (one item per person, as it's done in twelve step meetings), I hoped to make these words into a ritual utterance — as much incantation as instruction.

One result of this practice has been a change in my students' behavior during the first few minutes in their writing groups. In the past, I have found that students take a while to get started. They usually fumble around for the first few minutes, waiting for someone to begin reading or asking each other questions about what they're supposed to be doing. While there may be many reasons for this initial reluctance to begin the work of the group, including shyness and procrastination, I suspect that a contributing factor is their unfamiliarity and discomfort with the roles they are being asked to assume in a writing group. I've found that when I insist that students begin group work with these guidelines, they seem to ease into their roles as readers and responders with less difficulty.

An experience I have had in a different kind of recovery group has suggested a way in which giving feedback might be structured in a ritualistic way. As part of my own recovery process, I attended "family week," a week of intensive group therapy at an in-patient program involving addicts and their family members. While there, I observed how group interaction was structured by the therapists in a fairly rigid way. When addicts or family members were asked to express their feelings, they were required to do so by identifying one or more of seven "primary" emotions (fear, loneliness, joy, anger, sadness, shame, or pain) without any further elaboration and without resorting to any other terminology. As a writing teacher, used to giving feedback in more complex ways, I was at first irritated with these limitations. But as the week went on, I began to appreciate their usefulness. Their benefit was precisely that they kept me from expressing my emotions in a carefully nuanced and individualistic way and forced me to focus on the commonality of my situation and of others in the group. As with the ritual greeting and response that begins storytelling in AA meetings, this formulaic way of expressing feelings tends to submerge individual experiences into the experience of the group. After responding to the question, ""What were you feeling?" with the same formula, "I was feeling [for example] loneliness and shame," and after hearing other members of the group respond in the same way, one begins to identify with the others and to submerge one's individual problems and personality in favor of the "recovery persona."

A similar process was involved in responding to other people's stories and experiences. Often an addict was asked to pick several other people in the group to give feedback. In those instances, the group member was required to respond using the following formula: "What I heard was . . .; What I saw was . . .; What I felt was . . . ; What I related to was . . . ." This formula kept the respondent from giving advice, but, more importantly, it framed the individual member's observations within the greater context of a group process. When I responded using this formula, before I even began to offer my observations, I was reminded of the other voices in the room that had made the same utterance. In effect, my voice

became an echo of their voices, and my identity as an individual was mitigated by my identity as part of the group.

   In the recovery group, what is important about both sharing and giving feedback is that words, when they are framed by ritual, do more than convey meaning; they establish a particular kind of identity and help individuals frame their experiences in terms of group norms and values. This may be a particularly important idea for college writers who likely enter composition classrooms with a sense of writing as an activity that is done in isolation and that is more a matter of expressing the "self" than of taking on group norms—or what we might call "discourse conventions." In his explanation about how storytelling in AA transforms identity, Jensen is at pains to point out the social nature of this transformation. He writes: "The search for identity within AA might seem to be the kind of interior psychological journey that is historically associated with the Romantics: the individual goes within and discovers his true self. But taking on a new identity within AA has much more to do with the persona, a person's social role" (Jensen 95). Just so, it is important that students identify themselves as *writers*, not only in the Romantic sense of the word, but also in the social sense— of taking on the social persona of the writing group.

   Ritualized utterance, then, is an important tool for establishing a social persona. Such rituals include repeating the same words at each meeting, hearing those words echoed by others, and having them shape the way group members presents and respond to each other. In addition to having students begin each writing group by reading aloud the "Guidelines For Sharing Writing," I have experimented with structuring feedback along lines similar to those I observed at the group therapy sessions I had observed at family week. For much of this semester, I have insisted that my students respond to each other using the formula: "What I noticed about the writing was . . . ; What I related to about the writing was . . . ; What I wanted to know about the writing was . . . ." When the members of the group are finished giving feedback, the writer is asked to reflect on what she has heard, by saying, "What I got from this feedback was . . . ."

   I thought at first that my emphasis on using this script might put off many of the students, but I've been surprised at the good will with which they've indulged me. Still, I must admit that, at times, especially in the beginning of the semester, the ritual has felt a little silly and artificial. It is important to note, however, that newcomers to recovery often feel the same awkwardness at taking on a persona that is not really theirs.[5] Creating a ritual for students to use, even when it feels artificial, helps to ease them into the social norms and values of a writing group. In fact, the importance of ritual may be a powerful argument for a sequence of writing courses in which first semester students are mixed into groups with more advanced students. As in twelve step meetings,

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[5] On this subject, Jensen writes: " As they identify with others in the program, newcomers take on a new persona (they learn how to talk 'program talk' in what seems to be a rather bad play acting.) Even when they are not advised to do so, they try to play a role that they do not yet understand" (Jensen 98). It's interesting to note the similarity here to what some compositionists have said about students needing to mimic the discourse conventions of academic writing even when they do not yet fully understand those conventions. (I think, in particular of David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University.")

the more experienced students would be able to model the norms and values of
the group for the newcomers.

Of course, as I have said earlier, there are times when more directive feed-
back is appropriate, just as there are times in an addict's recovery when a spon-
sor may offer advice and guidance. In my basic writing class this semester, I
offered students the opportunity to give each other more "critical" feedback later
in the semester, and I often gave such feedback myself in conferences and in
written responses to drafts. Obviously, there are situations when students require
guidance, particularly with complex arguments or issue-oriented papers. Still,
I've found myself wondering if the writing group is not perhaps the wrong venue
for this more active intervention and directive feedback. The kind of intangible
energy that I've been trying to harness through structured rituals of sharing, feed-
back, and reflection is a fragile thing, and I find myself protective of this energy,
reluctant to let it be dissipated through activities which might detract from the
primacy of the writer's sharing. Twelve step groups are safe places for sharing
because their rituals reinforce the message that the person sharing will be ac-
cepted as one of the group, and that she will not be judged or evaluated. More
directive feedback, however helpful it might be in a *different* context, might very
well destroy that sense of safety and acceptance, upsetting the focus of the group.
Perhaps the ritual space of the writing group is best preserved when more direc-
tive feedback is saved for one-on-one conferences with me or assigned written
responses from students to each other.

If what I am suggesting in this essay seems distinctly un-academic, then
perhaps this says something significant about academics' bias towards processes
that we can control and direct. I think it also reflects a larger institutional uneasi-
ness with the spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning (an uneasiness that's
pretty well summed up by the quotation from Irwin Hashimoto which precedes
this essay). As students and teachers, we are taught the academic value of "criti-
cal thinking." Indeed, the rhetoric of the academy would seem to be at odds with
the rhetoric of recovery—"critical" here, denoting "skepticism" as opposed to
the faith required by twelve step programs. Some compositionists use terms such
as "critical teaching" or "critical consciousness" to refer to processes of denatu-
ralizing or demystifying the socially constructed power relations underlying aca-
demic conventions. My own involvement in the recovery movement has led me
to believe that there are times when students may access power in their writing
not by "de-mystifying" the writing process, but by "mystifying" it, by seeking
out a higher power that may not be available through either the language or the
methodology of "critical consciousness." But I am also suggesting that the rheto-
ric and ritual of twelve step programs is powerful precisely because it is socially
constructed—that groups (including peer writing groups) can use ritual not in
the service of "self," but to help individuals access a rhetorical power that is
explicitly communal.

We may, however, be reaching a point where we are ready to question the
dichotomy between spiritual and academic rhetorics. In a recent issue of *College
Composition and Communication*, Lizabeth Rand discusses the hostility between
Christian intellectuals and the secular academy. Rand suggests that religious writ-
ers' antipathy towards relativism and academics' discomfort with claims of tran-

scendent truth might yet yield a productive synthesis, one in which relativist ideas of knowledge may provide insight into spiritual struggles (352-53). But perhaps the greatest potential for rethinking the apparent split between socially constructed models of thinking and knowing and more spiritual approaches is their concern with ways of attaining power. Whether that power comes from the self, from the group, or from "God *as we understand God*," it is worth considering ways of thinking, responding, and structuring our classes that allow students to access power that may be unavailable to them through other approaches. In recovery, it does not matter what your "higher power" is, as long as it works for you. For us as compositionists, perhaps the rhetoric of recovery, along with other sorts of spiritual or "non-academic" rhetorics, is worth investigating as an alternative path to finding power in writing.

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Appendix A:

Writing Workshop – Guidelines For Sharing Writing

Writers in this workshop bring writing they are working on to share with the group. Everyone in the workshop promises to follow the following guidelines:

1. Writers in this workshop may introduce their writing by saying something about it. However, they may not apologize for their writing, and they may not say anything negative about it.

2. Members of this workshop will listen attentively to the writer's work. We understand that the writer is not perfect, and we do not expect nor do we demand perfection. We understand that the person reading may stumble or make mistakes. This is not important, and the person reading does not need to apologize for it.

3. The members of the group will respond to the writing being shared with supportive comments and we will express our appreciation by thanking the writer for sharing the work.

4. For the first several weeks of the workshop, the members of the group will not offer criticism nor will we give advice to the writer. We will accept the writing as it is, appreciating where it is in its stage of development.

5. We will try to allow equal time for everyone in the group to share and respond.

6. When responding we will listen respectfully to each other, realizing that what a person says is true for them, even if we disagree or see things differently. We especially value different points of view as long as they are offered in a respectful and supportive manner.

7. As writing group members, we demonstrate our commitment to growing as writers by coming prepared with writing in progress to share with each other.

Guidelines For Giving Feedback:

Group members are asked to respond to each person's writing by saying:

- What I noticed about the writing was . . .
- What I related to about the writing was . . .
- What I wanted to know about the writing was . . .

The writer, after listening to feedback, is encouraged to say a little about what he or she heard:

- What I got from this feedback was . . .

Appendix 2: "Group Participant Guidelines"

(From *The Twelve Steps: A Way Out*)

1. Recognize that your Higher Power is in charge.
   - Gratefully acknowledge the presence of your Higher Power and pray for guidance and direction.

2. Make a point of offering love in an appropriate manner.
   - Respect the needs of others by asking permission to express concern with a hug or a touch. Many are uncomfortable with physical contact.

3. Focus individual sharing on the step being worked.
   - Focus sharing on individual experience, strength, and hope in working the steps being discussed.
   - Allow equal time for everyone in the group to share.

4. Limit talking and allow others to share.
   - Keep your comments brief, take turns talking, and don't interrupt others.
   - Respect each person's right to self-expression without comment.

5. Encourage comfort and support by sharing from one's own experience.
   - Do not attempt to advise or rescue them.
   - Accept what others say without comment, realizing it is true for them.
   - Assume responsibility only for our own feelings, thoughts, and actions.

6. Refrain from "cross talk."
   - Cross talk occurs when two or more people engage in dialogue that excludes others. It may also involve advice giving.

7. Maintain confidentiality.
   - Keep whatever is shared within the group to ensure an atmosphere of safety and openness.

8. Avoid gossip.
   - Share your own needs and refrain from talking about a person who is absent.

9. Refrain from criticizing or defending others.
   - Lovingly hold others accountable for their behavior only if they ask you to do so. Otherwise, recognize that we are all accountable to our Higher Power, and it is not our place to defend or criticize others.

10. Come to each meeting prepared and with a supportive attitude.
    - Before each meeting, read designated materials and complete any written exercises.
    - Ask your Higher Power for guidance and a willingness to share openly and honestly when you communicate with at least one other group participant.

Stories of Re-Reading:
Inviting Students to Reflect on
Their Emotional Responses to Fiction

Brenda Daly

More than twenty-five years ago, in *Readings and Feelings*, David Bleich called for a pedagogy that invited students to disclose their emotional responses to literature. For a variety of reasons, I have been hesitant to adopt such an approach in my literature classes, but I have changed my mind during the past ten years. The major reason is that I have come to believe that the habitual censorship of emotions in the academy enforces a gender-based ideology that has negative consequences for everyone. As Jane Tompkins argues in "Me and My Shadow": "Because women in our culture are not simply encouraged but required to be the bearers of emotion, which men are culturally conditioned to repress, an epistemology which excludes emotions from the process of attaining knowledge radically undercuts women's epistemic authority" (123). For me, one consequence of this exclusion of emotion is that for years I struggled with issues of authority as a writer, unaware that my gender socialization would help to explain why. Not until I entered a doctoral program at the age of 37, and under the guidance of feminist professors, did I begin to analyze how gender socialization had shaped my identity. Sadly, only *after* having made major life decisions, such as marriage, did I find teachers who encouraged me to explore and write about how the act of reading might affect my life choices. Only in retrospect did I recognize that my schooling had actually been designed to prevent me from thinking critically about the effects of my gender socialization on my life.

Unwilling to perpetuate this kind of schooling, I have begun designing courses and assignments that encourage, rather than inhibit, the practice of introspection. My assumption is that the habit of introspection—the practice of looking within to examine one's thoughts and feelings—does not simply emerge with maturity, but can be taught, or at least encouraged, in some students. Unfortunately, many literature teachers miss an opportunity to encourage the habit of introspection because, for one thing, we rarely ask students to reflect on their personal responses to assigned readings. Instead, traditional writing assignments require students to analyze a literary work while avoiding any use of the word "I." Such pedagogy, I am convinced, forces students to suppress any examination

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of relevant life experiences, perpetuating the exclusion of emotion from the process of attaining knowledge. By contrast, teachers of writing frequently assign personal narratives, not only in first-year composition, but also in advanced courses in life writing. Why not, then, use this familiar genre in literature classes? While some readers will find nothing "new" in such an approach, the use of the personal in scholarly writing remains a controversial practice in literary studies; therefore, some literature professors might well argue that it is not wise to introduce this transgressive practice to undergraduates.

In fact, I once held this view, but I have changed my mind, and I'd like to explain why. My own resistance to making public revelations about my emotional responses to literature was rooted in a fear of exposing a family secret: that I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. It is a difficult to say this, especially to strangers; however, as I have explained more fully in an autobiographical-scholarly book, *Authoring a Life*, I could not have survived as an English professor had I not managed to integrate this "personal" trauma into my professional life, the life of a reader, teacher, theorist, and critic of literature. I understand, in retrospect, that because of my traumatic past, I may have been overly worried about inviting students to make disclosures when writing about literature. I have been concerned, for example, that if a woman discloses that she is a survivor of rape, other students may not be supportive. As I know from experience and from reading works such as Judith Lewis Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, the lack of a supportive listener can be traumatic for a survivor. At the same time, literature teachers cannot expect students, who rarely hear personal disclosures, to know how to respond. Instead, based upon the assumption that emotions should be excluded from literature classrooms, the sharing of such stories is often disparaged as "touchy-feely." The problem is: how can we teach students to analyze their own emotions—including the desire to rape or the desire for revenge against the rapist—if we exclude emotions from intellectual inquiry?

Despite such misgivings, I finally decided to address my pedagogical fears, rather than continuing to avoid them. Early in the 1990s, at the request of graduate students who had read my personal scholarship in collections such as *The Intimate Critique*, I agreed to conduct tutorials in how to write this taboo form of scholarship. More recently, I have designed and taught two graduate seminars that invite personal disclosures, one called "The Use of the Personal in Scholarship" and the other, "Trauma, Memory, Healing and Narrative," both of which were rated highly by students. It bears mentioning that I might not have taken such risks had I not had the professional support of English educators Jane Tompkins and David Bleich, both of whom have also had a powerful influence upon how I teach literature. David Bleich has, for example, articulated theories that inform my belief that our social identities—or memberships, as he calls them in *The Double Perspective*—influence how we read, discuss, and write about literature. At the same time, inviting students to make personal disclosures is not always a benign practice. As Megan Boler explains, teaching is a form of "pastoral power" that employs "modern methods of maintaining discipline and control" (21), that include "surveillance, or *fear of being* surveiled;" "peer policing [that] capitalizes on such structures of feelings as shame, humiliation, and desire for conformity" (22).

In short, inviting students to disclose their emotional responses to literature

might become a means, not of asking students to explore their own emotions, but of putting them under pastoral surveillance. One can understand, given the ethical dilemma posed by this pedagogy, why some teachers avoid it. Bleich addresses this issue, at least in part, by differentiating between disclosure and confession:

Disclosure and collaboration require neither confession nor revelation, which take place in completely private and completely universalist contexts, respectively. To confess and reveal have an implied reference to a religious morality, as if one were confessing sins and revealing secrets. Disclosure refers to telling things in intermediate contexts like groups, subgroups, classrooms, and lecture halls, where estimations need to be made about appropriateness and helpfulness to others as well as oneself. (*Know and Tell* 17)

Confession would allow a teacher "pastoral power," as Boler argues; by contrast, according to Bleich, "Disclosure presupposes readiness of a collaborative context, which includes a certain level of trust among peers and authority figures as well as the sense that the disclosed information could be germane to the ongoing work of the class" (17). Such "readiness of a collaborative context" is not always easy to achieve in undergraduate literature classes at a large university such as Iowa State, nor have students had the opportunity to learn how to estimate what is and is not "germane" or what is or is not "appropriate." But they can be given an opportunity to learn these social skills.

I have learned that even when students do not know each other, as in English 384, "Twentieth Century Fiction," which enrolls up to 35 students, it is possible to develop this "readiness of a collaborative context." I decided to attempt an experiment in English 384, not only because I teach this undergraduate course on a regular basis, but because I had already successfully introduced the option of writing "personally" about literature to graduate students, and to undergraduates in women's literature courses. Also, since few students in "Twentieth Century Fiction" are English majors, I do not feel obliged to teach them the conventions of literary criticism. But, most important, I have come to believe that disclosure has potential benefits for undergraduates, many of whom have yet to make life-altering decisions about marriage and careers. As Bleich argues in *Know and Tell*, "Disclosure can help to bring the subjective and the collective categories of experience together; it can maintain the necessity of understanding the collective within the subjective, and the subjective within the collective" (16).[1] Within this feminist, reader-response theoretical framework, I designed writing assignments that required students to reflect on their responses to fiction—including their emotional responses—at various stages in the reading and re-reading process.

As stated on the syllabus, "Twentieth Century Fiction" would focus, not only on the text, but on the text *and* reader or, more precisely, on what Louise Rosenblatt describes as the "transaction" between reader and text. Reading is a temporal activity, I informed students, an activity that occurs through time; there-

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[1]Again, having personally benefited from this process of self-disclosure in writing, I am reasonably confident that undergraduates will also benefit. I explore the risks of requiring students to make personal disclosures in "I Stand Here Naked and Best Dressed in Theory;" I focus on the benefits of making disclosure an option in "Radical Introspection in Teaching and Scholarship."

fore, some of my writing assignments would require them to examine the experience of reading, both before and after class discussions, reports, and lectures. Next, I introduced students to the notion that they might read a story differently because they occupy different subject-positions. In an introductory lecture, I informed them that, as articulated by reader-response theorists—such as David Bleich, Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocinio Schweickart, Jane Tompkins, and others—a reader's interpretation may be affected by a range of memberships and/or social identities: gender, sexual orientation, race, class, religion, or age. Because my goal was to encourage students to reflect on these differences, rather than simply take note of them, I sometimes pointed out during class discussions that my interpretation of a passage differed from theirs, perhaps because of my age, gender, or race. A few students joined me in this practice—once, for example, a young woman acknowledged that her emotional response to Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried" was intensified by the fact that her father was a Vietnam veteran. However, I did not require self-disclosures during class discussions.

I assigned a series of short papers, only one of which, the last, I have space to examine here. The first assignment, in accord with academic convention, required students to analyze a theme or a modernist technique. However, rather than suppressing the "I," as required by academic convention, this assignment also required students to analyze their own responses, as readers, to the particular theme or technique. How, for example, did they respond to ambiguous closure, a feature of modernist fiction? Some students shared their frustrations while, at the same time, acknowledging that the technique drew them into an engagement with the story. The second assignment required students to write a narrative of their reading experience. While most students have written personal narratives, I assumed that few had been asked to write a narrative analyzing their response, over time, to a literary work. Here is the assignment:

> Write an essay (3 to 4 pages) in which you tell the story of your reading experience with one short story. You may choose any story. [. . .] If possible, take notes as you read, commenting on what cues guide your reading of the story (a repeated image, for example), what confuses or pleases you; what raises and/or disappoints your expectations (ironic conclusion, for example). After reading any commentaries, reflect on your interpretation; did it change? Explain how. After hearing a lecture or report on criticism, did your understanding change? How so? Did seeing a movie based on the story change your interpretation? Did class discussion alter your interpretation? If so, how? Before writing your narrative, be sure to reread the story. Keep in mind: the best story has some sort of conflict or problem that creates tension. Give us a story line, not just a report, that records the movement of an intelligent and inquiring mind.

To avoid a misuse of pastoral power, I did not *require* the disclosure of personal experiences or emotions, but the assignment does make room for disclosures, and some students—mostly but not exclusively women—did include personal details about their emotional responses.

The results of the writing assignment were intriguing. As I told the students, I had not anticipated how much I would enjoy reading their narratives. One reason for my pleasure was, quite simply, that this set of papers was different from the many I have read during the past the thirty years. I also enjoyed learning more about students' lives, as, for example, when they set the scene of their reading late in the day, after coming home from a job or studying for a biology test. These scenes also demonstrated some skill at writing the personal essay. At the same time, I was not completely satisfied with the results of this assignment. While their "Stories of Reading" demonstrated a willingness to be honest about their initial responses to a work of fiction, including confusion and distaste, they did not always demonstrate, as required by the assignment, how their interpretations had changed following lectures, reports, discussions, and re-readings. One or two young men reported, with refreshing honesty, that they were "too stubborn" to change their minds, even in the face of convincing evidence from reports, lectures, etc. In such cases, I asked them to reflect on, but did not penalize, this refusal to change. Instead, as I had explained in advance, I evaluated their attentiveness to details in the stories, as well as in commentaries (in the anthology), class discussions, as well as reports and lectures on criticism, historical, and cultural background. If students ignored background information, I lowered their grades, explaining that I had done so not because they did not share my views, but because they had ignored relevant information provided in lectures and reports.[2]

It seemed only fair to give students a second chance at this assignment before making it the focus of a pedagogical study. I decided to repeat assignment #2 for their final essay, but this time I would give them an option: they could write a traditional comparison paper or a narrative of their re-reading experience. I offered this choice to determine what preferences might emerge. While I did not plan to draw conclusions based on so small a sample, I hoped that the results might at least suggest possible improvements in this assignment for the future. Next, to make these two options roughly equivalent, I added one requirement to the narrative option: students were to "consider this story in relationship to a story we had read earlier in the semester. What similarities and differences, echoes or variations, do you perceive?" Thus, in both assignment options, students would be required to think comparatively about fiction we had read earlier and later in the semester. My purpose remained the same: to determine whether a different kind of writing assignment—in this instance, a narrative of their read-

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[2]I also learned that I must change some aspects of my teaching, especially on issues of race. Even when students chose to write about stories such as Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues," they often avoided the topic of race, despite the fact racial issues had been addressed in reports and lectures. For example, some students ignored relevant background information—as, for example, when a white male reader analyzed jazz in "Sonny's Blues" without alluding to a lecture explaining the historical relationship between African American music and literatures. Such omissions occurred with greatest frequency when students wrote about stories by and about African Americans. In a future study, I intend to explore the silences about race. Is such behavior a form of misconceived "politeness," passive resistance, or habit? If I call student attention to such evasions, will they become more introspective about their attitudes?

ing and re-reading experiences—might encourage students to disclose their feelings about literature and reflect on them. Again, because it might be perceived as coercive, I did not require students to reflect on the effect of their social memberships on their reading experiences, but I hoped that a second experience with this assignment would prompt them to become more introspective about their socially constructed identities, especially since I had frequently modeled this practice in class. In the analysis that follows, I focus primarily on student disclosures (or lack thereof), and on their reflections on only one type of social membership: gender.

As I have already suggested in my introduction, my assumption throughout this study is that "masculine" and "feminine" are cultural constructions, subject to change. Of the 28 students in "Twentieth Century Fiction," two females (out of 19) and five males (out of nine) chose not to participate in this study. I can only speculate about why there was a higher level of refusals from male students. Are males less willing to become "objects" of a study such as this because this places them, or their texts, in a vulnerable position? Gender differences also emerged in student preferences of genre: males showed a definite preference for the comparison paper, with seven (out of nine) choosing this more traditional form. Despite the fact that most had received from good to high scores on their previous stories of reading, only two chose this genre. The major reason may be that a comparative analysis is perceived as the "norm;" however, as Bleich points out in *Know and Tell*, often the "norm" is not neutral, but rather an unmarked "masculine" genre. By contrast, 11 females chose the narrative paper, while only six chose the comparison paper. Since the seven females had, with one exception, earned from good to high scores on their first attempts at writing "stories of reading," I do not know why these seven chose the more conventional genre. One reason might be that, having learned to write comparison papers in high school or in a first-year college writing course, they may have felt more comfortable with this genre. Another possibility is that, because self-disclosure is rarely encouraged in literature classes, women have developed a "masculine" preference for suppressing self-disclosures, especially concerning their emotional responses.

For this final assignment, students chose a range of stories, but since the greatest number (seven women and two men) chose to narrate their experiences of reading and re-reading Joyce Carol Oates's novella, *Black Water*, I am focusing my analysis on these papers. My sample consists of only eight papers (one male who wrote on this topic chose not to participate), yet these papers illustrate the kinds of self-disclosure, along with varying degrees of introspection, characteristic of their stories of reading. But first, to provide some context for this study of student essays on *Black Water*, I should explain that our first discussion took place immediately after students had just returned from a one-week Thanksgiving holiday and two weeks prior to final exams. Given such demands on their time and attention, students would, I anticipated, be less actively engaged in class discussion. I could not have been more mistaken. The discussion of *Black Water* proved to be our most intense of the semester. The discussion was intensified by information, provided in student reports, that *Black Water* is a fictional account of a highly publicized event, the death by drowning of Mary Jo Kopechne in a car driven by Senator Ted Kennedy. The novella is remarkably faithful to the

events that took place at Chappaquiddick in 1969; therefore, even though Oates had changed the setting as well as the names of the main characters—from Mary Jo Kopechne to Kelly Kelleher and from Ted Kennedy to The Senator—even a few of the 20-year-olds in my class, who had not yet been born in 1969, recognized the historical basis of the novella.

In one report, a student provided a drawing of Kennedy's car, showing how the young woman was positioned while she drowned (or attempted to escape drowning). Another student reported on the factual details of Kennedy's behavior after the accident, details that painted an even more damning portrait of The Senator than did the novella. At one point during our discussion, to demonstrate the politics of point of view, I put a 1969 *Newsweek* article on the overhead to show that both the cover and the story itself focused on Kennedy, making Kopechne a minor or marginal player. I then pointed out that Oates had deliberately altered the media's point of view to focus on the woman, portraying her during the time she was trapped in the car and drowning. Students debated whether historical information should be allowed to influence our interpretations of the novella, one student arguing forcefully that historical background should not be considered relevant. I countered that, from a reader-response perspective, readers' understandings of a work of fiction are inevitably shaped by the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes they bring to their reading of texts. Another controversial topic, heightened by the "factual" sources of Oates's novella, was the degree of responsibility of the major characters, the 26-year old female victim and the middle-aged male politician who was drinking heavily before driving the car and who continued to drink while driving. Near the close of our 80-minute class period, I asked students to address this ethical question in written responses (of three sentences or so) to be handed in at the end of the class.

Students knew from prior experience that their responses would not be graded, but that I would, at the start of the next class, reply to some of their questions or comments, placing a few responses on the overhead or reading them aloud. In this instance, because their ethical judgments were diverse, I typed them up, handing out all of their statements (on three type-written pages which I haven't space to include here) to illustrate the range of views on the issue of personal responsibility. While many students asserted that Kelly must share some degree of responsibility—she chose to ride with the drunken Senator—most thought that The Senator should be held most responsible for her death because he could have tried to rescue her but chose not to do so. A few students held Kelly most responsible, and I did not directly counter this position. Instead, I informed them that my position was probably most similar to student (I am omitting the male student's name): "The Senator coaxed Kelly. His power as a senator, a man she respects, and as a possible employer/political connection all drag Kelly beyond her wits. 'There may not be a next time' says it all. Kelly needs The Senator's approval. The guilt lies on both parties' shoulders: Kelly was greedy and desired to increase her social/political standing, and The Senator desired not only sexual fulfillment but also, after the accident, to retain the power of his senatorial position." The Senator should be held most responsible, I argued, because he had more power than Kelly did: he was not only older and more experienced, he was also a United States senator. I added that, in my view, Kelly had been scripted for

her submissive part, as we learn through flashbacks, not only by her family, but also by romantic discourses, such as advertising, which Oates satirizes in *Black Water*.

One student, whose response to the ethical question differed most sharply from all the others, asked, "Why do we feel we have to put blame on anyone? Should we blame Kelly for getting into the car with someone who'd been drinking? Should we blame The Senator for his driving? How about the town that didn't block off the abandoned road, or Buffy who was having the party? The Senator's wife was using their house; why don't we blame her and her family? What occurred was an accident. There were no motives." I replied that she had made an excellent point: sometimes tragedies occur, and no one is to blame. However, I explained that, personally, I differentiate blame from responsibility: blaming may be a form of scapegoating, sometimes of victims rather than perpetrators, but all societies hold people accountable (responsible) for harming others, both ethically and legally. I considered asking students to reflect on the gender implications of their ethical positions, but again, because I felt this might be perceived as coercive in a general education course, I decided not to do this. Instead, I concluded by stating, "While it is not appropriate to enforce a particular moral position in an English class, I want to emphasize that one important purpose for reading stories is that they engage us in defining and redefining our values, beliefs, and attitudes. Through such meaning-making activity," I pointed out, "we define and redefine our cultural beliefs and values as well."

How, finally, did students narrate their experiences of reading and re-reading *Black Water*? In contrast to their papers for assignment #2, students were attentive to the reports on historical background of *Black Water*. I am not sure why. Perhaps because they identified more fully with the narrative perspective of the female victim, women students were more willing to at least begin the process of reflecting on gender politics in relationship to their lives. However, all eight students, including one man, referred to the historical events on which the stories were based, information they had learned from reports. Two females opened their essays with an emphasis on this historical background. One wrote, "When I first read the book, *Black Water*, I had no knowledge of the Ted Kennedy incident or of the fact that Joyce Carol Oates based the book on it," while another said, "The highly publicized events behind the story *Black Water* were familiar to me." A third female student, who began her paper, "Inspired by actual events. Based on a true story," went on to explain how the reports had satisfied her hunch that the story was familiar. A male student, referring to class debate over "blurring the lines between fact and fiction," remarked, "It seems many types of fiction are drawn from actual life but it seems that this story was the only one that we truly discussed the difference in. Was that because the other true-life happening didn't affect the story in the way that this one did," he asks, "or was it just because this story shown such a horrendous light upon the actual participants" (3). This question certainly shows a capacity for introspection.

This same white, male student then speculated about why students, himself included, had become highly involved with *Black Water* while, by contrast, he noted, we "didn't bat an eye in class" on learning that both *Slaughterhouse Five* and *The House on Mango Street* drew upon the authors' personal experiences. He

continues, "It is interesting how certain things affect our lives and how certain things just slide off of us like water off of a duck's back." He says, "When it comes to a moral issue and one that involves death instantly, people are rising up in defiance. I admit I am one of the crowd [. . .] for I too felt apathetic towards this story when I first read it, but when I found out there was a real life involved and this had actually happened to someone I was outraged." Not yet satisfied with his analysis, he continues, "The mind is an interesting tool, because when I think back I look at the way I read things [and] I can't understand my reactions to situations brought before me. In *The House on Mango Street* we read about a little girl getting raped and it was barely part of our conversation, or in *Slaughterhouse Five* we read about atrocities committed against real men and it barely affected us." I read on, thinking: "This student recognizes the moral issues in these stories; perhaps he will point out that Oates's novella strikes more emotional chords in his classmates and him—all of them white, with the exception of one African American woman—because the characters, Kelly and The Senator, are also white.

But he did not examine his membership in a social group. Had he done so, he might have suggested that *Slaughterhouse Five* is more distant, historically, than *Black Water,* and *The House on Mango Street* is more distant because the protagonist, Esperanza, is a from a different race and culture, as well as (for male readers) a different gender. In fact, when one male student stated openly in class that, of all the fiction we had read, *The House on Mango Street* was his least favorite, a remark that elicited agreement from a few other males, I suggested that differences in gender and race, between white male readers and a Mexican-American female protagonist, might explain why. However, this white male student resists (forgets about?) examining his membership in certain social groups; instead, he closes his paper by reiterating: "Is it the fact that the line between fact and fiction is blurred that makes us get riled up or is it the fact that the line isn't blurred but is shown so completely that we can't tell the difference?" Yet he had been "shocked and dismayed," he wrote, to learn that the story was based on fact.

This young man's willingness to choose the narrative format, "Stories of Re-Reading," is encouraging, as is his willingness to reflect on his response; however, not once does he refer to his collective identity—as a young white male—despite the fact that I modeled such behavior during class discussions. Yet, as I see it, gender identity was a key issue in student responses to *Black Water*. The dramatic shifts of focus from the reports, which focused on the male's (Kennedy's) actions, to the novella, which focused on the consequences of The Senator's actions for the female victim, intensified readers' awareness of gender politics. In one story of reading, a white female student mentions that tensions between students had, in fact, even surfaced before class began: "I even felt a little defensive when I heard very derogatory comments about her [Kelly] in the hallway before class," she wrote. The male student who had made the derogatory comment openly acknowledged during class discussion that he had blamed the female victim, but defended himself by claiming that he had not known of the novella's historical background. Indeed, he claimed that such knowledge should not be relevant to our interpretation of the novel. (Incidentally, this same male student had, during the first week of class, challenged my authority.) From my

perspective, this male student chose to insist on sharp lines of demarcation between "fact" and "fiction," rather than reflect on his disparaging views of the female victim. In the process, he managed to deflect the attention of many students, including a few women, from examining how their own gender identities may have shaped their responses.

Yet, most young women were willing, although not completely comfortable, with blurring the boundaries between genres. One woman made no apology: "The things I would learn later about that [Chappaquiddick] incident would completely change my perception on this story." Another asserted, "Some people questioned whether we should look at the history in comparison to the story. I don't see how I could have read it any other way. Only if I had not known about the accident could I have read this with a clean slate. Even then, I would still have a concept of the Clinton scandal or something to replace it." A few women were less certain. One wrote, "Unfairly, I can not just analyze the book without thinking about and taking into account the decisions and steps that Kennedy took and placing them on 'The Senator'." Another tried to "keep an open mind. Even at the point when he [the senator] propelled himself to safety by stepping on her head. I tried to be objective." She wrote, I even "questioned if it was fair of [Oates] to represent history in such a way that might do damage to the living." Nevertheless, she concluded, "After my research, I couldn't help but be angry with the Senator (and at myself for being so gullible and giving him the benefit of the doubt)." Another explained, "I try not to confuse fiction with real events, but the idea that this was not a whimsical storyline made me take the book more seriously." Another stated, "Knowing the facts to the real accident changed my perspective on the novel. [. . .] Even after discussing the danger of joining these two, I still make the connection. I don't think it will be easy for anyone to disassociate the two." During a second reading, she said, the reports on historical background caused her to "superimpose that information into the fictional accounts."

If students are to become skilled at introspection, they need to develop an awareness of and a vocabulary for their emotions; therefore, I was pleased that readers often used emotional terms to describe their responses. After hearing the reports, the male said he was "shocked and dismayed," while one female acknowledged feeling "anger and confusion." One woman said she read the book "more seriously," while another reported being "relieved to know I wasn't the only one with that idea nagging me. It was mentioned that the true-life story dealt with the Kennedy family. Ah ha!" Throughout their narratives, women described their emotional responses frequently, using a wide range of terms to articulate their feelings. For example, to describe their first reading of the novella, they used such phrases as: "Enjoyed the splashes of humor" and the imagery, "a little confused and sometimes frustrated by the repetition [. . .] of certain events," "confused and sometimes frustrated by the repetition," "put off [. . .] wondering if the whole book would be repetitious and disjointed," "annoyed with Kelly [. . .] put the book down in defiance," "haunting in my head [. . .] like voices calling from beyond the grave," "I am submerged in a darkness of someone else's creating. Struggling to breathe, I emerge to the top only to be pulled under once again," and "[because of a vague sense of the story's basis in fact] it was hard for me to concentrate."

I was also encouraged by the fact that many students reflected on and even revised their initial responses. One explained, "When I finished the book [. . .] I realized that it [the repetition] did help to build to the climax of the story. It portrayed the intensity of Kelly's struggle, her refusal to give up, more than if Oates had merely stated the facts once and ended the story. How better to illustrate the emotions?" The woman, who had initially been "put off" by the novella, began to "enjoy the style and storyline;" she says, "The stream of conscious style was difficult to read, especially at first. However, it was a good literary device because I felt like I was Kelly trapped in the car. I felt as if I was thinking, not reading the book. It was like the words were my own ideas and memories, and it brought the book to life." Her reading experience of "a sense of chaos and need for survival," she explained, "mirrors how Kelly would have felt at the party and in the car." Another woman, initially annoyed with Kelly, said that after chapter 20, "I had all I could stand of Kelly; I put the book down in defiance and went to bed. As I lay there trying to sleep I realized that even though I was really annoyed with the submissive, and in my opinion stupid behavior that Kelly was displaying, I knew women who were just like Kelly." One young woman, who felt "bombarded with images of the "All American Girl," reported, "I am there, holding her up, trying to breath life back into her."

Some students began to analyze how Oates, through her style, had shaped their emotional responses. Initially, one woman explained, "I felt bad for Kelly, but not really close to what was going on. But with each episode of her life, I grew to know her. This personalization made it harder for me when she dies at the end." She also noted, "The repetition of the event made me relive the accident over and over again, " an experience she found "emotionally draining," but she also noted that the repetition "makes it seem very fairy tale like, only gone very wrong." With both Oates's novella and her short story, she added, "I found myself wanting to escape the feelings they created in me, but not being able to. The emotions were haunting, resurfacing when I least expected it, causing me over and over to relive the stories of these two women." One woman, who also reported being "haunted" by the story, recognized that Oates, "through her style, had almost required me to feel this way. This was done in the manipulation of time," she explained, "which incorporated the use of flashbacks and repetition." She ended with a feeling of "hopelessness," interpreting the novella as a warning that there is "no fairy tale ending, no Prince Charming." Speaking of Oates's novella and her short story, another woman wrote, "My perceptions, of both pieces of fiction, are that Oates wants her readers to empathize with the female victims of these stories. She wants her readers to feel what the victims went through in order to have a better understanding of why it happened."

What is encouraging in this small sample of papers is the willingness of students to reflect on their initial responses and, in many instances, change their minds. One woman volunteered at the opening of her paper: "I really enjoy looking at how I perceive a story and how that perception can change depending on different information that I receive." This student, more open than most, also disclosed relevant information about her beliefs and values. "Many feelings [. . .] continue to program girls to feel incomplete without a man. I strongly disagree and am fiercely independent because I want to be different." In this pas-

sage, the student begins to examine the relationship between her individual and collective identities. Aware of her collective identity as a woman, she explains that she is actively resisting society's effort to "program" her to feel in need of a man. Another woman, who recognizes the novella as a parody of "Cinderella" waiting for her "Prince Charming," interprets *Black Water* as a warning to women, rather than as encouragement to resist social programming for female submission. However, another woman emphasized the victim's individual rather than her collective identity—perhaps to counteract the victimizer's failure to do so. In retrospect, I wish I had allowed more time for students to read each other's papers—as I often do—in order to discuss differences in their interpretations.

But before considering how I might do a better job next time I teach this course, I must ask: since women prefer to write narratives of their reading experience whereas men, if given a choice, avoid it, should I continue giving this assignment? My answer is a decided *yes*. I intend to continue making this assignment; however, since males are obviously capable of writing stories of reading, as well as capable of self-disclosure, I will not give students the option to write a more conventional analysis the next time I make this assignment. I am also considering what changes, if any, I should make in my explanation of the reading and re-reading writing assignment. If I require students to share their emotional responses, am I misusing my "pastoral power," forcing them to parade their feelings for my surveillance? I continue to think so. It may also be too coercive to require students to reflect on how their memberships in different social groups—race, gender, class, sexual orientation—may have influenced their reading experiences. For that reason I am planning a less coercive, collaborative practice: I will ask students to exchange their papers in small groups, making written comments on each other's work before turning in their papers to me. In this way, students more practiced in the habit of introspection might teach their less introspective peers to become more reflective, not only about what is "in" the text, but what is in their emotional/intellectual responses to the text. While such self-examination requires establishing a certain degree of trust in the classroom, this modest study teaches me that it is possible to develop enough trust, even within the short span of a 15-week semester, to encourage the habit of introspection. What I have learned, then, is that the potential benefits of disclosure outweigh the risks. ◌

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Successful Blunders:
Reflection, Deflection, Teaching

Devan Cook

*Miraculous and marvelous are clues; both words come from an ancient
Indo-European root meaning simply to smile or to laugh.
Anything wonderful is something to smile in the presence of,
in admiration (which, by the way, comes from the same root,
along with, of all telling words, "mirror"). (207)*

—Lewis Thomas

One of my students told me that in high school, her favorite class was chemistry. "The teacher didn't know anything," she said. "It wasn't even his subject. We had to learn the material and teach it to him. In every class, he made at least one mistake." The teacher might simply have been "performing" ignorance, pretending not to know anything about chemistry so the students would take more initiative. However, that seems not to have been the case; he usually taught history and coached the basketball teams and was called upon to cover this chemistry class at the last minute in a small, rural high school. What a successful teacher he must have been, to transform his lack of knowledge into a successful chemistry class.

Yet as teachers we work hard to avoid mistakes; terrified of entering a classroom unprepared, we plan our assignments and keep records carefully. We love control. Surely our efforts are not misguided, but taken in sum they create a firewall against mistakes in teaching, and mistakes, like the chemistry teacher's above, can be a powerful way to learn. I make a lot of mistakes in my courses, but I tend not to handle them as well as the teacher above, who misrepresented (due to lack of knowledge, the best of reasons) the subject of chemistry. Here I would like to examine my most successful blunder—caused by the ways my course and I represented students, or misrepresented them—and speculate about why it worked. Replication might be difficult because "performance" would be involved; the high school history teacher would have learned at least a little chemistry if he had to teach it twice.

A Rhetoric of Representation

Representation is both difficult and problematic, but it is an essential part of teaching. We cannot act without it. As teachers, we may represent ourselves, given

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our personalities and theoretical bents, as more advanced fellow writers, coaches, cheerleaders, discourse police, parents, watchdogs, laborers in the knowledge factory, cogs in the university's bureaucratic machine, or beckoning, seductive Socratic interrogators.

But, always, we are authorities. We represent classes we teach, and students, too—rhetorically, as texts, audience, and speakers. Jennie Nelson points out that we tend to read classes as texts, and that our teaching would benefit if we could read students as well as they read us (412). Recently, Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede have questioned the ways they (as teachers and researchers) constructed students as audience in their early and influential essay, "Audience Addressed, Audience Invoked":

> [T]he students invoked in AA/AI were in important ways the students we had been—eager, compliant, willing to shape ourselves to rhetorical situations. Our desire to invoke such students and to (re)write experience in such a way as to highlight success not failure, consensus not conflict, progress not struggle, is, we have realized, deeply imbedded in our relationship to schooling as well. (171)

We want (or rather, I want) students to become like us, or failing that, like our former students or the representations we have made to ourselves and others about them; we want their progress through our classrooms to mirror our personal narratives or previous successes, no matter how much we may have edited or cleaned them up.

Meanwhile, from the first class day students represent us as text, trying to "read" our mysterious agenda. And of course they represent us as audience—addressed, invoked—for their writing, hoping to appeal to us while shaping or revising us toward a more open-ended, inclusive reading of their products. When they share class notes or repeat assignments, they represent us as speakers. Sophisticated in the rhetorical processes needed to read the classroom, their poetics of representation are shaped by prior teachers and courses.

Misrepresentation

In spring two years ago, I had an English 101 class—first year writing, first semester. But it was spring semester; almost all of the students had failed the class at least once before. How can I best describe (represent) these students? The class met right after lunch, so students appeared not only disillusioned, oppressed, alienated, and wary—fearful of what might happen to them in English 101 this time around—but sleepy, too. (Interestingly, one possible root of "blunder" is the Old Norse *blunda*, "to doze.") Certainly that was the way I felt after driving thirty miles to school over icy roads and then sitting in my office for half a day, dealing with the petty aggravations junior faculty encounter as a matter of course. But the students seemed even more disengaged than I, in pain and angry about it, while at the same time their resignation suggested they felt powerless to prevent the inevitable occurrence of what I imagined to be the cause of their pain—my class—and the fact that they were required, yet again, to take it.

Make no mistake: I like teaching first year writing. In fact, I prefer it. About

three-fourths of the classes I've taught have been first-year courses, and usually the students' energy and enthusiasm for writing and learning keep me going, counterbalancing the institutional pressures that I often resist. Donald Murray, writing about his decision to teach, said that an acquaintance, in an attempt to discourage him, suggested that teaching at the college level would be like "being bitten to death by ducks" (354). However accurate this description may be, usually the students' "juice" keeps me from feeling like duck mash.

But this class was different. Unfortunately, I had ordered and assigned a book that further angered this already-unhappy class: Elizabeth Stone's *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins: How Our Family Stories Shape Us. Black Sheep* discusses ways we construct self-identities and families construct family identities, from the stories we hear and repeat that become, over time, a canon of family legend, composing lessons in what it means to be one of us—a Torres or a Baker, for example.

To illustrate, Stone offers this story from her own family:

> Annunziata was the daughter of a rich landowner in Messina, Sicily, so the story went, and she fell in love with the town post-man, a poor but talented man, able to play any musical instrument he laid eyes on. Her father heard about this romance and forbade them to see each other. So in the middle of one night [. . .] she ran off with him in her shift. (3)

A lovely story, certainly. But then Stone realized, as an adult, that "our most idiosyncratic family conviction—that the arts are supremely important and certainly more important than money—was there even in that story, when my great-grandmother chose as her true love that talented but poor postman" (6). The family story, selected and retold, had shaped not only Elizabeth Stone but generations of this couple's descendants, who had collected more advanced degrees and more romantic encounters than cash.

I too come from a family with lots of stories told to, as Stone asserts, "provide the family with esteem," "give messages and instructions," and "issue warnings and prohibitions" (5). "Teach!" my grandmother proclaimed, as she re-membered happily supporting herself in a one-room schoolhouse in St. Martinville, Louisiana, around the turn of the century. An orphan, she had insisted that her cousin pay her way through Branham and Hughes Academy, and with degree in hand she left Tennessee and made her way in the world. Pragmatism and self-sufficiency are subtexts of this story; my grandmother was not a romantic.

So I felt the book represented my experience with family stories; I loved it. I thought the students I had taught the previous year in another state had loved it, too. Just as I had, they had come from an Appalachian culture—family-centered, with a strong oral tradition. Several of them used the course's researched assignments to investigate their family histories: one discovered that her grandfather, a Cherokee doctor, had been a respected, important member of the Scotch-Irish town where he lived. Before she began research, she feared that he had lived a frustrated, unhappy life on the community's margins, but instead he was a property owner and the only doctor for miles. From this story, his granddaughter, who planned to go into counsel-ing, felt encouraged and approved as she continued her studies.

Thus, in ordering books and writing class plans, I represented *all* of this year's students as *some* of last year's, in the process misrepresenting both: classes are not unified in their desires and perspectives, and generalizing about groups of students was one of my first mistakes. Yet given academic timetables, such representations are an inevitable and perhaps even necessary part of teaching. Usually I can proceed through the semester with a few minor adjustments; careful listening helps. But this time problems caused by misrepresentation were more central to the class's work and thus derailed its progress.

The Process of Deflection

Although my new students disliked reading, they plowed through *Black Sheep* anyway. They were assigned to write a series of journal-type informal responses to Stone's book, followed by an essay using what they'd learned in reading to explore a family story. Did such stories represent students' lived experiences and the way they thought or spoke about them? Did their lives mirror family stories?

By writing around and into these stories, I hoped students would explore, identify, and/or resist all or part of their stories—just as my grandmother had done when she revised her role of "penniless homeless female relative" to "schoolteacher" by demanding a formal education, in the process creating a new and valuable family tale. My former student's research into her grandfather's history provided similar material for revision. Her grandfather was not marginal or "peculiar" because he practiced traditional herbal medicine; instead, he was his town's doctor and provided an essential service to all its citizens. Neither was her interest in counseling marginal; she, also, would provide a valuable service to her community.

I was fascinated this semester's students complained bitterly about *Black Sheep* but continued to read; as far as this text was concerned, apathy was not a problem. Every day students would come to class, loudly disparaging the previous night's assignment. After they'd finished the book, I asked them to write one more response. "You're an editor at Penguin," I told them, "and you gave Elizabeth Stone a $10,000 advance to write *Black Sheep and Kissing Cousins*. Now you have to make sure that the book makes enough money to recover her advance and your printing costs. What will you tell her to do—to rewrite— in order to make the book salesworthy, even attractive? After all, you'd like it to become a best-seller so you can receive a bonus."

This assignment was the most successful of the semester. Students, it turned out, had plenty of editorial advice. In considering language as active and persuasive, Kenneth Burke writes, "if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must also be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality" (45). I had chosen the textbook based upon reflections and selective representations of former students and classes; now, through their talk and writing students deflected the text and my expectations of ways they might receive it to better reflect/represent their experiences.

They came to class prepared. "Did she interview anyplace besides New York?" James asked disgustedly.

"Yeah, and did she interview anyone under forty?" Heads nodded; students

muttered and consulted their notes. "She wants us to think everybody's like the people she knows." The students talked heatedly for a whole class period about what Stone should and should not do, although they weren't heated with each other. For once, they were in surprising agreement: "Include more young people, more people from the West, more working people. Everyone in the book comes from Europe and lives in New York. They're all well-educated; they're all rich; they're all old."

"It's repetitive," Ron said. "The same thing over and over. Why doesn't she just say what she's going to say once and then let people tell their stories?" We had often discussed repetition as a convention of academic writing: making a point, looking at that point from varied angles and perspectives, repeating and rewording, teasing out connections and arguments for and against, and revisiting—one hopes, slightly farther along the road to understanding—the same point in the conclusion. These students thought so much repetition was a bad idea: once was enough.

I listened and did not chime in to take advantage of this "teaching opportunity." Jenny, a woman seated near the back of the room, spoke quietly. "My sociology professor says it's not good to pick out passages from interviews like she does. She should talk less herself, and let the people she interviewed talk more." Once again, students nodded; many of them had liked sociology—something else I didn't know. They disliked Stone's habit of interrupting narratives and commenting heavily; they felt she disrespected her informants and their stories, too hastily shutting off their voices.

Brad read his advice to Elizabeth Stone aloud: "Pick 5 people and stick with them. Give them a whole chapter each to tell their story. You get 5 chapters. You get an intro and conclusion. That's 2. Marriage, Money, and Luck would be good for the others. Everything you say could fit in there. Then, put your 5 people's stories between them so it's more interesting."

The students' advice about reformatting *Black Sheep* operates from sweeping generalizations about Stone's research and discussion. But it reveals the sophistication of their reading and critical practices, as well as the faith they felt in the ways they read as opposed to the ways I expected them to read. Clearly, students felt that Stone's evidence in support of her thesis—family stories shape the ways we "choose" to live our lives—did not reflect their identities, histories, and contexts. They thought Stone was mistaken—as mistaken as an unprepared high school chemistry teacher—and they took this opportunity to tell her so. Nobody in *Black Sheep* had to leave their hometown because the silver mine or lumber mill closed; no one went to taco feeds at the grange hall; no one spoke Basque or came from a family that once supported the Wobblies.

Students did not see Stone's stories as published "delegates" for their own and felt no agency from them or in them. Many of their editorial suggestions were meant to broaden Stone's reading of who she might be representing: "Add ranchers, elk hunters, snowboarders, Mormons. Add people who can represent *us*. Then, we'll consider your ideas more seriously." As Sara wrote in her response, "My dad had to roll irrigation pipe and drive the spud truck. So did I. He couldn't play sports, and he missed a lot of school. At least I got to be on the volleyball team because us kids had a car. I don't know where Elizabeth Stone would put us in her book."

Finally, I began to understand: instead of an enclosed and conventional academic monologue, students wanted *Black Sheep* to be more open, a conversation between Elizabeth Stone and her respondents and, potentially, between their stories and hers. The students believed they could join in the discussion only if there was room for their stories, too. The large number of interviews and the tightly woven surface of the text—a thread from one person here, a swatch of another history there, bound together by the moving shuttle of Stone's interpretation—dissuaded them. So why, students asked me, should they be given a personal writing assignment based upon a book that left out who they were, what they believed made them? *Black Sheep*, they felt, told them who they were supposed to be: Eastern, middle class, middle-aged. How could they write a personal essay about the sort of family history they had never experienced?

Reflection, Distortion, and Identity

A reviewer, responding to an earlier version of this essay, wondered why I did not use the critical evaluation assignment to counter the "parochial nature of our students." But my own parochial nature and the parochial nature of the assumptions I made about the desirability of students' adopting my perspectives, rather than developing their own, was more of a problem. Sure that this class apprehended and evaluated family history and experience in much the same manner as my former students and I did, wasn't I being at least as insular as they? The question, it seems, is not what to do about parochial students—and yes, these were, Western and working class down to their DNA—but about admitting that teachers can be just as limited as their students (and maybe more so).

In retrospect, I am not at all certain that I would like to remake Western working class people in my own image and likeness; I prefer them as they are (just possibly, the academic world has more than enough people like me already). In *Writing and Sense of Self*, Robert Brooke defines and describes identity—specifically, students developing an identity as writers—as critically important to successful writing instruction. He states, in explaining "how self and society interact to form identity," that identity theory "would describe the way selves are formed in the interaction between available roles and individual desire" (11). And he quotes Erving Goffman, a sociologist who has written extensively about identity: "We always find the individual employing methods to keep some distance, some elbow room, between himself and that with which others assume he should be identified" (qtd. in Brooke 24).

Thus students, invited to guest-edit and "save" Stone's book, found writing space where they could position themselves between roles I as teacher thought they could or should play—among them, the role of eager acolyte cozily positioned in a talkative middle-class family—and the roles they actually inhabited. In a similar vein, Jennie Nelson argues for "the importance of finding ways to make students' interpretive practices a part of the classroom discussion about writing assignments" (427), for these were roles students wanted to either continue or transform according to their own desires, not mine.

After the class ended, I puzzled over the fact that the editing assignment had been much more successful—if success means more talk, writing, and sophisti-

cated thought—than the essay based upon the book's premises which followed. Deflection worked better than the reflection I had originally assigned. Surely one reason was that although I amended that assignment to encourage students to write into gaps they'd identified in Stone's text—tell your whole story, make your contexts and histories part of the picture, extend the critique of Stone's ideas you began with the "editing" responses, get it all off your chest—students may have still felt excluded by the smooth, tight structure of Stone's arguments.

In some fundamental way, students' editorial advice suggested, her book failed to represent not only people, but also ideas and concepts with which they could identify. Stone positions family stories as universally or globally instructional and inscribing: such stories always help families construct their common identities and goals. But these first-year students in effect replied, "Not so fast! What's a family? What's a story? You aren't talking about stories or families as we know them. Many of us more or less raised ourselves and are managing fine, thank you; we know what we're doing. We think you should have tested your ideas more broadly if you want to sell books. We think you rushed to publish."

I didn't agree with students that Stone rushed to publish; in fact, I continued to believe that a different population of students (the people I taught—and who taught me—in Kentucky, for instance) might have identified with it, marveled at how similar its mirrored images were to their own pictures of themselves and their families, and happily used it in the classroom. If my reflection/representation of their realities serves, they would not think *Black Sheep* was filled with mistakes in content and editing.

Yet I consider this assignment a successful blunder, albeit one I am not sure how to replicate other than assigning *Black Sheep* every semester. Still, the high school chemistry class's progress suggests an intriguing possibility, for in it students' roles were very different from those they might have expected to play. In high school chemistry that year, students were either co-learners with the teacher or . . . teachers themselves, people who knew chemistry well enough to instruct another (i.e., the teacher). In fact, because they had to correct continually the teacher's mistakes, students could be said to hold the final authority about the subject matter.

Blunders as Openings for Critique

Certainly I am not suggesting that we abandon instructional authority and allow students to teach all subjects. This teacher really did know less chemistry than his students, and there was nothing false about his situation. But I am suggesting that we teachers may know less than we think we know, and students may know more. The problem is that much of what students know often doesn't seem academic, yet it's crucial to create spaces for their knowledge to dialogue with ours so that critical thinking and understanding can occur.

My blundering assignment, I suspect, helped students adopt a critical perspective. These students were well-positioned to be critical because their lives in school had been so unsuccessful; many of them were right at the point of giving up higher education as a bad choice and the university as a place that did not care about people like them. Stone's text, as I had assigned it, inadvertently reinforced the notion that, in the academy, *they* were a mistake.

Jane Tompkins critiques "an educational process that infantilizes students, takes away their initiative, and teaches them to be sophisticated rule followers. Of course, as professors, we don't see the ways in which what we do as teachers narrows and limits our students: for we ourselves have been narrowed and limited by the same process" (209). These students were not the "sophisticated rule followers" I expected them to be, nor were they willing to be in subordinate or acolyte positions. They were a little less conventional, a little more independent, than the academy's representation of "successful students." Yet when invited to revise their expected roles to serve as proxy editors, they were articulate, even profound as they suggested revisions that could make the text mirror/represent their experiences, too.

My blunder in assigning this text threatened to leave a huge hole in the class's progress. Students turned that emptiness into a way to talk back, get involved, and set me—and Elizabeth Stone—straight about how they saw themselves, who they were. Their deflective, resistant readings taught me several lessons: students needn't think like me to think critically; mistakes can be useful, even if unnerving; being unwillingness to listen or change assignments can be counterproductive; and sometimes simply being open to opposition is the best way to construct difference. There's a lot of good thinking in first year writing classrooms, even those that seem problematic. And although I know something about teaching the conventions of academic discourse, my representations are no more authoritative than anyone else's. Critical discourse allows for multiple discourses, dialogue rather than monologue. As Burke points out, language that acts may lead to "*conflict*" and "*victimage*" or to "*solution*" and "*dialectic*" (55). Even if it's by mistake, we need to leave the window to ongoing conversation tantalizingly open.

Seen from a non-pedagogical perspective, this is obvious. Ernesto Quinonez, the author of *Bodega Dreams*, told Terry Gross on *Fresh Air* that *West Side Story* doesn't accurately represent Spanish Harlem: "We **hated** *West Side Story*. A comedian named Freddie Prinze used to tell jokes about it. 'A guy's singing to a girl named Maria in Spanish Harlem, and only one window opens!'"

Exactly. ◌

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The Accidental Curriculum

Terrance Riley

Professors of English experience the force of accident and misdirection in their lives in about the same measure as everyone else, but they experience it more vividly because the sprawling, irrational character of accident is at odds with intensity and replicability, the complementary values we use to bring continuity to ourselves and our projects. To be able to see life steadily and see it whole is the hope instilled by our deeply felt sense of the power of concentration and of the incorrigible greatness of some texts; but all of our hankering after "structure" contrasts poignantly with the frequently haphazard way we stumble into lifestyles, lovers, and career tracks. A failed relationship sends the high school teacher on for a Ph.D.; a gull in the sky over Ocean City convinces the poet to pack it in; a year in Nepal makes the Carlyle manuscript irrelevant, and one begins again. One might not regret having taken this road or that; but then we do not use the word "accident." Happy moves are called "turning points." Painful missteps rededicate us to planning, prediction, and caution.

Since we are not in most respects extraordinary individuals, it is not surprising that professors of English desire the ordinary comforts of reproducibility. People end up reproducing the culture with which they identify. Most of us now believe, to some degree, that what we used to call "civilization" *is* mere reproduction (as opposed to, say, "progress"). But professors of English are supposed to know this, to be critically aware of it and therefore immune to the syndrome. We are supposed to know that trying to hypostatize life structures only creates more opportunities for "turning points." Our literary theories, after all, have adopted just this paradox as a principle of discourse: the harder the philosopher/novelist tries to systematize her universe, the more likely she is to drift into contradiction and discontinuity. The carnival now, and not the cathedral, is our metaphor for the novel; we should not be surprised that our lives too have their share of freak shows and funhouses. Nor should we be scared. But fear of madness is more powerful when one looks in the mirror than when one looks in a book, and most of us continue to relegate chance to the shadows, preferring to believe that life's important business is conducted in the sunlight.

Predictably then, our university curriculum in English is a clean, well-lighted place, comprising as many aspects of English studies as we might hope to reproduce successfully from year to year. Thus, it includes, of course, the system of undergraduate and graduate majors, tests for admission and advancement, required and elective courses, credits, GPAs—the package of interchangeable parts

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standardized many years ago by the education industry. It also includes the reproducible course structures created or appropriated by individual teachers (and occasionally endorsed as department policy): the canon or canons which the teacher of, say, Victorian literature arranges to illustrate some portable generalizations; also themes; theories; syllabi; and marking and ranking systems.

But "curriculum" refers also to folklore and exemplary tales and structures, which we sometimes call the " hidden curriculum": the invisible but powerful system of hierarchies and preferments, approved ideas, trains of thought, and professional conduct which guides us when we can't make up our own minds what we should do. Some of these are obsolete and trivial—literature over composition, for instance, and ivy over public—but some retain an ineffable totemic power: schooling is more legitimate than learning on one's own; intensity is more honorable than diffusion; the reproducible is more real than the ephemeral. This colloid of unarticulated beliefs is the real life blood of the curricular animal sketched in the college catalogue. We do want our students to read Dickens, but it is an attitude toward Dickens we want them to absorb. Likewise, as also recorded in descriptions of the English major, we want students to write thesis-driven essays using accepted terminology, methods, and approaches; but what we're really looking for is the passionate expression of a set of values—of clarity, rationality, permanence—and not the external form.

One might say then that the curriculum comprises two domains. The formal curriculum—which is what we normally refer to when we use the word—is designed to work more or less automatically: if the English major follows all the steps and completes the required courses in the correct order, she will have learned what she needs to know. The informal or hidden curriculum is the domain of beliefs and desires, our beliefs and desires, which we hope will be reproduced in our students; but, as a domain of only-half-realized attitudes, it cannot be instilled directly, except by accident, or blunder. We might say further then (or admit, since it is our daily experience) that the informal curriculum undermines the formal: our elaborately programmed sequence of behaviors halts in disarray in the presence of an eager sophomore lit major.

That in practice the formal curriculum is commonly disabled by accidents in the informal (his writing is quirky, his interpretations tactless, his tests scores anomalous) does not apparently disturb our faith in the basic formal arrangements. This fragile confidence in the formal, replicable domain of the curriculum is mirrored in our trust of the learning theory which is supposed to underlie the curriculum. A general sort of cognitive psychology underlies most contemporary pedagogy. It is necessarily general: most English teachers are not experts in learning theory, and would not want to be. But when we are called on to produce expert rationales for our work, we are glad to have on hand such citable figures as Frank Smith. Learning, Smith writes, is

> actively to seek, select, acquire, organize, store and, at appropriate times, retrieve and utilize information about the world. Human learning is rarely passive or accidental; rather it is always directed towards the purpose of increased understanding. [. . .] Children are conceptualized as "constructing theories" in order to make sense of

> the world, and "conducting experiments" to test their theories. (*Comprehension and Learning* 2-3)

What Smith engagingly calls in his own work an information-processing "bias" can be found in many modern learning theorists. The appeal of such a bias to orderly, scholarly minds, or to minds that so fancy themselves, is obvious. But college professors rarely show much interest in the other half of the cognitive approach, its major functional principle: that learning emerges from past experience and that it does so in ways highly specific to the learner. "Individuals," Smith writes a few lines after those cited above, "perceive the world and respond to events in the manner that makes the most sense to them personally at the particular time, in terms of their past experiences and current predilections" (3).

This principle, seen through to its conclusion, cannot be comforting to the professor who likes a controllable classroom. So instead we have developed the half-theory that fits our own "predilections" for intensity and replicability into a pocket paradigm of the life of the mind so neat that most of us don't think about it at all. How to get someone to learn something? Isolate the desired objective ("human who understands literary heritage"), identify the usual means of attaining the objective ("take literature courses"), and impose the experiences ("Your required courses will include . . ."). Along the way, organize the experiences to increase the challenge gradually: move from easy to hard, short to long, simpler to more complicated; from appreciating to analyzing to theorizing. Focus. Test frequently. Nip mistakes. This little bundle of common sense, drawn out into a four-year program and supported with many numbered paragraphs of justification, validates our formal curriculum and informs our myths and folklore. Nearly the whole bag of teacher-wisdom is filled with nuggets from this vein, their uncomplicated cognitivism gleaming happily, like seams of iron pyrites.

And despite the patient assistance of such historians of curricular failure as Laurence Veysey and Frederick Rudolph, most of us maintain a panglossian optimism in traditional pedagogy. We say we believe that this is the way people learn, even as we sit through daily performances of evidence to the contrary, in which prejudice and superstition sweep aside organized learning experiences; in which reconstructing the experience to fit the theory (or prejudice) is much commoner than the reverse; and in which the effects of formal schooling are rarely predictable, profound, or lasting. People do learn a fair amount in classrooms; but they either don't learn what we intended, or they don't learn in the way we designed.

The cognitive psychologists themselves frequently acknowledge that the model of learning they offer can be upset by the cognitive whimsy of the individual human being. Carl Bereiter has been one of the most vigorous advocates of the cognitive model in literacy, and his particular version of learning theory is in wide use. But Bereiter himself (as opposed to those who "use" him, widely) is quite aware of the potentially massive forces which counter the organized learning experience. In a "stop-gap" response to skeptics who doubt that higher order conceptual learning can take place at all, he enjoins teachers "to assume that complex learning does occur, but [. . .] that it is genuinely problematic—chancy, susceptible to failure, in need of all the help it can get." Bereiter's decidedly non-curricular list of complex learning "resources" begins

with "chance" and includes "social supports for learning," "biases," and "a coherent self-concept" (604).

Likewise committed to the cognitive model in educational theory, Howard Gardner has, in a series of books and articles since 1988, identified eight or nine distinct human capacities, or intelligences, each of which may be educated, cultivated, in or out of school. But Gardner warns the would-be teacher against treating any intelligence as an isolable entity; human capacities should rather be considered as "processes and abilities that (like all of life) are continuous with one another" (*Frames* 70). Since all of our "intelligences" are operating all at the same time, there is no reason to expect that a student is developing linguistic ability in a writing class, even if she's paying attention; she might be systematically developing her spiritual or interpersonal side (and *she* doesn't have much more control over her particular cognitions than we do). Like most responsible learning theorists, Gardner acknowledges that the model he has created is not intended to account for learning completely: "such psychological factors as proper motivation, an affective state conducive to learning, a set of values that favors a particular kind of learning, and a supporting cultural context are indispensable (though often elusive) factors in the educational process" (*Frames* 373); and more recently: "Educators' understandable focus on cognition has sometimes had the unfortunate consequence of minimizing awareness of other equally important factors. Probably the most crucial is motivation" (*Disciplined* 76).

Interestingly, Smith, something of a cognitive purist in the early 70s, has more recently come to focus increasingly on the impurities and unpredictabilities of classroom learning. In 1995, he included "curriculum design" in a charming list of educational "disasters" ("Let's" 2). In 1998, a discussion of the "classic view" of learning (that one learns naturally and continually from the community one is affiliated with) versus the "official theory" (that learning is an unnatural act requiring discipline and effort) leads Smith to the following conclusion, among others: "The problem in school is not that many students aren't learning, but *what* they are learning. They may not learn what their teachers teach them, but their teachers may not be teaching what they think they are teaching" (*Book* 10).

Such cautionary notes do not represent a recent refinement of cognitive theory, of course; that people learn according to their own agendas—and not the teachers'—was always part of Smith's theory, as noted earlier. In 1974 Arthur Appleby (no educational heretic) also argued that attention to the design of formal curricula was misplaced: "the repeated observation that the teaching of literature [fails] to achieve [its intended] ends with any significant number of students has usually been mustered during the course of an attempt to substitute one body of content for another, rather than to suggest that it is the stress on content itself that is at fault" (246).

This minor round-up of famous names establishes something quite striking. Despite their general faith in the cognitive model, contemporary learning theorists have significant reservations regarding any confident deployment of the model in a classroom setting—reservations so significant, in fact, that if we look only at the skeptical passages (keeping them out of their larger, more optimistic contexts), they amount to compelling arguments against the effectiveness of any

formal curriculum conceived apart from those larger domains of the variable that Gardner calls "indispensable." Their skepticism foregrounds everything the theory cannot predict and the classroom setting cannot compass. It is not simply that we do not attend to the personal or that students are not intrinsically motivated; this much we might be able to manage. Rather, our learning theory fails to generate a reliable pedagogy because, in the interest of making the classroom dynamic re-producible, it refuses to acknowledge the context of variables which swarms in the vicinity of each human being in every setting of his life, bordering him, though permeably, and making him who he is, though variably. Eliminating variables sounds intuitively right—why would we want accidents in our classrooms, after all?—till one starts enumerating the variables: motive; pleasure and pain; reward commensurate with effort; self-concept and group affiliation; sense of the ultimate ends of life; and a hundred others, each with a hundred ramifications in consciousness. To the partial degree that we are successful in shooing these out the door, we deprive our readers and writers of resources that give rise to the second kind of knowing, the kind we really want—the knowing that becomes part of consciousness and imagination, welcomed not because it can be deployed in the solution of this or that momentary problem, but because it makes life richer; *but* which also leads, kind of accidentally, to sophisticated reading and writing.

If one manages, through some sort of Herculean arm-waving, to sweep one set of variables out of the air—by creating a highly structured instructional unit, for instance—a new set will simply fly into the yard. People *will* have interior lives, and they will learn, something, but the process is not subject to much control. When we try to control it by striking the X-factors out of play, our students without effort call up a new set of unruly memories and "predilections"; they have an inexhaustible supply. So instead of learning the inner workings of dramatic monologue in some important and lasting way, they may simply learn, lastingly and powerfully, that they don't like Browning.

This principle—systematically intransigent indirection or cognitive anarchy or whatever we might choose to call it—seems fairly easy to grasp, and as suggested above, most of us do accept some version of it. Indeed, our informal acceptance of the productive power of accident is the strangest part of this story. We know perfectly well and intimately how essential "tacit knowing" is, both to mundane business and to life projects: art or scholarship or government or love. None of these can be managed easily or managed well under clinical conditions. Artists and lovers and even clinicians know this. College professors ought to, for the scholarship and art they produce does indeed draw on their whole range of human capacities: in researching the text or composing the quartet, none of us would think to deny ourselves the leaping-forward intuition, the interdisciplinary borrowing, or the heretofore unsanctioned solution. No one doubts that intuition or life knowledge or expert knowledge exists. Nevertheless, college English teachers (if such a collective can be said to exist morally) seem to have agreed, as if by NCTE Position Statement, to ignore the stubborn bias and the unpredictable insight, and exaggerate the value of the planned curriculum and the clinical model of learning. In the realm of the classroom, we continually commit ourselves to clearing the air finally and altogether of personal variables—like my neighbor who leaves his bug light on twenty-four hours a day.

All the approved elements of the formal curriculum, I am arguing, in fact represent the least promising opportunities for the sorts of learning we might want for an English major; they are valuable primarily as occasions for accident. A formal, rational, replicable curriculum can only address short-term memory and skills created for the occasion of the course. Whereas "the sorts of learning we might want"—sophisticated reading and writing, say, or insight into culture— are features of character and not transmissible skills.

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It's a little scary to suspect that one stands upon nothing, that a century of effort to elaborate the professional model has been largely wasted. But, as noted at the outset, it is not surprising. English is a largely imaginary field. The philologists and rhetoricians and classicists who first imagined it knew this—knew that if they were to consolidate the advances they had made by getting modern languages and literatures into the course catalogue, they had to do something to fill the empty, rootless present of the classroom. In fact, it was they who made up most of the curriculum we still have, and they made it up, rather tragically, out of spontaneous, living, cross- and non-disciplinary inspirations, the kind of fortuitous intellectual accidents that happen to free, living minds. But unfortunately, like us, when our great-grandparents thought currically, their living ideas became mass-produced certainties, like the distinctions of the genres and the boundary dates of literary periods and the canon of great writers. Remarkable new ideas took fire from time to time, of course, but rarely from contemplation of the certainties. Fiery ideas normally emerge from accidents of intellectual history: idle talk at conferences, casual reading in another discipline's journal, some crackpot systembuilder stumbling on the work of a long dead crackpot. We are deep in debt to the crackpots for such exciting and useful projects as the analysis of patriarchy and structural linguistics—and cognitive psychology. But when a living idea is subjected to curriculum, it dies.

It seems to me that English teachers who are sympathetic to the particular crackpot perspective developed here are under an obligation to begin acting out its implications for the way we conduct our professional lives. But Applebee's weariness with the "time for a change" theme is surely the appropriate response to the reform movements which have comprised our academic politics for a hundred years, and which fail for the same obvious reason. Our entire history can be characterized as a protracted failure at institutionalizing ideas which are important only when they are in motion and which, when they are stopped, vanish, or mutate into ponderous oxymorons: "postmodern classroom," "post-disciplinary theory," "non-foundational knowledge," "critical pedagogy," "process-oriented curriculum."

Several such attractively-named alternatives compete with the old and now much vilified passive learning. In fact, we had been hearing about new "active learning" pedagogies for twenty years before Ernest Boyer's 1987 study of the classroom experience in the American university found that the same inert material was still being dumped upon the same passive undergraduates (141). But the conclusion we should reach is surely not that the hundreds of professors Boyer

observed had all devoted themselves to the principles of passive learning. No one believed in passive learning by 1987 (and I am not sure that anyone ever did). The reason Boyer discovered passivity is, once again, simple and unsurprising: any psychological or cognitive process which we program into a course becomes part of the course content and will be pursued as an objective rather than a process. It is another daily problem, the obvious sources of which most of us manage not to see: one recalls the composition student who is more concerned about the revision due dates than the recursiveness of her writing process; the one who feels unprepared for class because he's lost his critical thinking handout. Walker Percy (whom one ought to put among the learning theorists as a heretic) described the problem exactly in "The Loss of the Creature": "Everything the educator does only succeeds in becoming, for the student, part of the educational package" (407).

Redesigning the package, though perhaps useful as a heuristic, will not, cannot, produce results. Our first step in the desired direction is to cease trusting in the efficacy of reforming the curriculum at all: to stop trusting in the mechanisms of traditionally-conceived and -structured classes, grades, readings, assignments, and credit hours to issue the "well-rounded critical thinkers" we say we want. If we can recognize that "what we want" of and for our students is indeed a matter of character, the kind of learning that suffuses the intellect rather than just bothering it temporarily, then the simultaneous step is clear. We stop thinking of our students as platoons in need of drill in "seeking, selecting, acquiring, organizing, storing and retrieving"; and begin thinking of them as real human beings, unwilling to learn because learning means changing, but in any case learning powerfully only by "perceiving and responding in the manner that makes the most sense to them personally at the particular time, in terms of their past experiences and current predilections" (*Comprehension* 2-3).

Difficult, keeping such an idea in motion, not least because it entails giving up the professional/technocratic model of the English professor. But there are rewards. I know few people who would *not* be happy to give up the repetition of vacant curricular tasks which we have thought, incorrectly, to be the necessary correlate of responsible teaching. Working the formal curriculum is rarely a compelling part of our job, and, if our own work becomes drudgery, we can hardly expect enthusiasm from our students. But we need not restart at zero. We are already doing the right things; we just don't recognize that they *are* the right things because they seem to happen accidentally.

We already teach courses—first-year composition and general education literature—which have no comfortable, legitimized place in the curriculum ("preparatory" is what we call composition, when we need to give it a curricular address), and in which, therefore, one has the luxury of putting a premium on pleasure and exploration. Most of us, I suspect, find our conception of these courses evolving in strange ways from term to term, as we increasingly see how vague their goals are compared to the ruddy objectives marching about the more highly valued parts of the curriculum. The energy we invest in general ed courses is rarely conditioned by any well-worked-out plan or professional agenda, rather those of us who take pleasure in the investment are used to extemporizing, finding what we need at the last minute, tailoring the material to particular contexts

(class populations, resistant individuals), and relying on inspiration. The readings we offer to the students, and the theories, spring free from the trellises to which they are bent in more goal-oriented courses and sway in interesting directions. *We* sway in interesting directions in encouraging our readers to make the work into pleasure, as it presumably is for us. The specific content of the course becomes less important than the challenge of breaking out of the constraints imposed by the classroom setting.

We ought to be offering this very kind of liberation to our English majors instead of pursuing the sort of thoughtless credentialing that currently passes for responsible preparation. We all do want our favored books and periods and authors to form the bases of rich experiences for our students; we want this above all and desperately, I should think. But we need to recollect first that we cannot pre-package such experiences, nor ensure that a book will become part of a student's imagination; astonishments do not ignite reliably. Therefore, we need to abandon the assumption that because there are books that English majors should read and papers they should write (whether or not we could agree on which ones), we are under a moral obligation to ensure that they have written and read under approved professional conditions.

What more is required to satisfy our deepest and primary sense of what an English major should do than that she should read a book and absorb it, make something of it on her own? We justify examinations (and papers which are meant to accomplish the same ends as exams) by claiming that they provide closure for the student, an opportunity to synthesize and demonstrate what she knows. But there is no evidence of this; there is at least anecdotal evidence that students find examinations somewhat nerve-wracking, that faculty would not give exams if we didn't have to force our students into reading, and that we wouldn't grade papers if we didn't have to generate some rationale for the final grade report.

But even if we do see the need or the responsibility to coerce a student into reading some particular book, as we might from time to time, no corresponding responsibility follows to test him upon that reading. All of us could name fifty books which we were never tested on, but which have become part of our knowledge of the world. The knowledge of an uncredentialed sophomore can be as substantial and valid as ours; she can take a book to heart and make it work for her without our interference. And to repeat, our interference is not likely to alter her experience for the better in any case; certainly quizzes, journal entries, and oral reports will not ensure a rich experience, and may well have the opposite effect.

My point is not that quizzes and papers and coerced readings or even complexly sequenced syllabi ought necessarily to be eliminated; we do need, perhaps with regret, to give up our expectation that because we've organized an experience, the students will remember what we wanted them to remember a month after the semester is over. Some will—they will remember and be moved in years to come by something that happens in the context of one of our classes. One simply can't tell in advance who will be moved or by what. So we might as well muddle on hopefully—as we always have, really—laying before our students books and assignments that we think will be good for them.

Will our majors understand if we ask them to read and write, not to provide us with an opportunity for giving grades and not because they need the practice

for graduate school, but because we believe it will be good for them? At first they will suspect a trick—a reaction instructive of the current state of things. But most of them enjoy reading and writing (though they don't much like being graded), and if we can create a more worldy atmosphere in the classroom, we can all get used to operating on the principle that one writes because one needs to way something. That "something" will occasionally be esthetic; it might also be political, historical, psychological, or in some way personal. It doesn't matter, not if the project is pursued seriously.

And we can put our own consciences to the test when the time comes for giving grades. We are probably on the right ethical track if we feel like kicking ourselves for going into higher ed instead of some less morally ambiguous field, like tort law or tobacco advertising. But we can try to guess how far each student has come from where she was (knowing that the usual procedure of assigning points and weights is just a guess with an attitude); we can allow for alternative paths, so that the students can play to their own strengths and pleasures. And we can get on university committees and work to replace grades with descriptions of abilities.

But again, the reward is giving up those Sisyphean penances: controlling interpretation and monitoring learning (impossible anyway); prescribing traditionally literary topics for papers (of dubious value—does anyone write such papers anymore?); and measuring the value of a student's work against a professional standard of research or originality (categories long since deconstructed to death). If we feel some nervous compulsion to control, to monitor, to prescribe, or to measure, there is no reason not to, as long as we don't delude ourselves that this is part of the teacher's role. Punishing failure has nothing to do with teaching.

It may not look like teaching; it will probably look like we're making it all up as we go along, and to the degree that we try to attend to the needs of our transient little communities, we will in fact be making it up daily. But this is not tossing coins or avoiding preparation; it is recognizing that no amount of preparation will ever guarantee the bright moments we hope will happen and that we ought instead to take advantage of—rely on, trust in—a process that will take place anyway, whether we will or no: an interaction of time, place, and persons that will animate the material in some way or not, our preparation notwithstanding.

Does this mean that we must give up the notion of the integrity of the undergraduate curriculum? Yes—though I would note that the curriculum is usually integrated only in the minds of the curriculum planners; to the typical student, it looks a little haphazard. If we sense a danger here, I would propose that it comes not from any fear that our students will be instructionally disadvantaged, but that *we* will look frivolous to our colleagues around the campus. But no one will laugh if our students get good jobs right out of college or, for those who dream it, spots at top grad schools. They *do* need to prepare for steps like these, but for that very reason we need to get them out of the classroom and into professional internships, meaningful public research projects (both in and out of English), political organizations, responsible work-study jobs in other departments, semesters abroad, volunteer teaching and tutoring, editing, and writing of whatever kind they can get good at and find pleasure in, for publication of whatever sort. We offer such opportunities now, but as *accoutrements* to the curriculum or as awards reserved for the brightest. All of it ought to become commonplace for all, as common as courses.

Does the undergraduate course, then, become a little less important than it is at present? Yes—and that is another scary upsetting of priorities. I would only plead that what's really frightful is how little most of our students are changed by their courses, given the enormous investment of time and energy faculty put into them; and I would argue again that the organized undergraduate course, like the organized English curriculum at present, is primarily disposed to the faculty's professional and institutional needs. Courses may be worth preserving for the opportunity to work in communities, and classrooms are convenient places to meet, if a little uncomfortable. But since you never can predict how valuable courses will be, it's an up-front expense of spirit to expect too much of them.

Should we then try to eliminate everything that we are accustomed to think of as central to the English curriculum—the courses, the reading lists, and the lectures; the quizzes, the paper topics, and the grades; the honors, advancements, and graduations, and the failures and humiliations; the preferments and hierarchies? No—the dean would complain. But we can move such institutional decorations to the periphery of our attention and our programs (as we do now with such annoyances as outcomes assessments). We can recognize—we ought to recognize—that we do not need to organize our students' experiences, and that we are ill advised to try. When our students achieve, when they ignite, when they change, they either do it on their own; if with our help, it's help unsanctioned, off the record, accidental, or coincidental. Learning what's important is an extracurricular activity.

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The Landscape Listens—
Hearing the Voice of the Soul

Robbie Clifton Pinter

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons—
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes—

[. . .]

When it comes, the Landscape listens—
Shadows—hold their breath—
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death—

—Emily Dickinson

On September 11, when the world changed, I wondered how I would ever teach again. How could I make sense of literature and life after seeing the world blown up, again and again on television and gradually realizing that the image I saw was not from a movie? In "A certain slant of light," Emily Dickinson's words remind me of the *other* reality, the soul-filled reality, that my students and I usually don't acknowledge. Now, still stinging from the realization of what *can* happen, I look again to the study of literature and writing as a source for hope—this study can lead to a place where the "landscape listens," pregnant with possibility of the light that can and does enter. The listening landscape doesn't always make sense in a traditional way—thank goodness. To get to the place where we can hear, we must study, reflect, ask questions with difficult answers, offer insight, and take risks. In short, the listening landscape brings students and teachers to the edge of understanding our realities and then it gives us courage not to understand. We have hope that sometimes we will see "a certain Slant of light" and that's enough.

Students and teachers have always been engaged in a search for what matters, seeking the light in an often dark world. Authentic listening, listening for the landscape, can shape both on their journey. Listening, the least acknowledged

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of the language arts, has the potential to be the one that allows students and teachers to be fully present in their learning, their lives, and that of others. This kind of listening is *radical* because it listens with mind (intellectually), heart (emotionally) and hands (physically)—it can initiate change in both the one who hears and the one speaks. Mary Rose O'Reilley in *Radical Presence* suggests that when we truly hear another, we can sometimes call the other person, or ourselves, into being (34). Attentive listening to another challenges the status quo, providing ways for other voices to be recognized and respected. Although listening seems like the most passive of the traditional language arts, authentic listening can be revolutionary, for the individual, for the classroom community, and for the larger academic community.

Currently, the American educational system, particularly higher education, is not conducive to genuine listening. It focuses instead on teaching listeners not to listen but to think ahead while someone is talking in order to question or praise what the other person is saying. Parker Palmer suggests that respect can transform academic institutions into learning spaces. In a talk entitled "The Grace of Great Things," Palmer criticizes the normal academic culture that is based on competition instead of community, where a model of "survival of the fittest" makes it hard for anyone to learn in a different way. He says that academia does not grant respect to tentative and heartfelt ways of being in the world where the person can't quite think of the right word or can't think of any word at all. We don't grant respect to silence and wonder. We don't grant it to voices outside our tight little circle, let alone to the voiceless things of the world.

Academia typically doesn't "hear" students who do not think in long-cherished patterns of claim, support, and argument. Palmer argues that academia doesn't acknowledge another way because of fear that the community or the individual might have to change and neither knows how. This is the same fear that's at the root of not hearing, effectively silencing those who are different from the way we are. For authentic learning to take place, each person must respect one another's differences, whether they are of gender, race, intelligence, nationality, social class, or learning style. This respect demands that each member think enough of one another to ask tough questions and try to understand another's perspective—whether one agrees or not.

Radical listening, that for which even the landscape listens, can provide a way for action to grow through the fears. I am not simply talking about paying attention or hearing the words right or reading something with an open attitude, although it is those things. It is attentive openness. Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist Zen master, calls this openness "mindfulness," or being completely present in the moment. Mindfulness is a kind of listening, a way of opening the whole learner's body-sensory response: the one who speaks is fully open to the one who listens. Radical listening changes the individual and in the classroom it changes the community.

Respect is a way to listen that is integral to individual, and to corporate or group learning of the community. It has the power to show others the essence of another person, idea, or reading. Not only does it challenge an individual's prejudices, it also challenges accepted social norms like stereotyping that categorize groups according to their differences.

Consider how radical listening works for the individual. When we are fully attentive to our own lives, when we *know* ourselves, we listen for connections and contradictions to our own beliefs. In listening to ourselves, we search for the sacred center that grounds us. Frederick Beuchner, a contemporary theologian and writer evokes a long romantic tradition that seeks the sacred in each individual. He calls us to our center in his book, *Now and Then*:

> Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and pain of it no less than the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy hidden heart of it because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace. (92, 87)

Recognizing the divine in our own lives connects us to the lives of others. As teachers, we have to provide space in which students may listen to their lives—to be attentive to seemingly small prejudices or assumptions that have blocked us from learning more about life or a discipline.

A moving example of how one student "heard" her own life came at the end of a term in one of my classes when the students responded to a prompt asking them to connect one poem, play, or story to their own lives. This student, Jan, chose *A Doll's House* and focused on the part where Nora leaves her husban, and therefore her family to establish an identity for herself. Jan connected the play to her family. In a paper, she reported that the play made her see another reason for her mother leaving the family when Jan was two. Jan had always thought her mother had left because her mother was bad, a deserter, or worse because Jan herself was an unworthy child. Literature, the written text can call an individual to her center and make her see it in ways she otherwise might not. My student was able to listen to her life, to witness it.

Connecting to the center within, whether through texts, other people, or other art, is a visceral experience. When it happens, people know it with their whole bodies. When Emily Dickinson noticed a shaft of light, she described it in a way that spoke to the sacred center in many of her readers. They had been there. Deep inside, they knew what she meant—they had all witnessed one slender beam of light that spoke of another way of viewing the world.

Such knowledge is not intellectual, but rather, it's incarnational. Eugene Gendlin coined the term "felt sense" to describe this bodily response, a gut feeling, people have something in their experience, such as an image, a word, or an idea that connects them to their inner voice:

> The soft underbelly of thought [. . .] a kind of bodily awareness that [. . .] can be used as a tool [. . .] a bodily awareness that. . . encompasses everything you feel and know about a given subject at a given time [. . .] . It is felt in the body, yet it has meanings. It is body *and* mind before they are split apart. (qtd. in Perl 35)

Gendlin suggested that people who practiced a concentration technique he termed "focusing," or being attuned to their inner wisdom, were able to work through significant psychological problems. He noted that just as there's a felt sense in life, there's a felt sense in teaching. We know in our bodies when

something's right or wrong—a gut feeling. Perl applied Gendlin's ideas to writing. She suggested that acknowledging and using felt sense would lead to better writing because it would help students hear what mattered in their lives. I'm suggesting that if we as teachers could help students listen to their lives using this mindful bodily attention, we would be creating a climate where students could more fully learn.

To allow the felt sense to emerge in students, teachers need to ask them to release the minutia of daily life. Writers and writing teachers know the value of "burning off the fluff" in order to improve writing; shedding distractions permits students to hear what's really important in their learning. Listening attentively to our lives, being fully aware of our individual "felt senses," is a way of moving beyond the fluff that crowds our concentration and draws our attention away from an essential core. When individuals attend to their felt sense, they are making connections that matter in their lives and participating in learning in ways that can change people and institutions. Teachers encourage the development of their students' felt sense when they structure opportunities for students to relate their lives to their learning. In some ways, every time we ask students to write a narrative, or any kind of self-reflective paper, we are providing an opportunity for them to listen to themselves, to connect and focus to the present moment. But we need to make sure we keep offering those chances to listen to their lives, perhaps through journal writing, perhaps through short response papers. The personal connection is key to encouraging students to honor their own felt sense, their own radical listening.

In class some practical tools for engendering a classroom listening space include simple rephrasing that models for students how to listen mindfully. Phrases such as "from your perspective," "the way you see it is, " it seems to you," "what you'd like me to know is" model a classroom dynamic that differs from the traditional one of claim, support, and argument. This cushioning gives students the opportunity to engage in a model other than the traditional academic one. Of course, they would serve only as trappings of authentic listening if they are not used with mindfulness.

Another way to model radical listening happens when teachers frame the love of their discipline in ways that students can relate to their lives. In talking about poetry in class, I speak from my own center. Often students don't connect with what I'm saying, but they do connect with how I'm saying it—they recognize the extraordinary in the ordinary. Such a simple awareness encourages students that it's okay to be vulnerable and make known their core beliefs.

Radical listening develops the individual within his or her community; it helps students not only recognize their beliefs, but also to evaluate them as the context of the beliefs of others in the community. In "Divided No More," Parker Palmer claims that in the community, individuals can often listen to themselves for the first time because their audience, the community, gives them voice. In the "charged expectancy" of the classroom, members of the community may learn to hear the differences, such as those of race, gender, identity, and culture without trying to fix, change, or convert. The light and the dark are held together, remaining opposites, but linked in the understanding of the other. Because of the light, the dark exists. Through the contradictions, all students can come to

recognize the numinous in their own souls and in those who are different or only appear to be so.

In many classes, the individual and the community learn better from one another when they can meet in the presence of something they can share equally, such as a common text. In a first year writing course I taught recently, the class read Toni Cade Bambara's "The Lesson." A young teacher, Miss Moore, takes a group of Harlem children to mid-town Manhattan to visit F.A.O. Schwartz. My students' reading prompted most of them to assign blame to various characters: Miss Moore should not have exposed these poor students to such expensive toys; the children were rude and their language offended me; the parents should have told the children that they were poor. One student suggested that perhaps Sylvia, the narrator, would now be inspired to acquire the knowledge, and therefore the wealth, necessary for purchasing such baubles. The students all wanted to either fix the problem or explain it. Despite its title, I do not see the story as quite so didactic.

My students' responses help to illustrate what can happen in the process of radical listening. I asked the students to think about the problems the story suggested and the changes they wanted to effect—really, I was asking them to listen to the story and hear it in the context of their own lives.

Later, after class discussion, a student, John, came to my office to talk about the story. He was feeling that the children's despair was his own. He felt that the theme of the story was not simply about lack of money, but about lack of power. The children were powerless to change the systems that they had inherited for generations—this story became his story. He spoke: "I don't want to follow the tradition of what I am supposed to do. . . to work hard, get a job, make a lot of money, succeed according to others' rules. I want to make my own rules so I'll know why I'm doing what I'm doing." The story had seeped into his soul. He later made his rebellion known to the class in the form of a short paper. When he read it to his small group, the members didn't understand his position or how his response could be "analytical." I sent them home with one question: Why does John's response bother you? I don't know how that question worked its way into their understanding, but it would not have been possible outside the context of the class community. Students saw that it was all right to let the story be about their own lives—to see it in terms of their own lives (and John's). The students' response to the story, in contrast to John's response, established a dissonance for the class. One of their own, a class member, simply didn't spurt out another patented answer (usually composed to please the teacher) about racism and poverty. John's unique perspective showed the class how to put two issues, side-by-side—the extreme poverty and their personal response—and let the intersection speak. The intersection is the listening space.

The community of the classroom and its "charged expectancy" can give students a chance to fail. In discussing "The Lesson," my students questioned John's understanding of the story because it was remarkably different—it challenged their assumptions about how to explore literature, and it was scary. John's understanding mattered to him. Through the community, through listening to the story from several perspectives, he was able to clarify and express his own views. For students to feel free to explore the connections between their world and

others, they must feel the class is a safe place to take the risks necessary to learning. Students (and teachers) fear having to change, and radical listening leads to change. It is uncomfortable to step out into the dark.

In reading "The Lesson," some of my students only heard that it was a story about poor African American children in New York, and they never transcended the labels until a classmate did so. Hearing it as a story that was alive and vital to their lives came from John's ability to think outside of the box and from their ability to hear him. John also learned. By reading aloud, he clarified his perspective when he "heard" how his peers responded to his ideas. Such respectful listening is not simply a watered down version of "play nice"; it is a critical part of learning that recognizes the "other" in the midst of the larger community or culture. Students may disagree, make claims, establish other points, just as in a typical academic model. But in the radical listening model, students are expected to listen "as if their lives depended on it"—as if it mattered to them personally. In opening a listening space, the community becomes an avenue within which the individual can listen and, perhaps, change. The landscape listens.

Radical listening not only changes individuals, it potentially can change educational systems. It is similar to Krista Ratcliffe's idea of "rhetorical listening," another term for rdical listening. Ratcliffe defines radical listening as "a trope for interpretative invention, one on equal footing with the tropes of reading, writing and speaking" (196). She suggests that rhetorical listening opens a space, a "discursive intersection" (196) where those with differing perspectives, genders, and cultures can meet in community and fully hear another's differences. Such listening demands that members of the community try to acknowledge one another's differences, to be fully alive to them, and thus to hear them. It assumes an active, purposeful role in the discourse of the community, whether it's in the classroom or in the larger community. In rhetorical listening, readers can hear the text speak without thinking ahead to change it. When Ratcliffe defines rhetorical listening, its connection to the felt sense of radical listening is clear:

> For just as all texts can be read, so too can all texts be listened to. As a trope for interpretive invention, rhetorical listening differs from reading in that it proceeds via different body organs, different disciplinary and cultural assumptions, and different figures of speech [. . .]. For when listening within an undivided logos, we do not read simply for what we can agree with or challenge, as is the habit of academic reading (in its multiple guises). Instead, we choose to listen also for the exiled excess and contemplate its relation to our culture and our selves. (203)

Rhetorical listening can question long-held assumptions without attacking them. That very act is a challenge to the cherished ways of academic learning that rewards the learner who can quickly rebut a text or speaker's argument. This way of hearing texts is one that calls for connections to the self, and through those connections, holds the possibility for change. Ratcliffe continues that

"[S]uch listening [. . .] may help us invent, interpret, and ultimately judge differently in that perhaps we can hear things we cannot see. In this more inclusive logos lies potential for personal and social justice" (203).

In our contemporary academic culture, the focus on getting the job done quickly and efficiently limits learning. Often, I feel that students only want to hear the requirements from me: How many pages do I write? When is it due? What's the length? In short, how can I get the good grade? Educational communities often hide in the trappings of education because we're afraid of change. Listening fully to another is almost like standing naked before that person—it's just not done in academics—we typically hide behind an accepted but thin rationale: allowing students to see their teachers as people strips us of some of our power. We're afraid. If students felt their teachers were less all-knowing and more worth knowing, they could ask us about simple things like their love for baseball or their passion for dogs. Then, they would feel more comfortable asking us about disciplinary matters like how is math part of my human experience, or did Etty Hillesum really find life in the death-dealing of the Jewish concentration camps. Students want to know it's safe to ask the personal questions as well as the critical ones because it takes both for learning to have the power to transform beliefs and the systems they create. That's a big risk. Such exchanges make learning vital, life-giving for both students and teachers. To encourage that kind of authentic learning, I feel I must continue to ask myself and others to lower our figurative veils and look for a "certain slant of light," letting it call us to their spiritual realities that are not easy to hear.

Engendering an atmosphere that allows for a class or a student's personal interaction demands that academics get rid of the factory model of education that asks students to engage in a lockstep program of learning: everyone reads the same text, everyone responds to the same prompt, everyone writes only argumentative papers. Instead, we must imagine and support a creative model, complete with a workshop model, listening facilitator, and a common assumption that learning requires open, attentive listening. The classroom becomes a space conducive to creativity, not productivity.

We must allow our students the kind of listening spaces that let them live with questions and indeterminacies. Radical listening asks for the full presence of the other as it offers that same presence. It holds the promise of individual and community transformation. What I want, and what I want for my students, is a chance to open ourselves to hear other voices and also our own. I want us to see how we differ from others and ultimately to have a chance to act on what we learn. This learning is soul-learning—it has the power to change people and systems. And when it does, the landscape listens.

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Connecting

Section Editor's Message

The purpose of education is to give people a "glimpse of the force of human creativity." I like this definition of Lisa Ruddick's from her narrative included in "Connecting," so I borrow it here. We get educated; we study in "content areas." History teaches us the span of human creativity. The other humanities deepen our knowledge of its dimensions. The sciences define its operable rules. The arts provide opportunities for its practice. If we are lucky, through our study we glimpse this force of human creativity—and then situate ourselves in our particular spheres to *be* the force. Breathing, walking, collective human creativity.

Do you like the definition too? Let's go with it then.

Let's go straight to the paradox. The collective force of human creativity is at once magnificently powerful and fragile, both "volatile and eternal," in Lisa's words.

The narratives that follow, with collective force I might add, point out the dilemma we experience as we pursue the best within ourselves and within our profession.

Lisa Ruddick's story, "We are the Poetry, " is the paradox itself. Although she speaks of the wrongness present in educational institutions, the power of her story and the honesty and courage in her telling are the glimpses of the force of human creativity that lead us on.

Kathleen McColley Foster's narrative follows, a portrait of commitment to our profession, a portrait you may recognize as yourself some years ago. Next are three stories of the complex, fragile, and yet powerful work we perform in classrooms—where answers are seldom clear. Where we fail often—but fail in the service of *being the force* and so ultimately succeed. Where students perplex us but also show us the way, by teaching us to "live wildly," as Meg Petersen explains in her narrative. Finally, Linda Parkyn's "Coming Full Circle" narrates her journey to help learners catch their glimpse of *the force*.

Just now, I look up to see it is almost 6:00. I ran into Erin earlier today and promised I would come to the art studio; she is excited about this semester's work in painting class (her major). She was in my first year seminar two years ago. We spent lots of extra time together; she has a learning disability and slaved over each paper.

I am back, and my mind is exploding from this fresh glimpse of the force of human creativity! The feisty persevering Erin I loved from Foundations of Composition—with her paintings *bursting* with ... human creativity! I had no idea! I want to *sing*—for her, for the glimpse she allowed me, and for the paradox which allows for eternal amazement and the eternal need for each of our very particular, courageous work.

We Are the Poetry

Lisa Ruddick

Teaching an undergraduate poetry course this term, I'm feeling that I'm just now appreciating what English poets of the Renaissance and the eighteenth century were driving at when they spoke of poetry as existing in a timeless realm, where what happens happens for good, as if inscribed in the heavens. I was pondering this image the other day, and asked my daughter Ellen, who is twelve, whether she thinks that poetry is eternal. She said that she did, and I countered, "But what if all the poetry were burned?" Her response was that it would be here all the same, for "we are the poetry." This phrase has since been woven into the poetry of this week of my life; I keep coming back to it. But what does it mean? Virginia Woolf said virtually the same thing: "We are the words. We are the music" (72). Something connects the ways in which poets pull together the filaments of a created world and the ways in which our ordinary experience peaks in moments in which we pull things together and shape meanings. Why I think of this process as at once volatile and eternal, as I guess Ellen does, is something I'll have to think more about.

What seems clear to me in any case is that the feeling that "we are the poetry," the very feeling that makes life worth living, is easily sent into hiding when it encounters whatever force it is that drives academic institutions. What our educational system seems to do, from the early grades through the Ph.D., is to give people a glimpse of the power of human creativity but then to throw this awareness off, just enough that students and teachers have trouble feeling viscerally that they themselves, singly or in their work together, are part of the poetry. One of the things I've found striking, as I've shared stories and read work by other AEPL members over the last couple of years, is that no matter how different the teaching environments we work in, almost all of us seem to feel that we have to fight and fight, often against a numbness in ourselves, to create a space for our students in which the tentative, sometimes lonely process through which each person creates an imaginable world is honored rather than reduced to something else or simply overridden.

The particular intellectual world that is my professional home is *gratuitously* antithetical to the notion that there is a poetry in ourselves. My field is that of mainstream scholarship in kuteratyre, a field that in the last two decades, as most of the people outside it have had an easy time observing, has partially lost its moorings in reality and become dizzyingly "playful" and eccentric. I'm talking not about what happens in classrooms, where there is still a lot of diversity and humanity, but about the kinds of thinking that get rewarded with the highest prestige at professional conferences and in journals. While some valuable thought

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has emerged from this period of upheaval and innovation, the general atmosphere of intellectual license has resulted in a dehumanization of thought that I've spent some time trying to figure out. It's scary enough that teachers, in K-12 schools, constrained by standardized testing and standardized curricula, teachers can feel gravely impeded in helping their students to learn and grow. What's at least as scary to me is that in the upper reaches of the academy, where no one is constraining those with tenure to say or do anything, the poetry of life gets thrust aside just because people seem to take pleasure in repudiating it.

Against the idea that each life has its own precious and distinctive creative momentum, its own voice, professionals in my field are under pressure to agree that creativity is a historical construct, that the "singular voice" that any one person might evolve within a lifetime is not a precious thing but a spurious ideal emanating from the needs of the liberal state (Lloyd 109) and that "the poet" for that is not a person, offering something meaningful that each reader may weave into his or her own being (or choose to reject), but is merely "a discursive formation embedded in particular historical conditions and disciplinary needs."[1] These words may sound merely pretentious and technical, but, if you spend months or years in the presence of ideas like these, you can get very depressed.

What I make of this situation—though I'm almost ashamed to have come to such a bleak view—is that there is something in the life of contemporary institutions that, unless it is persistently noticed and fought, conduces to what the psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas calls the "hatred of life." Bollas believes that the default position within our culture as a whole is to reward people for developing a "false self" that mirrors convention, in place of fully developing a personal "idiom" or a unique, metaphorically rich inner world, a poetry of self. In fact, what often happens is that the personal idiom gets reviled: "As many contemporary individuals exchange difference for sameness, *the loss of the urge to disseminate [one's personal] idiom is transformed into an unconscious hatred of difference*." Whole institutions will offer, in place of the pleasure of putting one's irreplaceable, vulnerable voice into communion with other voices, the security or even exaltation that comes with "the dismantling of idiom" in oneself and others (98-99).

This destructive pleasure motivates much of the published work in my field. When in the Editor's Column of a recent issue of *PMLA* I read, "the four superb articles gathered in this issue have as their common horizon the exploration of various forms of affect as embodiments of discrete ideological negotiations" (284), I hear in these words the hatred of life, the pleasure in losing consciousness of whatever is poignant and precious in any one human voice or heart.

A colleague at another institution recently confided to me," I don't even read *PMLA* because it always puts me in a bad mood. I don't care about any of it." Another colleague said, "No, I don't read *PMLA*. I look at the titles of the articles, and I say,

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[1] This quotation is from a recent issue of *PMLA*. Since the author of the article is at a relatively early stage professionally and is more or less summarizing the current thinking in the field, and displaying expertise—something that is demanded in the process of making one's way up the ladder—I'm not naming the author here, though anyone who cares to look up the article will find in it a good synopsis of the multiple ways in which one can discount the idea that writers have anything special to offer.

'Why would I want to read about that?'" For some people, then, the destruction of idiom is a pleasure that fails to captivate. It quickly gets boring, or sad. For myself, I can say that with every step I take away from the intellectual and moral universe of journals like *PMLA*, my world gets bigger. *PMLA* becomes the small world. That experience, of watching the coordinates reverse themselves, has probably happened to a lot of readers of *JAEPL* in the course of their lives.

I'm grateful to AEPL for existing and for helping to expose me to the voices of a myriad people who, however diverse, feel that the sacrifice of a personal idiom is a sad thing when it happens under institutional pressure and a ghastly thing when it happens for no good reason. This fact seems so obvious that maybe in time it will penetrate the world of literary studies and prompt a different kind of conversation. That's my hope, particularly since right now there are signs that a large subset of the people in English have had enough and are wishing for change. In any case, it will be interesting to see what happens; I tell myself that, either way, I'll find out something about the world.

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Becoming a Professional:
A Coming of Age Narrative from the 4Cs

Kathleen McColley Foster

"Surprise," they said smiling as they handed me a large, carefully wrapped package. "We thought you would need this for your conference in Denver."

I quickly unwrapped the gift and was holding a beautiful black leather briefcase with side pockets, zippers and locks. "Wow, it's great," I said with a big smile. "Now I'll really look like a professional. Everyone will think I am a real professor or something."

The hotel lobby is filled with many other 4Cs attendees. I feel lost and look around me. I don't know anyone. Two professors from my graduate university are attending, but, with over 3,000 people in attendance, finding them is next to impossible. As a first time conference participant, name tags don't really help,

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though I occasionally see a name which I recognize from having read composition journals and books. Of these "greats" I am in awe. They are my idols.

At the Newcomers Breakfast, a few "big name" scholars come up to me and welcome me. I'm sitting at a table marked "Scholars for the Dream." Next to me sits a very nice young lady whom I just met and with whom I feel an instant friendship. People I don't even know come up to congratulate me. I still haven't realized the significance of this honor, but it gradually starts to sink in as I stand on the podium for a few seconds in the plenary session, shaking hands and looking out into a sea of faces, all smiling back at me. They are applauding me, a lowly part-time college instructor still struggling to finish her PhD.

In the ballroom and corridors strangers come up to me and offer their congratulations and encouragement. Strangely, I feel as if I'm being accepted into their fold as an equal. It is a completely different feeling from standing alone in the middle of a crowd at the MLA. After attending many interesting sessions given by scholars whom I have long admired, I find myself in a blissful daze. Not only am I enjoying the sessions, but also I am actually having engaging conversations with these colleagues of mine who amazingly express an interest in me and in my scholarship.

With a sigh of relief, I gather my papers and transparencies placing them into my new briefcase. My presentation is successful, and people surround me, asking questions and sharing from their own experiences in the classroom. Finally, the last professor leaves, and I look around. My new friend and colleague is standing a little to the side, waiting for me. She smiles beautifully and simply says, "You were great."

As we pass by a lobby mirror, I glance out of the corner of my eye and see a young professional dressed in a suit, looking confident and discussing teaching strategies with a colleague. For a split second I hardly recognize that person, but it is myself. The moment passes, and this time I stop, looking squarely at this radiant face in the mirror. From deep down I feel it. A sense of accomplishment, of having grown almost overnight, of being acknowledged, accepted, and embraced by respected colleagues. "Yes, I am a professional now," I think to myself as I lift my chin, adjust my briefcase, and head off to the next session.

Writing the Bully

Chauna Craig

You've had Justin before—in your nightmares. The boy in the back who slumps in his desk; his head is a square block, eyes close together, forehead sloping. You'd describe him as Neanderthal, except it's a cliché. And not nice.

Justin holds the door closed from the inside when you try to enter the

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classroom. He pulls girls' hair and bullies the boys into letting him copy home-work. He harasses Nehla, the girl from India, for how she speaks English. He challenges every direction you give and whispers lewd comments. And most students can't help but laugh.

This is a college writing class. *College*. And nothing in your pedagogical research or seminars or previous classroom experience prepares you for this. You have to write your own text, call it *Pedagogy of the Bullied*. But, first, there's Justin whose attendance is maddeningly perfect. There every day to torture, mixing odd moments of insight with his special brand of aggravation.

Your colleagues, all male, advise you to kick him out, show him who's boss. And you hesitate. Fear of your own authority? Fear of some inability to work out the problem? Or do you really think this one can be saved? From what? By whom? You're no messiah. Tell yourself what you tell your students. "Write about it. Just start to write."

Chapter One: Sympathy. Try a heart-to-heart talk. Watch Justin nod then shake your hand as if in agreement. Watch hopelessly the next day as he throws a pen and bonks Lamont on the head.

Chapter Two: Outrage. Immediately shout that you will *not* tolerate that kind of behavior. Notice how the classroom collapses into silence you can't interpret. Study Justin's dark stare and reflect it back. Complain to your colleagues who repeat, "Just kick him out."

Chapter Three: Bargaining/Begging. Say, after class, "Look, if you can just keep your attention on the work itself for this hour, we can have a really good class. What do you say? Will you try harder? Please?"

Chapter Four: Flattering/Lying. Say, after the next class, after he's expressed in loud grunts the stupidity of the latest assignment, "You're a leader, Justin. The others look up to you. And with that comes power and responsibility. You can influence everyone's education in such a good way if you focus on positive things in your comments." Smile warmly when he replies, "Yeah, I never thought of it that way."

Chapter Five: The Problem of Interpretation. He tells a shy young woman in the front row that she has "great tits." He reminds you he's focusing on positive things.

Last Chapter: Admitting Defeat. Kick him out. Wrestle privately with guilt, humiliation, failure, and that gang of emotional bullies you'll never be able to roust. Return to class with a new lesson plan. Fill the gap of quiet with an assignment: "Write About a Time You Felt You Had No Control." Realize that most of these students have no idea where to start. Like you.

Epilogue: Read Nehla's paper late at night when you're tired and vulner-able. Read how she feels she has no control over the English language as it wrestles with her tongue, how she tries to coax it, force it, beg it to come out right, and how sometimes it doesn't and she feels like such a failure.

Consider into the dark, silent hours how maybe our only choice is to keep on trying.

Discipline 101

Steven VanderStaay

By the time we asked about it, the semester was over. We had studied a wide array of teaching models and approaches. We had written unit plans and lesson plans, objectives and outcomes. Everyone thought it a great course. But in our moments together—speaking softly before class began, or meeting to study together for exams—we wondered if the professor would ever get around to saying something about it.

After all, he had been a high school teacher himself. He would know what to say and do. And wasn't his job to prepare us for student teaching? But soon the last day came and still not a word about it.

It was now or never. Sharon, the bravest of us, raised her hand. "Professor," she began, "what can you tell us about classroom discipline?" The class fell silent in expectation.

"Don't yell at them," he replied. "Any other questions?"

Looking back on this moment, I suppose the professor meant that a teaching approach which created proper contexts for learning would create a classroom where discipline problems were rare. By refusing to talk about discipline, he sought to keep us focused on this goal. "So-called 'discipline' approaches come at teaching from the wrong direction," he might have said. "They create contexts defined by restraint rather than learning."

But he didn't say these things. He said, "Don't yell at them." A nervous, pre-service teacher, I left the class disappointed, angry, and not a little afraid that I would find myself unprepared when faced with discipline problems of my own.

And so it was with no sense of betrayal that, finding myself at the tail end of a bad day in my first year of teaching, I directed a short, surgical strike of a yell at a group of boys who had ignored my requests to "please read quietly." The impact was immediate: the boys looked at me, grumbled once, put their noses in their books, and read quietly for the rest of the hour.

Assuming that what works once will work twice, I yelled again the next day, and then in another class, too. My success was startling. Students who once disturbed my classes began to eye me with a glint of respect. Conversations ceased at my approach. I found that even a quick turn of my head held a certain silencing power. My classes (excepting, of course, my own outbursts) became paradigms of order. And when the principal poked his head in for a quick look around before the Thanksgiving break, he gave me a big thumbs up, remarking, "Nice to see you've got everything under control."

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Then, recalling the emphasis in my methods class upon a student-centered classroom, I distributed a mid-term course evaluation, asking students for their thoughts on how the class was going and how I might improve it. Debra was the first to turn hers in. A quiet, solitary student, Debra sat at the front of the room, nearest my desk. Debra wrote charming, pastoral narratives about events on her family farm and had once given me a thank you note for the response I had written to one of her essays. Confident of her praise, I took Debra's evaluation and read the single line she had written.

"Don't yell at us," it said.

To Live Wildly

Meg Petersen

This morning, in my composition class, we had our final readings of the semester. I was amazed at how so many of the students read the most personal and intimate thing they had written all term. In the absence of specific instruction on what to read, they seem to have chosen to make their writing a gift. They selected the piece which would reveal the most about themselves and offered it up, not for response, not for praise, but in a simple act of giving.

As we worked our way around the room we heard stories of suicidal depression, deaths of grandparents and high school friends, and two pieces dedicated to mothers — one about a mother who had left her 11-year-old daughter in order to overcome a drug problem, the other about a mother who grew up in such poverty that she named the rats in her apartment as pets. These extraordinary revelations of these students' selves, most beautifully written, all carefully chosen, bring me back again and again to the richness of this work we have chosen, but none so deeply, on this day, as Lindsay's.

Lindsay read the paper she had brought to me the week before in conference. She had arrived for our weekly meeting, clutching her paper. Before she read it to me, she said, "This is really personal. Only three people know about this." She wrote of how she had to escape to the wilderness "to live wildly" because her secrets "had become louder." I guessed that she was writing about an abortion.

I felt odd counseling Lindsay about how to make her meaning clearer to readers, as so few people knew her secret. I wondered if she wanted readers at all. But, in this final reading, it was this piece she chose to share. She clutched her paper tightly as she read about how she wanted to give herself back to the earth, but wondered, "Is my soul good enough to be taken back as a flower, or will I be a weed?" She concluded her paper by resigning herself to take the life she had left — her own — and live it.

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So many times when I meet with students and they talk to me about their writing, I marvel at the teaching relationship—and how it can be so intimate and so formal at the same time. We work with another person's thinking as they discover their truths, yet we work always within the constraints of our role. We are privy to the most intimate details of their souls, yet the price of our entrance is an almost reverent respect that compels us to treat them as a character in their own lives.

Sometimes I leave the writing classroom awed at what has transpired there. These are the moments in class when my skin prickles, when I know that something genuine has occurred. In a writing class, we can enter another person's universe through their writing and emerge changed for having been there. The world can become, for all of us, a bit more complex and interesting.

Often the truth resonates most clearly in those minutes of respectful silence, those times when a student quietly gets up to shut the door to cut off the noise from outside, those times when we allow ourselves to be transported by a classmate's words into a life we will never know first-hand, or those moments when someone has finished reading a piece and you can hear everyone in the room just breathing it in. In these moments, I too feel as if I am living wildly, and know there is no more important instant, no more essential vocation, than breathing in those stories, receiving those gifts.

Coming Full Circle

Linda K. Parkyn

I came full circle last month when Katherine Patterson, author of the Newberry award-winning book, *The Bridge to Terabithia,* came to speak at the college where I teach. I joined this gracious woman on a panel discussing censorship issues. She was the author of a story that was influential in my struggle with censorship a few years ago. The sense of closure which this experience brought to my struggle prompted me to write my own story here.

The circle began when my son's fifth grade class was assigned to read *The Bridge to Terabithia*. I was the Vice President of the school board in our community, and the concerned parents of students in my son's classroom came to a meeting determined to stop the reading of it. I read the book and thought it was a wonderful, honest book about friendship, death, and dying. The parents objected to the death of a child in the book and the way the characters dealt with it. They did not think that the book was age appropriate and asserted that they should be the ones to talk to their children about these issues, not teachers and students in the classroom by themselves.

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The upshot of this meeting was that it did not stop the reading of the text, but it left me shaken with the sense that children were prevented from exploring things that were a part of their world. My response was to write an article entitled "Circling the Wagons: What Should Children Read?" published in *The Executive Educator,* a journal associated with the National School Board Association. Here is part of the text:

> Children need to read about others who struggle as they do. They need to think about those who argue, dream and remember in different ways. For an afternoon, sprawled on their bedroom floors, they need to read about life as Huck Finn experienced it. They need to imagine that they have a friendship as close as Jess and Leslie in *The Bridge to Terabithia.* They need to see the perseverance of Helen Keller and the integrity of *The Call of the Wild.* They need to sift through the agony that made Anne Frank pick up her pen. One of the best ways to teach ethics to our children is to embed the choices of life in stories. Sometimes stories are all we remember when confronted with the difficult choices of life. Actions, taken years later, are triggered by stories that we once read.

In response to my article, a local clergyman wrote expressing his discomfort with allowing children to read widely. He asserted: "Our children do face real threats, savages that lurk in the brush: pederasty, pornography, drug abuse, bigotry, violence, depression, to name a few. Yes they are real, and yes they must be confronted. But do we want to invite them into our children's encampment? Should we encourage our children to try out Nazism? Should we allow them to make a choice of *Hustler* magazine in the school library? These illustrate that circles of morality must be drawn."

The editors of the journal responded: "We won't censor you Mr.____. But for the record, our author referred to Helen Keller, Anne Frank, Huck Finn, *The Bridge to Terabithia,* and *Call of the Wild.* She did not advocate exposing elementary school students (or any other children) to Nazism, *Hustler* magazine, or cocaine. The distinction between license and a liberal education seems to have eluded you."

One little boy in my son's fifth grade class lost his father while the students were reading *The Bridge to Terabithia.* One of the things that the teacher did in trying to help the boy come to terms with his father's death was to have him write notes and feelings down to include in the casket in order to help him say good-bye to his dad. I am grateful that this controversial book helped this little boy to know that he wasn't alone in experiencing this tragedy. Some of the parents kept repeating in our meetings that death was an unsuitable topic for children. They were right: death was unsuitable to this little boy and his family, but it did happen. And children need to read and write and talk about unsuitable topics.

Circling back in my thinking makes me wonder about things that I deem unsuitable. When I don't like what I read, I hope that I can ask the question—how has my tradition not informed me? What gives me a platform to speak but not this person and their ideas? How do we become informed so that all of us do not reduce the world to categories of suitable and unsuitable? Stories help us not to reduce the world. They tell of the complexities of life; they engage us with irony, paradox, and inconsistency in concrete ways. These contrast mightily with circling the wagons around us and around our children. We must allow for narratives to help all of us make sense of the world.

REVIEWS

Christensen, Linda. *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up: Teaching About Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word*. Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, Ltd., 2000.

Nathaniel Teich

Linda Christensen's subtitle, "Teaching About Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word," tells a lot, but does not fully describe the many rich contents of her inspiring and useful book. It contains not only her narrative of teaching at an urban high school including diverse ethnic and minority students, but also her practical teaching units, reflections on the obstacles and outcomes for both her and her students, and many compelling examples of the student writing produced.

The "Rising Up" aspect of her pedagogy should be well received by those of us subscribing to the goals of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning. Christensen states, "I use the term 'rising up' because reading and writing should be emancipatory acts" (vii). Her pedagogy complements the values of care, healing, and transformation that characterize our person-centered approaches.

She offers new and reinvigorated ways to teach with a critical social consciousness—pushing us beyond the stale and strident ideological approaches that have often become divisive in high school and college classrooms, where students as individuals end up being subordinated to abstractions and dogmas.

As a self-styled "social justice educator" (147), Christensen struggled continually to build classroom communities encouraging empathy—in students' personal and public lives, in the literature they read and the essays they write, and in the actual world beyond school. Her care and genuine regard for her students are evident throughout the teaching assignments and personal stories woven into the structure of the book.

Christensen manages this structure well. Her first-person narrative spans the 22 years of her teaching at a magnet arts high school "in the heart of a predominantly working-class African-American neighborhood in Portland, Oregon" (vii). And her narrative structure supports a rich fabric of teaching assignments and examples that can stimulate our own adaptations.

There are stand-alone assignments (such as writing about one's name and origins); there are complete units (such as researching immigration); and there are ways to bring personal and social concerns to poetry instruction. Moreover, the full-size format of this book makes available a number of activity sheets that could be photocopied or used as templates.

In keeping with her commitment to teach reading and writing as transformative acts, Christensen includes a chapter on teaching about the politics of language and a concluding chapter "Untracking English" arguing for quality education for all students. However, her solid, practical teaching strategies and reflections are always part of the fabric of her social commentaries.

Early in her teaching, Christensen realized that "the interplay of race, class,

and gender created a constant background static" in her classroom. Given this condition, "real community is forged out of struggle" as "students haven't been taught how to talk with each other about these painful matters [. . .] like racism and homophobia" (2).

> To become a community, students must learn to live in someone else's skin, understand the parallels of hurt, struggle, and joy across class and culture lines, and work for change. For that to happen, students need more than an upbeat, supportive teacher; they need a curriculum that encourages them to empathize with others. (2)

Thus, to Christensen, literacy is first "a tool that students could use to know themselves and heal themselves"; then it becomes "a passage into interrogating society" (vii). She asserts:

> We need to move beyond sharing and describing our pain to examining why we're in pain and figuring out how to stop it. [. . .] We must teach students how to "read" not only novels and science texts, but cartoons, politicians, schools, workplaces, welfare offices, and Jenny Craig ads. We need to get students to "read" where and how public money is spent. We need to get students to "read" the inequitable distribution of funds for schools. This is "rising up" reading— reading that challenges, that organizes for a better world. (vii)

Of course, trying to achieve these ideals is the teacher's on-going struggle. For example, Christensen chose to address directly the fears and attractions of gang violence in the lives of her students. "I couldn't ignore the toll that the outside world was exacting on my students" (4). However, she insists: "Bringing student issues into the room does not mean giving up teaching the core ideas and skills of the class; it means using the energy of their connections to drive us through the content" (5).

The struggle to build classroom communities takes place outside school, as well as in class. Christensen's commitment to "letting them know we care enough" meant such things as calling students' homes at night and giving them time to talk after school (38). This sense of caring and resultant community, in my mind, contrasts with the ill-conceived exploitation of so-called "contact zone" confrontations over controversial issues, in classrooms where genuine community and mutual tolerance are not established.

Christensen describes effective assignments that successfully integrate her empathic strategies and ideals. For example, in a class co-taught with social studies teacher Bill Bigelow, they paired American-born students with ESL students from the many countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Each one interviewed and wrote a profile of the partner to share in class: "Students were moved by their partners' stories. [. . .] Others were appalled at how these [foreign-born] students had been mistreated" (6).

Christensen's commentaries typically include both generalizations from the specific assignments to their broader implications and particularizations in the form of student quotes or writing samples:

> A curriculum of empathy puts students inside the lives of others.

By writing interior monologues, acting out improvisations, taking part in role plays, by creating fiction stories about historical events, students learn to develop understanding about people whose culture, race, gender, or sexual orientation differs from theirs. This is imperfect and potentially dangerous, of course, because sometimes students call forth stereotypes that need to be unpacked.

Things changed for me this year," Wesley wrote in his end-of-the-year evaluation. "I started respecting my peers. My attitude has changed against homosexuals and whites." Similarly, Tyrelle wrote, "I learned a lot about my own culture as an African American but also about other people's cultures. I never knew Asians suffered. When we wrote from different characters in movies and stories I learned how it felt to be like them." (6)

These two paragraphs illustrate Christensen's "pedagogy with a purpose" (177), which reflects the heritage of Paulo Freire, Ira Shor, and others in the progressive movement of educational reform for personal and social engagement and liberation. However, the strength of Christensen's book and practice is her uncompromising practicality. This is most refreshing and useful, in the face of the excesses frequently confronting us in the form of ideological and cultural critiques—excesses of theory that have accumulated and become new orthodoxies in literature and writing classrooms and in academic publications.

Christensen shows us how to open the door and let the actual world into our classrooms—and then how to take ourselves and our students out into that world to make it more just. Her example serves as a timely reminder to AEPL members in particular because our organization often seems deceptively non-political in relation to social justice issues. We should not ignore the implications of our commitment to go beyond traditional disciplines and approaches. Expanding our perspectives need not mean setting our sights on exclusively transcendent realms.

Christensen can teach us to ground our theory and practice in the timely social and political issues that affect us and our students. We can learn from her admirable ethical concerns for respectful understanding of a multi-cultural society.

In the last decade, Christensen has published a body of both creative and scholarly work, including notable articles in *English Journal*, which have been reprinted in several collections, and contributions to *Rethinking Schools* publications. She has become a nationally and internationally recognized leader and speaker for the educational reform movement for social and institutional change. Her work is grounded in rigorous critical scholarship, questioning established assumptions and practices while advocating a responsible agenda for change.

Her success is evident: from the classroom writing and sharing circles, in which she shared her own poetry while encouraging talented minority students to publish their writings in their award-winning literary magazine, to her honor as recipient of the prestigious Fred Hechinger Award from the National Writing Project in 1998. This annual recognition of an outstanding teacher who translates writing research into classroom practice is named in honor of the late *New York Times* education writer, whose values she exemplifies.

True to scholarly and literary value, Christensen's book contains generous selections of creative works from students and professionals, plus adequate bibliographic references and index. Every teacher will gain both ideas and inspiration from this book. If you are unfamiliar with Rethinking Schools, see www.rethinkingschools.org, and order this book on line.⌂

Elbow, Peter. *Everyone Can Write: Essays Toward a Hopeful Theory of Writing And Teaching Writing*. New York: Oxford UP, 2000.

Hepzibah Roskelly

Peter Elbow's writing has always appealed to the general reader. His 1980 book *Writing With Power* remains the only writing textbook I know that students have actually *lent* to their friends for its helpful advice about writing problems and for its welcoming, honest voice. It's not surprising then that Elbow begins his new book, a group of essays written since his last collection *Embracing Contraries*, with a note to general readers about which essays they might find most helpful. Like his other books, Elbow offers encouragement to all writers and hope for any teacher, and his voice strikes the same chords of disarming self-disclosure and friendly engagement that his earlier work has done. Yet, although this is a book for any reader who is interested in writing and language, it's decidedly a book for the profession, a book that argues for the possibility of teaching writing and that asks writers in the field of rhetoric and composition to encourage what he calls "a more welcoming conversation" and "a more inclusive community" (xxiii).

Elbow's insistence on the democratic possibility in teaching writing, that *everyone* can write, and his determined use of words like *hope* and *belief* to describe teachers' work, is no naïve, fuzzy doctrine. In fact, he waylays some of the criticism that has characterized him as romantic or fuzzy by creating voices in the text that argue with his stance, as here: "Peter, why are you so hung up with writing as mystery? [. . .] Why won't you accept writing as a matter of skill, rationality, and craft, rather than as playing God or jumping into the unknown? Not everyone is a romantic you know" (82) Or here: "At the bottom you're seeing everything in terms of *natural* vs. *unnatural*. But natural is a sentimental fuzzy-minded concept. What you call natural is not natural, it's constructed, it's a convention" (230). The critics Elbow dramatizes throughout his essays represent real positions in the profession, of course, and Elbow enacts his belief about academic conversation becoming less adversarial and more capacious by carefully and respectfully addressing objections.

The issues the collection's essays confront will be familiar to readers of Elbow's earlier work—invention, audience, reading, oppositional thinking, voice. Taken as a whole, the book operates as a systematic argument for rethinking the way we conceive of our work as writers and teachers by seeing the contradictions

that beset teachers and writers not as obstacles, but, as Paulo Freire would describe them, as limit situations to be problematized. The book's six sections (which I'll indicate by underlining) each include essays and what Elbow calls "Fragments" developed around a set of issues—from personal writing to evaluation. Each section explores the contradictions and complications embedded in the issue and suggests how to rethink theories by asking new questions of our practices.

This kind of problematizing is one of the things Elbow does best. He thrives on the contradictions embodied in dialectic or opposition, saying in the Introduction that "it might be that the believing game underlies everything else. . . . Yet since I also love doubting, criticism, and logic, binary thinking may lie deeper than the believing game" (3). The first section, Premises and Foundations, establishes the framework for oppositions beginning with Elbow's own experience as a failed writer ("Illiteracy at Oxford and Harvard"), where he speaks of writing as at once both compliance and resistance. The section concludes with "The Uses of Binary Thinking," where Elbow lays out the central premise in the book, that conflict is at the heart of writing and teaching, and that writers and teachers should, and can, hold conflicting ideas in their heads at one time. "My deeper goal in this essay," he says, "is not to preserve pairs or binaries in themselves so much as *to get away from simple, single truth:* to have situations of balance, irresolution, nonclosure, nonconsensus, nonwinning" (51). How to use the tension productively, to change our minds, to believe two or twenty ideas about private and public discourse, research and teaching, responding and evaluating—and the host of other dichotomies the profession wrestles with—becomes the subject of the following four sections of the book.

In The Generative Dimension, Elbow meditates on invention, on freewriting and audience awareness, and on the form and content dichotomy. In Part III, Speech, Writing and Voice, the essays propose varying definitions and attitudes toward voice, a concept that has intrigued Elbow throughout all his work. In "The Shifting Relationships between Speech and Writing," for example, Elbow proposes that writers and teachers turn on its head the traditional idea of speech as ephemeral and writing as indelible as a way to recover voice in writing. In an essay on "Silence," he speaks of the uses of the body and of silence in discourse. "Silence and felt sense. The foundation of verbal meaning often lies in the silence of what is felt nonverbally and bodily" (176). Discourses reflects on academic writing, on the relationships between reading and writing—with some useful, provocative advice on how to teach reading in a writing class—and on expressive discourse in academic writing.

The last section, Teaching, confronts some of the most common and most difficult dilemmas teachers face: in valuing dialect speech, "Inviting the Mother Tongue," in responding to texts, "High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing," and in evaluating writing, "Getting Along Without Grades—and Getting Along With Them Too" and "Starting the Portfolio Experiment at SUNY Stony Brook." The essays on teaching, and the Fragments that follow them, offer tentative, *possible* solutions to some of the complexities of teaching and learning in the writing class. I liked especially the "mini-lessons" Elbow offers in some of the essays and his attention to the multicultural dimen-

sions of our work with language in "Inviting the Mother Tongue." I wished that in this essay Elbow had chosen to discuss the gendered implications of his title, or the way that feminist thinkers like Ursula LeGuin and Gail Griffin have used the term "mother tongue" to argue for an expansion in the way we approach discourse.

Like the pragmatists Peirce, James, and Dewey, Elbow is determined to see the strength of an idea reside in its consequences, determined to resist doctrine, to embrace difference and possibility. There's an open-hearted generosity about his writing and his strategies for teaching that encourages real conversation, that welcomes new thinking, that allows for hope. Elbow may invite readers to play the doubting game, but it's the believing game that he really wants us to win.

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Farmer, Frank. *Saying and Silence: Listening to Composition with Bakhtin*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2001.

Emily Nye

This collection of essays by Frank Farmer uses the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin to explore the rhetoric of silence. Farmer frames his work on Bakhtin's ideas that "the relationship between saying and silence is hardly one of uncomplicated opposition" (3). These essays shed light on this complicated opposition.

This timely topic is illustrated in contemporary culture as we struggle to understand the meaning not just of what is said, but what is left out of news stories, popular culture, and art (to name a few). As teachers we may wonder how to deal with our students' silences or how to interpret the use (or misuse) of silence expressed between colleagues and administrators. Farmer applies Bakhtin "to help in the project of interpreting silences, naming them, and encouraging all silences to speak in ways that are freely chosen, not enforced" (4). Farmer approaches this "project" by explaining several of Bakhtin's theories, and along with the works of other contemporary rhetorical theorists, exploring the issue of silence and what it means in the writing classroom.

In the past I found Bakhtin's work to be dense and somewhat inaccessible. Farmer is able to explain Bakhtin's work clearly and help us see its meaning within the context of writing pedagogy. In each chapter, Farmer poses some rhetorical predicament (such as writing for an audience in Chapter Two or using imitation as a pedagogical tool in Chapter Four), and he then applies the work of contemporary composition or rhetorical theories to explain and complicate his ideas.

While some of Farmer's essays stress theory, to his credit he is able to tie Bakhtin's ideas back to the composition classroom. An example is how Farmer explicates Bakhtin's idea of the superaddressee in Chapter One. Farmer explains the superaddressee's role as an invisible, third listener in every conversation (the first ear is presumably the author, while the second ear is the person directly addressed). Farmer argues that the superaddressee is alive and well in our students' texts. If we are unable to hear what our students are trying to say, they become frustrated. They either "turn away from us as potentially responsive addressees of any sort and thus abandon any notion that what they write *for* us would be meaningful *to* us, or they would seek out other contexts for writing wherein some meaningful response might still be possible" (29).

This interpretation gives me a way to make sense of something I've experienced in my writing classroom. Often a student seeks me out to serve as what Bakhtin would call a "sympathetic third party [. . .] beyond the one defined by our pedagogical role in the institution" (29-30). I recognize the telltale signs when a student hands in an assignment that is slightly or seriously off the topic. In either case, I am forced to examine not just what the student wrote, but what she didn't write, and why. When I contact the student and ask about the assignment, our conversations often reveal the frustration Farmer describes. My role as superaddressee enables the student to articulate what she needs to say, even if it isn't the assignment. I don't mind playing this role when I believe it helps my students to develop intellectually (and on other levels). However, I acknowledge that sometimes it is inappropriate when students make personal disclosures.

Another idea I found helpful was Farmer's explanation of "Aesopianism" in a writing classroom. This term refers to a tumultuous period in Russian history (1917-1940) when the Russian intelligentsia could not directly address social and political ideas, so they developed allegorical strategies for communication. Bakhtin himself experienced this Aesopian dilemma of not being able to write or express himself the way he wanted. This concept of writing "in disguise" is certainly evident in writing classrooms today. Farmer illustrates with an example from his own classroom. Bakhtinian theory helps him make sense of his interactions with Devlyn, a student who challenged Farmer's authority. Devlyn refused to simply regurgitate class material. Farmer poses an interesting discussion of the use of voice in student writing. Bakhtin would ask us to locate Devlyn's voice within the larger chorus of voices. Bakhtin would also ask us to examine Devlyn's voice and notice how it is changing, and has changed, and to listen for other voices that might be located within "the single voice we ascribe to Devlyn" (54).

Voice is a continuing theme in this collection of essays. According to Bakhtin, voice and selfhood are inexorably linked. Voice is not a finished entity, but an unfinished project, a process "whose origins reside in particular social moments, institutions, and dialogues" (55). He looks at developmental, rhetorical, and historical aspects of voice. He draws not just on Bakhtin, but on Lev Vygotsky's work on voice as internalized social dialogue.

Farmer suggests that when we expose our students to unfamiliar voices, we help them imagine a different worldview. He encourages us to nurture this "dialogic consciousness," or the exchange of voices in dialogue, the challenges of making our voices our own (68). Not only should students learn to listen to voices,

but also they should learn to answer these voices through dialogue journals. He suggests assignments that have students use (or stake a position in opposition to) other voices. Farmer, and Bahktin, would have us help our students see that there is no single true voice, but rather a chorus of voices.

One point I disagree with is the publisher's promotional blurb on the book's back cover. It defines the book's audience as general scholars, specialists, and also advanced composition students. While the book is accessible, I would qualify the third audience as graduate students. Several of the chapters wax philosophical; Farmer presumes membership in the community of rhetorical scholars who discuss and interpret Bahktin. Farmer freely throws in mention of theorists like Charles Taylor, Richard Rorty, and Bernard Donals. This book is decidedly not for novices. I recommend *Saying and Silence* as an ideal text for a graduate seminar in Bahktin and his applications to writing pedagogy, along with reading Bahktin's original works.

This book's strength is its attempt to explain Bahktin while creating a praxis of relevant classroom application. When one reads Bahktin alone, there is the danger of abstracting his (already abstract) ideas and losing their connection to our work as teachers and writers. Farmer guides us through Bahktin while showing us how this Russian philosopher struggled to be heard and understood in a politically turbulent time in his country. Farmer helps us see the parallels between these struggles and our students' attempts to be heard and understood in our classrooms, not just through what they say, but what they don't.

Finkel, Donald L. *Teaching With Your Mouth Shut*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman Boynton/Cook, 2000.

Dennis Young

I like to talk. I like to profess, hold forth, elaborate, illustrate; I like to dazzle students with verbal acrobatics, well-rehearsed ideas, studied lucidity. I know better, but like many teachers my insecurity arises in the face of silence and lack of control. I was lucky enough to read Donald Finkel's *Teaching With Your Mouth Shut* in the middle of the semester, a time when I usually need some sort of inspiration or spur to invigorate my classes. Finkel helped me to stop the chatter, reminding me to reflect once again on the premises behind the Pedagogy of Telling that surreptitiously grips my teacher's psyche. He reminded me of what I thought I already knew: "Yes, I realize I talk way too much, robbing students of vital dialogue. I need to relax my vocal chords and let students pursue ideas without fear of my vigilant voice. Live with uncertainty, let students be." This "simple" realization, so hard to admit, was validated as I continued to read the book. To change my pedagogical practices means I have to change my *style of consciousness* as a teacher. What makes this book worthwhile is its elaboration of ways to

enact authentically such a radical, enviable, and often difficult to achieve pedagogical style.

Teaching With Your Mouth Shut constitutes a valuable lesson and model for beginning teachers learning their craft; it speaks as well to experienced teachers who want to revise their classroom practices with ideas to shape their teaching lives. More importantly, it's a lesson to help us honor students' abilities to engage in learning among themselves in a carefully considered environment. This book resonates with rich and lively examples of student writing, assignments, course descriptions, reading/writing schedules, and specific teaching ideas—all theoretically framed. This is not, however, merely a "how-to" book. Socrates, Plato, Rousseau, Dewey, Piaget, A. S. Neill, and to a lesser extent Friere are present throughout, sometimes explicitly; Finkel's pedagogy rests on their *romantic* shoulders. I prefer to call it romantic (as opposed to progressive) because the word suggests a constellation of ideas concerning human nature, psyche, education, and democracy. This tradition holds these truths to be self-evident:

- people who want to learn are naturally curious about the world and ideas;

- real ideas cannot truly be communicated but only experienced first-hand;

- only by wrestling with problems and thinking in a dialogical way can learning be made real;

- only by seeking and finding out for oneself can one truly learn.

One could easily add others to this list, but the main point here is that the real work of learning goes on when students talk and write among themselves in the presence of a teacher who does not *directly* tell them how to proceed or what to do.

This is also a pedagogy of resistance. Finkel aligns himself with a tradition of resistance to pedagogy as usual, the kind most of us are all too familiar with: teacher knows, teacher tells; student is deficient, student listens. This book is as much about saying no as it is about anything else we do as teachers. But saying no does not imply a renunciation; it does not mean that teachers relinquish responsibility. Responsibility, power, and authority are re-figured and reconsidered. Such teaching does not mean that anything goes and that the teacher sits back to let students wander wherever they may. Refusing to "teach," far from being irresponsible, means that teachers refuse to answer questions for students, refuse to tell them what to do; it means acting indirectly, posing questions, starting a discussion, relating stories. It means "to create a situation where [the student] will be able to make the best decision for herself" (132). In one chapter, Finkel takes enormous pains to show how a structured sequence of questions shapes learning environments. The *question* becomes the teacher's real work. After questions, silence achieves new status and becomes the art of teaching. Finkel keeps reminding us do not take charge, do not redirect students away from their own struggles with the questions at hand and the present interests that drive their imaginations. Just say no to the Pedagogy of Telling.

Saying no, however, to decades of the Pedagogy of Telling which furnishes the teaching ethos of higher education (and has so for years, despite experiments in collaborative learning) is easier said than done. Here's where Finkel shines.

Specific examples appear throughout, and the theoretical framework comes to life when Finkel illustrates his own "conceptual workshops." Hands-on learning, he insists, does not mean one has to drag in blocks, props, and computer software. Students learn concepts and ideas, gain insights and perspective by grappling with highly complex texts in the company of other grapplers. This approach takes as its task the opening up of the hermeneutic dimension of learning in its full scope. Assertions are understood as answers to questions and ideas that arise in response to another.

My favorite example is *In Search of Socrates*, a course devised by Finkel that focuses on Plato's early Socratic dialogues where Socrates' famous maieutic pedagogy is set forth. The teacher as "midwife," one who helps give birth to new ideas by questioning, probing, and discussing, constitutes one archetypal method behind Finkel's "open-ended seminar." Learning through inquiry, sometimes perilous, potentially chaotic, also leads to the unpredictable, perhaps the biggest payoff. Like Donald Murray's insistence on writing as surprise, Finkel's entire pedagogy may be called "learning as surprise." Surprise of course goes both ways: "A teacher must always be ready to be surprised" (42). This "Copernican shift" in classroom consciousness means that authority and the center of attention no longer resides in the teacher, the person-who-is-supposed-to-know. The intellectual work falls on students engaged in specific tasks concerning a text or problem in order to attain improvisational, not final, answers to open-ended questions. The teacher's work? Thoughtfully sequencing increasingly sophisticated questions and letting students proceed with a minimum of teacher intervention. This *improvisational* teaching style implies that there is no *providential* authority that always knows the answers from the start, no god-like over-seer of truth.

This may all sound somewhat familiar, especially to those who employ collaborative learning techniques, but I found the ideas here pushed me to new thinking about the purpose and strategy behind my own attempts to engage students in such learning. Although students already work in groups in my classes, I immediately lifted teaching ideas from this book and employed them, especially the "open-ended seminar," a highly sophisticated series of questions intended to engage students in dialogue for a lengthy period of time. To create such a seminar required me to rethink texts by developing a careful sequence of questions to help guide students to deeper understanding. The hardest part, I must confess, was keeping my mouth shut and standing ready for students; this teacher de-centering is the key to a successful seminar. The irony of the de-centered class, however, is that the teacher assumes even more power by remaining silent. By refusing to be the center of attention, the teacher becomes the "object of special interest" (130) when she does speak, the few uttered words attaining significant weight and import, becoming harder to ignore. So choosing when to speak and what to say has added weight and depth. The less we teach by telling, the more students learn; the less we speak, the more we say. This sounds like a variation of Socratic irony—he is wisest who know he knows nothing, that is, who remains continually open to the ongoing dialogue of learning.

To paraphrase Socrates, "The unreflective classroom is not worth having." Finkel tells us in the last chapter, "I have written this book to raise questions, to

widen horizons, and to stimulate reflection on our culture's cherished conceptions of 'great teachers' and 'great teaching'" (160). Following John Dewey, this book posits that "education is not an affair of 'telling'" (157); and even though most of us would likely acknowledge this truth, how often is it practiced?

You may be guessing that there is an agenda behind this style of teaching: the challenge is to "help shape students' characters toward one that will be competent to participate in a democratic community (especially a democratic community of inquiry)" (117). Character development to initiate democratic participation as thoughtful, questioning, intelligent citizens is, Finkel reminds us, the ultimate goal of education in a democratic society. To foster a democracy that is reflective and deliberate, rather than simply a marketplace of competing interest groups, a democracy that genuinely takes thought for the common good, we must produce citizens who have the Socratic capacity to reason about their beliefs. To unmask prejudice and to secure justice, we need questioning and argument, essential tools of civic freedom. So teaching with your mouth shut is in the end not just a faddish attempt at new-age pedagogy, but is at bottom a radical attempt to engage in thoughtful intellectual citizenship that sustains democracy.

Teaching, then, goes far beyond the walls of the classroom, potentially touching lives and engendering profound citizenship. I'll end by keeping my mouth shut and allowing Donald Finkel the last word about his book: "In the end, the title phrase will, I hope, turn your head sufficiently so that not only will your notion of good teaching be transformed, but so, too, will your sense of what may be signified by the word *teaching* itself" (10).

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