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Voice, a call and response : understanding voice in writing through storytelling.

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VOICE, A CALL AND RESPONSE:

UNDERSTANDING VOICE IN WRITING THROUGH STORYTELLING

A Dissertation Presented

by

FERN TAVALIN

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
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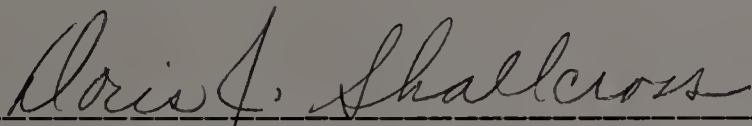School of Education

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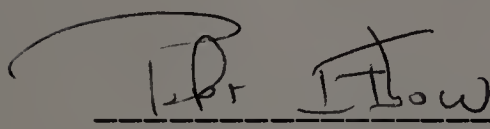
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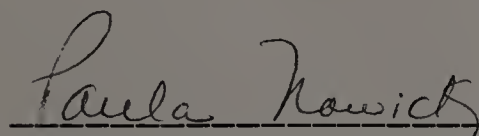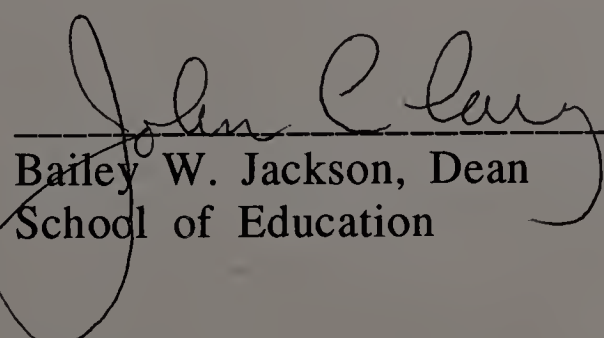
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Finally, I would like to thank my husband Peter Tavalin for taking on the details of my daily life while I pursued a doctorate. Without his love, encouragement, and faith none of this would have been possible.

ABSTRACT

VOICE, A CALL AND RESPONSE:

UNDERSTANDING VOICE IN WRITING THROUGH STORYTELLING

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There is a piece missing from the composition discussions about voice and that is the knowledge which evolves from learning through a dynamic group experience. Voice is recognized by most scholars as having a social component, yet there is little research about voice in writing which has occurred in a social context that is purposefully designed to allow the participants to set their own parameters, ergo exercise their own voices.

Through telling stories about voice and having participants choose a means to respond to those personal stories, this dissertation provides a methodology for the emergence of personal voice both physically and metaphorically. From the stories told and the responses to them, it became apparent that voice in writing operates in a much larger context than that of the word on the page. Acute to the emergence of personal voice are issues of vulnerability and personal safety. To hear each other's stories in a secure setting and be guaranteed a response creates a sense of comfort and a willingness to break barriers.

Even though there is no universally accepted definition of voice, the term is used facilely and with intention by many people. Because of this it is possible to ask someone to tell a story about his or her personal experience with voice, without defining the word. These stories shed light on how the term is internalized and personally applied. Such storytelling allows a place for each person to be voiceful, whereas a strict or limiting definition of voice can rule some people out.

As a pool, individual stories about voice form a field of possibilities. What is told as possible within a group then becomes the socially created parameter for voice. In this way, using the loose group framework presented in this dissertation permits fluidity as well as structure. While voice in writing is certainly framed by social contexts, it is at the same time, highly personal. Far from being at odds, as many scholars suggest, these two dimensions reinforce each other. They are mutually shaping and, therefore, neither can be considered without regard for the other.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Voice. Sound through the body. The chorus that booms as thunder, directed by the wave of a hand. A wispy presence that floats in the breeze, hoping someone will notice. A call. An echo. The vibrations that come from the depth of a soul.

Voice is so powerful that I sometimes wonder if any of us realize the powder keg we hold when we speak about it. Or if any of us understand how quickly it disappears under the sensed threat of a non-receptive audience. I have spent the last two years deeply involved with the subject of voice, yet could not permit my own to surface openly for fear of dismissal. This dissertation is as much about the emergence of my own voice as it is the participants in the study. Deeply rooted in the passive voice that "proper" academics used to instill in would be scholars, I am trying to break out of that mold in order to include active participation and welcome lively, fresh voices.

One of the precepts of stimulating creative behavior is to push through obvious boundaries so that the innovative can come forth. These boundaries can appear in the form of imposed definitions or as self restrictions due to any number of personally held root assumptions. The focus of this dissertation is to present a methodology which combines storytelling and collaborative group response as a means to break the barriers which can inhibit the

emergence of personal voice in writing. In setting this condition, it has become clear to me that boundaries serve a dual purpose; it is helpful to have them AND it is helpful to break out of them when necessary.

By telling their stories and then choosing a means through which to respond, the participants of this study showed the importance of social mediation in establishing a personal voice. The structure of allowing participants to define their own parameters led to an increased sense of voice during the research collaboration and underscored the dynamic relationship between the process of using voice and the intellectual understanding of it. Furthermore, the elements of time, attention, and <u>felt</u> understanding confirmed each participant's individuality and the sanctity of her space. This method fostered individual development and a sense of the unique voice in every person.

Nature of the Methodology

Inspired by the use of storytelling as inquiry as set forth by Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins (1990) in *Human Inquiry in Action*, I decided to see if storytelling might have a place in understanding the creative voice in writing for women writers and teachers. Storytelling and group response to those stories was chosen as a method to allow for the dynamics of group interaction, thereby addressing a key argument in the literature about the social nature of voice. As a result of this group's interaction, members were able to learn more about their own voices while still operating within a

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social context. The climate set by the group proved to be an essential factor.

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Literary Definition of Voice

A search through six literary dictionaries yielded no entries for voice. This is very telling. Many authorities do not recognize the term. However, M.H. Abrams (1988) has included voice in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* at least since 1968 and it is his definition which serves as the frame for this dissertation.

> The term in criticism points to the fact that there is a voice beyond the fictitious voices that speak in a work, and a person behind all the dramatis personae, including even the first person narrator. We have the sense of a pervasive presence, a determinate intelligence and sensibility, which has selected, ordered, rendered, and expressed these literary materials in just this way (p. 136).

Background of the Inquiry

Some of the tensions concerning the use of voice are brought out by philosophical notions about the origin and originality of language. Further complications arise through the interpretation of the purpose of writing and its separate, yet related function to speech. How closely should the written metaphor of voice be related to its oral manifestation? Opinions range from extreme to extreme.

Arguments exist about how much of the individual is individual and how much is shaped by culture and circumstance.

Theoreticians have attempted to mitigate the tensions over voice in writing by seeking clarity of definition or by manipulating the components which are tangible. Much of the current theory is based on introspection, philosophical stance, logical analysis, or observations of student writing. These aspects add to a total picture, but so many pieces are missing that those who believe in the existence of voice in writing are still calling to find its meaning. Part of the elusiveness of voice exists because it has been treated as an object, possessing "thing" like qualities. Such an approach frustrates the seeker when the assumed "thing" changes form.

Voice becomes social in the very manner in which language is taught. The sending out and receiving of language places it in a social domain. Which type of voice is projected is in large part due to social interaction. To foster creative expression, the environment must be comfortable enough for a person to transcend any feelings of vulnerability which stem from the group setting.

The spiritual dimension of voice presents a unique problem to explanatory theoreticians because this realm is taken on faith. Of all the metaphors for human understanding, the spiritual is the most invisible in American society. Yet, it is the very essence of creativity in voice for many people.

Statement of the Problem

There is a piece missing from all of the discussions about voice and that piece is the knowledge which evolves from learning through a dynamic group experience. Voice is recognized by most scholars as having a social component, yet there is little research about voice in writing which has occurred in a social context that is purposefully designed to allow the participants to set their own boundaries. This dissertation provides a methodology which utilizes a social setting as a means to break the barriers which can inhibit the emergence of personal voice in writing.

Purpose of the Study

It was my intention to create a situation whereby a social understanding of voice could emerge. Using a combination of participatory and phenomenological methods, I have explored the social context in which individual voice forms to:

1. gain a formative understanding of a possible new social methodology for breaking barriers which inhibit the expression of personal voice

2. examine whether or not the individual and group outcomes of this study can add to the holistic understanding of voice given by those scholars who adhere to its existence.

Significance of the Study

In that it may add to the understanding of voice in writing, this inquiry has significance for theoreticians of writing instruction. In fact, many are calling for further study so that a well rounded theory may develop which synthesizes old and new. Part of this call concerns a need for dialogic pedagogy. This study will show that storytelling with group response is an important component of the dialogue.

Beyond the realm of writing theory, the research method itself may be of practical use in the stimulation of voice in student writing. Answering a story with a story, as opposed to solitary journaling or critical feedback groups, may be an additional method for helping basic writers.

Across disciplines people have been urging that attention be given to individual stories and the truths they may yield. Indeed, phenomenological research is based in story. It is hoped that this study will encourage those who seek a personal way to integrate the human experience into academia to do so.

On a grander scale, this study may change how ideas evolve by demonstrating a means to include cross currents into a holistic picture rather than providing either/or situations which lead to crossfire instead of collaboration. The time has come to welcome the artist's ways of creating into academic discourse so that we may make room for open, growing, and never ending understanding.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE SEARCH

The Struggle for Definition

Whether or not voice exists as more than a mystical, unknowable term is the subject of much controversy in the fields of literary criticism, rhetoric, and writing. "Again and again I have advised my students in both high school and university classes: Write in your own voices, your personal, authentic, sincere voices. But I am not at all sure that I know what I mean by *voice*" (Leggo, 1991). Critics warn of the anti-intellectual roots of voice as "authentic" or "natural" (Axelrod, 1988; Hashimoto, 1987; Palacas, 1989). "Because the whole notion of 'voice' is so mystical and abstract, the term may have become nothing more than a vague phrase conjured up by English teachers to impress and motivate the masses to write more, confess more, and be happy" (Hashimoto, 1987, p. 74-75). Some limit the definition of voice and apply a linguistic examination of language structure to try and isolate individual components (Palacas, 1989). Others expand its meaning to encompass altered states of consciousness and different levels of personal expression (Moffett, 1982; Lockhart, 1987). Still more resist the notion that voice should be categorized at all: "... the experience of voice, the device of voice, the personality of voice, the tone of voice, the politics of voice, the intertextuality of voice, the authenticity of voice, the origin of voice, the ubiquity of voice, the energy of voice cannot be conceptualized,

schematized, and classified anymore than beachstones can be categorized and labeled" (Leggo, 1991, p. 143).

Despite academic caveats and logical contradiction, scholars persist in trying to define, discuss, or describe voice. Expressing voice in writing is made difficult by the paucity of cues in written language when compared to speech (Elbow, 1981; Hoddeson, 1981). "Concerning language in print, meanings are derived from just three elements: words, syntax, and the mechanics of capitalization and punctuation" (Hoddeson, 1981, p. 94). These three patterns have to account for the entire range of verbal communication. In order to effectively transmit voice, writing frequently deviates from standard form (Elbow, 1981; Hoddeson, 1981). This is especially prevalent in writing associated with sales and advertising. Brochures and maga- zine ads account for the introduction of numerous contemporary writing conventions designed specifically to catch the eye of the reader.

Towards a Working Definition of Voice in Writing

In an article entitled "The Pleasures of Voice in the Literary Essay," Peter Elbow (1989) distinguishes three categories of voice in writing: audible voice, dramatic voice, and authentic voice. The first two forms of voice as he describes them are less elusive than the in- tangible nature of authentic voice. Texts with audible voice allow "a sense of a sound coming up from the page by itself, and they seem to give us energy rather than requiring energy of us" (p. 212). Accord- ing to Elbow, audible voice arises from the use of spoken language in

written form, poetic rhythm, simple sentence structures that show movement, phrases that call attention to the author, or word choices that signal the author's presence.

Dramatic voice brings character to the author. Elbow frames the question, "What kind of *voice* do you hear in there?" to help identify the nature of dramatic voice (p. 218). The degree to which a text shows dramatic voice varies from vivid to implied.

The third type of voice which Peter Elbow recognizes is authentic voice. He uses an umbrella phrase "one's own voice" to discuss a three pronged notion which includes: one's own voice as distinctive and recognizable, one's own voice as having the authority to speak, and one's own voice as having authenticity or resonance. Elbow is tentative about whether these distinctions are part of a whole or remain as three related concepts. Nevertheless, the first two distinctions are straightforward when compared to the third. A recognizable voice refers to an author's distinct style, a use of language which calls the reader's attention to a specific implied author. Voice which contains "having the authority to speak" comes when the author shows trust in self. This idea is found in the form of voice-lessness as addressed by Adrienne Rich, Tillie Olson, and Mary Belenky, et al. (Elbow, 1989).

Authentic voice, a subsection of "one's own voice," is the most controversial. Elbow distinguishes authentic voice from dramatic voice by stating, "Always there are two 'authors' for any text: the implied author as it were *in* the text and the actual historical author as it were *behind* the text" (p. 224). Which author to emphasize depends upon whether the reader is treating the text as self-

contained or extending what is written to include a real author and a real world beyond the written text. The latter allows for a discussion of the author's intentions. This is especially necessary when working with student writing. "We can often help students realize their intentions better if we can see them. If we cannot see them most of our advice will be misguided" (p. 225). Frequently, the reader can be incorrect about the inferences made. Nonetheless, "... good reading and good teaching depend on the ingrained human tendency to make these dangerous inferences" (p. 226).

Not only is Peter Elbow examining the author behind the writing, but he is searching for an unconscious connection. "We have all had the experience of hearing perfectly sincere words which nevertheless don't ring true or solid because they don't take account of important feelings or character-facets of which the speaker may be unaware.... When words are resonant, they fit the whole person - including his unconscious" (p. 226-227). The notion of resonant voice is one upon which Elbow later elaborates in a soon to be published essay. There he stresses that resonant voice need not be sincere or true, that it is a connection to the unconsciousness of the author that exists past the reader/author relationship.

In trying to isolate voice, and authentic voice in particular, Peter Elbow is careful to note that he is speaking of a complex and multifaceted entity. "A self that is deeply social - an entity made up largely of strands or voices from others and subject to powerful forces outside itself - can of course have identity and integrity, and thus authentic voice" (p. 230). Underlying his discussion is the impli-cation "... that we live in a world of distinct selves; that we are able to

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know something of each other through language; that language or behavior can fit the self well or not so well; and that we can sometimes hear the difference as we listen for authentic voice or its absence" (p. 229).

Although "The Pleasures of Voice in the Literary Essay" represents a discussion of voice in nonfiction, the thoughts Peter Elbow presents stem from years of writing about voice in general, and he applies them to fiction as well. The reason for examining voice is that it contributes enormously to power and breath in writing. In **Writing With Power** Elbow (1981) notes that there is a breath and rhythm to voice in writing. This description is akin to his later categories of audible and dramatic voice. He further offers a notion of "real voice" which corresponds to the authentic voice described in "The Pleasures of Voice in the Literary Essay." "Writing with **real voice** has the power to make you pay attention and understand - the words go deep" (p. 299). This is not to say that real voice always contains loud emotion. "It is often quiet" (p. 312).

Throughout his discussions Peter Elbow embraces both the elusive, mysterious qualities of real voice and a conviction that real voice is nevertheless attainable. It is not limited to a single, fixed voice. A person can have many voices which develop and manifest for different purposes (Elbow, 1981; 1989). Peter Elbow does not leave the idea of authenticity on the written page, but applies it to his own teaching as well. He speaks of the times when doubting his real voice and being reluctant to inhabit it have led to awkward moments in the classroom, but that "...when there is a congruence between behavior and intention or conviction, the effect is loosening,

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lightening, and freeing of the atmosphere - some fog lifted from everyone's consciousness" (Elbow, 1986, p. 204-205).

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Understanding Voice Through Introspection

While Elbow's definitions add clarity to the discussions about voice, there remain endless ways of describing its qualities. Toby Fulwiler offers ten observations based on an introspective examination of voice:

> 1. If there is such a thing as authentic voice, it is protean and shifty....

> 2. Most published voices are carefully constructed...

> 3. Authenticity can best be found by looking at whole pieces of discourse, preferably more than one...

> 4. When people hear a voice in writing, what they most likely hear is a tone conveyed through an aggregate of smaller discourse features characteristic of the writer's public persona...

> 5. The structure of a whole piece of writing contributes significantly to the image of rationality in a writer's voice...

> 6. Distinctive writing voices commonly depend on language features associated with creative or imaginative writing...

> 7. The writing topic itself contributes to the sense of voice...

> 8. Published voices are more distinctive than private ones...

9. My own voice is determined, to a significant extent, by a discourse community long thought left behind...

10. Writers' private expressive language conveys less sense of voice than their transactional language... (Fulwiler, 1990, p. 218-219).

It is important to note that Fulwiler makes his conclusions within the narrow framework of introspective examination. Applying the same method, one might also conclude: 1. Published voices are less distinctive than private ones; and 2. Writers' private expressive language conveys more sense of voice than their transactional language. Still, these observations provide a base for discussion and some grounded assumptions about what underlying characteristics influence written voice.

<u>Another Definition of Voice</u>

Michael Stephens (1986) combines the roles of author and critic when he writes **Dramaturgy of Style: Voice in Short Fiction**. While Stephens analyzes certain aspects of voice, his definitions remain poetic. "Voice is shaped, given form, builds from experience a rhythmical arc of circumstance, finds a tension which allows for fiction's ultimate push and pull.... Truth is only capitalized at the beginning of a sentence in fiction as in drama and poetry. What is more important than truth is being faithful to the rhythm of experience. Short fiction can lack character, plot, and theme, but these are replaced by figures like image, form, rhythm, and tension.

Poetry, drama, and short fiction withhold - leave out. Part of the seeing voice is its silence" (p. 4-5). Yet, despite all of the poetry, Stephens remains impersonal in his portrayal of voice. He connects voice to the larger resonances of life and experience, but does not maintain a contact with his own lived experience. Stephens does not ultimately define the term. "Finally, this thing about short fiction, its voice and all - I want to paraphrase from a short story by Flannery O'Connor - is as obvious as a pig on the sofa" (p. 15).

The Inner/Outer Tension of Voice

At the root of many discussions concerning voice is the work of Lev Vygotsky (Trimbur, 1988; LeFevre, 1987). In the early 1900s Vygotsky conducted psychological experiments with children in order to ascertain the mechanisms by which language is acquired. Through his work Vygotsky determined that language and thought are two separate functions which blend early in the development of the child and then become interfunctional so that each develops in and with the influence of the other. In turn, the role of language itself is shaped by an early social speech which then divides into egocentric speech and communicative speech (Vygotsky, 1991). This occurs within the context of humans as "socially rooted and historically developed" beings (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57).

This separation of internal speech and external speech yields different developments. Internal or egocentric speech changes form, departing from its early use as internal rearticulation of social speech, into what Vygotsky coins as "inner speech." Inner speech is

like a personal shorthand. It interfaces socially influenced words and thought with personal language and image in a dynamic system of evolving meaning. A single word of inner speech can represent elaborate discourse. "And naturally this unique inner sense of the chosen word cannot be translated into ordinary external speech. Inner sense turns out to be incommensurable with the external meaning of the same word" (Vygotsky, 1991, p. 248). Vygotsky also believed that inner speech lived as an outer plane to inward, pure thought. "Experience teaches us that thought does not express itself in words, but rather realizes itself in them" (Vygotsky, 1991, p. 251).

John Trimbur, in an article entitled "Beyond Cognition: The Voices of Inner Speech," takes Vygotsky's notion of the social forma- tion of inner speech and applies it directly to student writing. He rejects the idea that writing is a struggle to gain freedom from the private, inner world of personal thought. Rather, Trimbur uses the example of a student's reaction to a writing assignment to demon- strate that inner speech is socially influenced, instead of privately maintained. He likens the saturated inner speech to "a chorus of voices from outside, contending for our attention and allegiance.... The compression and condensation of language that occur when we internalize the voices of others disembody these voices, leaving ghostlike accents in the words that compose inner speech. But the point is that the words we think of and experience as private thought are in fact constituted through the voices of others that echo in our verbal thought" (Trimbur, 1988, p. 13). Shirley Brice Heath empiri- cally demonstrates this impact of socialization on language and

communication in her ten year study of language acquisition among different cultural groups of the Piedmont Carolinas (Heath, 1983).

Ideological Conflicts

Presented thus far, the inner/outer nature of voice seems like a benign concept. However, depending upon the philosophical stance of those discussing this issue the debate can become quite heated. There are social constructionists, postmodernists, deconstructionists, et cetera who would erase the idea of a unique inner self altogether. Caught up in a frantic one-upping of each manifested voice, some believe that the self never existed or has been obliterated. Those who so posit are politically concerned with the ills of competitive societies to the extreme point that self is objectified and vandalized.

I think that one source of confusion lies in forgetting that constructs of the self are metaphors. Self does not have a physical location as does the arm or the leg. Hence, it is in a better position to fluidly move within or without our physical bodies, depending upon where the spiritualist's unconsciousness flies or the theorist's frame deems fit. In an environment which has been trained to think objectively (as in Shutz's sense of object or thing), the subjective or process nature of being is momentarily forgotten. It is this confusion that locks theoretical interpretations into place. With the recent, more commonly accepted attention to subjective reality (again in the Shutz sense of process), it is imperative for those who have stated early opinions about authentic voice to revoice them. Such restating can be seen in the work of Peter Elbow. He clearly speaks about the

multiple nature of both self and voice, a clarification of his earlier notions. The search for voice does not rule out an inner/outer complementarity.

Emergent Voice

The idea of an emerging voice is illustrated by Kurt Spellmeyer through student writings. Spellmeyer applies Foucault's theory that the "I" defines itself by speaking and then learning what has been said. "Thought, as a testing of its own limits, runs blindly ahead of intention" (Spellmeyer, 1989, p. 723). Through the act of writing, voice is discerned retrospectively. However, the search for truth can interfere with its discovery because it inhibits open questioning. Accordingly, he notes of his student, "...she must start to ask questions for which no answers or containing forms wait ready at hand" (Spellmeyer, 1989, p. 723).

Placement on a Spectrum of Consciousness

The nature of voice is multiplicitous. Certain scholars speak of it in terms that are objective, quantifiable, and defined. Others write about voice in terms that are as ethereal as perceived reality itself. Some look for ways of finding it when it is lost. Still, there are those who deny its existence. An inquiry into voice needs to allow for any of these possibilities to emerge.

Borrowing from Gregory Bateson (1979), the source of many disputes and faults in logic occur from mistakes in logical typing.

That is to say, conclusions are drawn about metaclassifications from the data of classification. But, these are two different maps. Bateson refers to the work of Russell and Whitehead at the beginning of this century to further accentuate his notion that "... logic cannot model causal systems, and paradox is generated when time is ignored" (p. 117). In order not to create a paradoxical situation, it is necessary to distinguish the map from the territory.

Extending this analogy, consider the dilemma of the mapmaker whose job it is to create a flat map from a round world. No matter how carefully the mapmaker works, there exists the underlying problem that the map does not, in Bateson's words, reflect the territory. Any projection made accounts for certain aspects of reality while grossly distorting others. If a map shows the correct shapes of the continents, it cannot depict their relative sizes. One is forsaken at the expense of clarifying the other. However, in order to understand the information given on one map, the reader needs to remember what has been appropriately learned from the other flat projections. This concept is nearly impossible to convey to seventh and eighth grade students because the impressions and misconceptions made from the constant viewing of a single projection (usually the Mercator map) are difficult to erase. At the same time, the people who make these maps forget that they, too, are dealing with projection. In the Nystrom World Atlas: A Resource for Students (1990) it states: "Because the earth is a sphere, a globe is its only perfect model" (p. 84). Of course, even a globe represents very little about the complexities of Earth. Is it a perfect model?

In my conveyance of some of the work written about voice, I would like to use a map to represent some of the understandings that I have gained. By doing so, it needs to be remembered that

> The map is always smaller than the territory
> and more concentrated; it preserves basic re-
> lationships as it highlights selected features.
> Maps both reveal and conceal; they provide a
> gain in simplicity and clarity but usually also
> cover over some of the complexity of the
> depicted situation (von Eckhartsberg, 1981,
> p. 23).

Therefore, the term map is being used in the sense of an aid or a tour guide to a complex territory which remains necessarily under-developed.

Ken Wilber (1985) has offered a structure for viewing layers of reality in his spectrum of consciousness model which is conducive to the criteria I have enumerated in the aforementioned paragraph. Briefly stated, Wilber combines many different spiritual notions of consciousness into a general frame. He denotes four different levels of consciousness: persona, ego, total organism, and unity conscious-ness. Within each level, enculturated boundary lines are drawn which, according to him, need to be reintegrated. "The ultimate metaphysical secret, if we dare state it so simply, is that there are no boundaries in the universe. Boundaries are illusions, products not of reality but of the way we map and edit reality. And while it is fine to map out the territory, it is fatal to confuse the two" (p. 31).

Keeping in mind that these levels are a map and not reality itself, the self/not self boundaries become more restricted as an

persona   shadow

_____   _____

PERSONA LEVEL

         ego   body

_____   _____

EGO LEVEL

        total organism   environment

_____   _____

TOTAL ORGANISM

                         TRANSPERSONAL BANDS

_____

UNITY CONSCIOUSNESS   universe (manifest and unmanifest)
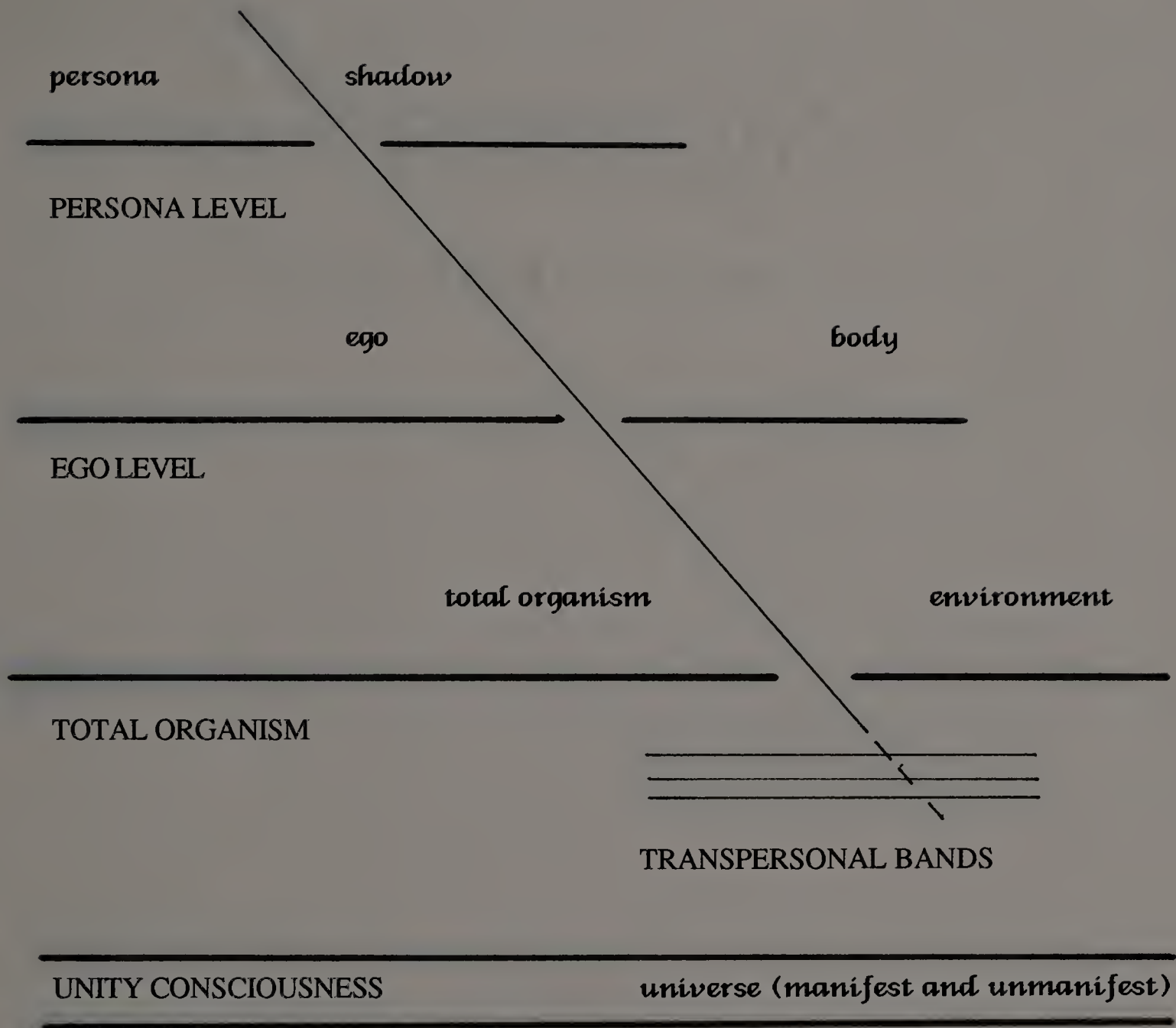
(Wilber, 1985, p. 10)

Figure 2.1

Wilber's Spectrum of Consciousness

individual defines herself in terms of self. So, at the unity conscious-
ness level there is a sense of being one with the universe. At the
level of total organism, the individual identifies with the mind and
body as one, separated from the environment around. At the ego
level, the individual relates to an ego which has incorporated the
shadow and persona, but is still distinct from the body. At the
persona level, the individual relates to some aspects of personality
while denying others, namely the shadow (Wilber, 1985).

Boundaries can be described psychologically as in the above
paragraph, or they can be interpreted socially, historically, scientifi-
cally, politically, ad infinitum. For the sake of discussion and
personal meaning making, I would like to interpret some writers'
views about voice in terms of a parallel to Wilber's spectrum of
consciousness.

An analysis can be made of the different definitions or denials
of voice offered by the rhetoricians, psychologists, and philosophers
cited in this paper so far. Many of the definitions can be categorized
into several different levels, depending upon the contexts of their
use. Lack of context places the intents of the definitions at odds.
Unarticulated boundaries are at play, but the discourse continues be-
cause the same words are bantered about. The term "real voice" is
one such example. In the writings of Peter Elbow (1981), he de-
scribes this term as being "on slippery ground" (p. 293). Yet, Karen
LeFevre (1987) places Peter Elbow's "real voice" into a Platonic box
with a label of "asocial mode of invention" (p. 52). Arthur Palacas
(1989) calls for objective definitions and relegates voice to the do-
main of parenthetical expression and paragrammar. James

Moffett (1982) asks for voice to enter the silent world of meditation. Once their ideas are viewed in context, the debate becomes irrelevant. Each is discussing a different level of voice. See Figure 2.2 on page 23 for an illustration of these categories.

Within my literature search four authors stand out in terms of the presence of an actual author behind the text who resonates as described by Peter Elbow. These authors maintain resonance for me because of an almost immediate connection to Wilber's spectrum of consciousness. They appear to actively reflect in their writing the struggles Wilber delineates. In doing so, a chord is struck in me that suggests resonance at a consciousness/unconsciousness level.

Roland Barthes as Persona/Shadow Split

In a 1974 preface to the first series of "Dialogues" produced by Roger Pillaudin for *France-Culture*, Roland Barthes speaks about the difference between speech, the written word, and writing. Even in translation, his words are full of audible voice. According to Barthes:

> First of all, roughly speaking, here is what
> falls into the trap of scription (this word,
> pedantic though it may be, is preferable to
> *writing* : writing is not necessarily the mode
> of existence of what is written). It is evident,
> in the first place, that we lose an innocence;
> not that speech is in itself fresh, natural,
> spontaneous, truthful, expressive of a kind of
> pure interiority; quite on the contrary, our
> speech (especially in public) is immediately
> theatrical, it borrows its turns (in the stylistic
> and ludic senses of the term) from a whole

persona   *shadow*   2 3

* Voice as Parenthetical Expression and Paragrammar
* Real or Authentic Voice in the Sense of as Different from Habitual Self-Expression

PERSONA LEVEL

ego   *body*

EGO LEVEL   * Real or Authentic Voice as Resonation
                                      * Voice as a Social Invention

total organism   *environment*

TOTAL ORGANISM

                                   * Real or Authentic Voice as an Expression of Jungian Archetypes
                                   * Voice in Silent Meditation

UNITY CONSCIOUSNESS   *universe (manifest and unmanifest)*
                                    * Voice Combined in Silent Meditation with the Unverbalizable Whole

Figure 2.2

Placement of Certain Voice Debates on Spectrum of Consciousness

2 3

collection of cultural and oratorical codes:
speech is always tactical; but in passing to the
written word, it is the very innocence of this
tactic, perceptible to one who knows how to
listen, as others know how to read, that we
erase; innocence is always *exposed* ; in
rewriting what we have said we protect our-
selves, we keep an eye on ourselves, we
censure and delete our blunders, our self-
sufficiences (or our insufficiencies), our
irresolutions, our errors, our complacencies,
sometimes even our breakdowns... in short, all
the watered silk of our image-repertoire, the
personal play of our self; speech is dangerous
because it is immediate and cannot be taken
back (without supplementing itself with an
explicit reprise); scription, however, has
plenty of time; it can even take the time to
"turn the tongue seven times in the mouth,"
as we say in French... in writing down what
we have said, we lose (or we keep) every-
thing that separates hysteria from paranoia
(Barthes, 1985, p. 2-3).

Barthes portrayal of the spoken word as thoughtless and his insis-
tence that rewriting is a form of self-protection shows a lack of
shadow/persona integration. With this belief about the actual author
it is easier for me to understand why he later asserts that writing is
the only true form and that it should never be considered as emanat-
ing from speech.

Walter Ong at Ego Level

For Walter Ong (1968) voice has an interiority which casts itself out and is received externally to then be placed into the interior of another being.

> All verbalization, including all literature, is
> radically a cry, a sound emitted from the in-
> terior of a person, a modification of one's
> exaltation of breath which retains the
> intimate connection with life which we find in
> breath itself, and which registers in the
> etymology of the word 'spirit,' that is breath....
> The cry which strikes our ear, even the
> animal cry, is consequently the sign of an
> interior condition, indeed of that special
> interior focus or pitch of being which we call
> life, an invasion of all the atmosphere which
> surrounds a being by that being's interior
> state, and in the case of man, it is an invasion
> by his own interior self-consciousness....
> Precisely because he does not renounce his
> own interior self, the cry of the wounded,
> suffering man invades his surroundings and
> makes its terrible demands on those persons
> who hear it.... The voice of the agonizing man,
> we say, 'captivates' others' attention, their
> very selves, 'involving' them, as we have
> recently learned to put it, by pulling them
> into his own interior and forcing them to
> share the state which exists there (p. 28).

Voice, then, is a resonation from one interior to another. This being said, that resonation is not transmitted directly. Words, according to Ong, imply that the speaker and listener enter into what Martin Buber labels an "I-thou relationship" in order to communicate. "The

human speaker can speak to the other precisely because he himself is not purely self, but is somehow also other. His own 'I' is haunted by the shadow of a 'thou' which it itself casts and which it can never exorcize" (Ong, 1968, p. 52). Voice gives birth to this roleplaying in life and in literature. As Ong points out, "... is it not highly indicative that the word for mask, **persona** (that-through-which-the-sound-comes), has given both to the ancients and to us the word for person?" (p. 54). He maintains that this voice is a calling out for response, a human need for communication.

Russell Lockhart and the Transpersonal Band

In **Psyche Speaks** Russell Lockhart discusses the emergence of voice in terms of Jungian psychology. He strives to reach the reader with "that sense of Echo as the deeper voice of all things" (Lockhart, 1987, p. 8). In doing so, Lockhart speaks about art and poetry as being "rooted in the future" (Lockhart, 1987, p. 94). It is vision that brings voice for him. At the same time, Lockhart laments the loss of oral tradition and its unifying effect on community spirit and group memory. As an author he struggles with how to communicate the breath of his words through writing. "How to 'write down,' how to print books with the 'mysteries of words,' how to publish **Psyche Speaks** without losing the essential animal nature of psyche speaking in the breath, and that breath traveling to innocent ears; how indeed! That is a deep puzzle" (Lockhart, 1987, p. 90).

James Moffett in Unity Consciousness

Moffett (1982) speaks of authentic authoring where material surfaces from somewhere unknown to consciousness. He offers a route for writers which parallels the teachings of many meditation guides. In doing so, his suggestions consciously acknowledge the spectrum of consciousness. Although employing different terms, Moffett challenges writers to reach unity consciousness. He asks for writers to reach a state of suspended inner speech, "holding the mind on one point until it transcends discourse and culture and merges with cosmos, in trance" (p. 239).

Voice as a Psychological Metaphor

The development of voice in women has received considerable attention, beginning with Carol Gilligan's (1982) book *In A Different Voice*. Gilligan noticed that many women did not seem to fit the traditional theories of human moral development. Through extensive interviewing she noticed a distinction between the morality of those who individuate and those who connect. Although the study focused primarily on women, Gilligan cautions:

> The different voice I describe is characterized
> not by gender but theme. Its association with
> women is an empirical observation, and it is
> primarily through women's voices that I trace
> its development. But this association is not
> absolute, and the contrasts between male and
> female voices are presented here to highlight
> a distinction between two modes of thought

and to focus a problem of interpretation
rather than to represent a generalization
about either sex. My interest lies in the in-
teraction of experience and thought, in differ-
ent voices and the dialogues to which they
give rise, in the way in which we listen to
ourselves and to others, in the stories we tell
about our lives (Gilligan, 1982, p. 2).

Inspired by the work of William Perry, who believed that an understanding of relativism (that truth depends upon the context and the framework of the knower) was essential to the humanities, the authors of **Women's Ways of Knowing** began a phenomenological study of women's modes of knowing. The metaphor of voice emerged from this study as a unifying theme. "What we had not anticipated was that 'voice' was more than an academic shorthand for a person's point of view.... We found that women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined" (Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 18). In contrast to the voice metaphor, Belenky et al. note that scientists and philosophers frequently apply visual metaphors such as the "the mind's eye" which

suggest a camera passively recording a static
reality and promote the illusion that disen-
gagement and objectification are central to
the construction of knowledge. Visual
metaphors encourage standing at a distance to
get a proper view, removing - it is believed-
subject and object from a sphere of possible
intercourse. Unlike the eye, the ear operates
by registering nearby subtle change. Unlike
the eye, the ear requires closeness between

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subject and object. Unlike seeing, speaking
and listening suggest dialogue and interaction
(Belenky, et al., 1986, p. 18).

The connection to the ear and listening brings voice out of its symbolic meaning and back to the original function of voice as speech. Writing has distanced this function and so has the rush of words which flee past as we listen, but "don't give psyche's speech time to *wander* in the labyrinth of the ear" (Lockhart, 1987, p. 8). Used in this sense, words themselves represent the voices which gave birth to their meaning. Lockhart views words as eggs through which he urges his readers to follow "the connections that come imaginally when we break the shell of words by attending to the etymological roots of words, whereby the hidden psyche in words can be awakened and freed" (Lockhart, 1987, p.13-14).

The Psychological Metaphor Turned Concrete

Julian Jaynes (1990) proposes a radical relationship between voice and the development of the conscious mind. According to him, it is possible that humans at one point functioned with a bicameral mind, split between the automatic non-conscious side of the brain and the god-like side of the brain which sent auditory hallucinations to help sustain enduring tasks and control situations of imminent danger. Jaynes emphasizes the importance of socialization and the need for a group voice in order for prehistoric man to survive in the stages which led to civilization. He further recognizes the human

struggles for certainty as a vestige of man's previous obedience to the internal voice of the gods.

In this theory of auditory hallucinations, writing was one of several factors which may have contributed to a natural selection away from the bicameral mind. "The consequences of the disappearance of auditory hallucinations from human mentality are profound and widespread, and occur on many different levels. One thing is the confusion of authority itself. What is authority?" (Jaynes, 1990, p. 227) The word "authentic" carries with it as a primary meaning the idea of authority or that which has everything requisite to authority (Oxford English Dictionary, 1988). Jaynes connects this use of authority to voice when he says,

> In the classical bicameral mind, that is, before its weakening by writing about 2500 B.C., I suggest that there was no hesitancy in the hallucinated voice and no occasion for prayer. A novel situation or stress, and a voice told you what to do. Certainly this is so in contemporary schizophrenic patients who are hallucinating. They do not beg to hear their voices; it is unnecessary" (Jaynes, 1990, p. 228).

Voice and Creative Writers

The expression of voice by creative writers seems to vary significantly from that of literary critics. A shift in sense from a philosophical notion to a personal discovery is represented in the account Eudora Welty (1984) gives of her development of a writing

voice. She places her writing within the context of her life and the characters of her stories. It is there that Miss Eckhart is created and with this character, a voice found. "Not in Miss Eckhart as she stands solidly and almost opaquely in the surround of her story, but in the making of her character out of my most inward and most deeply feeling self, I would say I have found my voice in my fiction" (p. 101).

Call for Connection

Roland Barthes accentuates the need for reader response to modern text when he laments the loss of the amateur in making art. For him, the calling up of an internal written conversation with a text gives it significance. In this sense, a text has voice if it conjures response in the reader. In order to fully participate, however, a reader must also maintain an experienced sense of what it is to write. "Enmeshed in a world where he projects himself, he projects not his doing, his making (his body), but his psychology. This reader who cannot write projects his image-repertoire (the narcissistic zone of the psyche) very far from his muscular, carnal body, the body of jouissance. He is drawn into the trap of the image-repertoire" (Barthes, 1985, p. 240-241). These comments represent an aging Barthes whose own writing had developed from critic to author.

Creativity as a Connector

There are cries for connection from all corners of the world in many ways. Focusing on voice, the types of connections asked vary with each author. Carol Gilligan and Mary Belenky, et al. discuss the connection of people to people. For Roland Barthes it is a connection of reader to the art of writing in order to fully appreciate and physically experience the art form. Peter Elbow speaks of a connection to resonance. James Moffett seeks a connection to the cosmos. I would like to add to this a connection born from one sort of feminine creativity.

At the outset, I would like to state that I am not discussing feminine in the sense of gender affiliation, but in the sense of the feminine archetype as presented by Jung. Despite my feelings about the alienation that sometimes arises from the term feminine, there is no suitable term that is as widely evoked as is Jung's. Therefore, please accept this term in the spirit in which it is offered.

Valerie Valle and Elizabeth Kruger (1981) offer a notion of female creativity that fits with the type of creativity that I most frequently employ. According to them feminine creativity is "the creating of the environment necessary for the emergence of the created" (p. 387). The truths which the feminine seeks are epitomized in the diaries of Anais Nin. "She comes to the diary with the actual truth, her own truth; the work is not meant to be scientific or objective.... Never needing to change, cross out, or erase one word in the volumes of her diaries, there she gives us clarity without being scientific, honesty without being objective, rational thinking without

becoming rigid, and logic without being cold" (p. 392). This type of knowledge, the knowledge that speaks from personalized story needs to be included more frequently into the academic debates. Experiments with voice need to be set in the feminine sense where intuition leads to the setting of environments which create other dimensions of knowing.

Summary: About Using an Expressive Approach

A review of the literature shows that ideas about voice are "all over the map." In fact, they are all over many different maps. Despite this diversity, there has been nothing written about voice from an expressive group approach. Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins (1990) write about a form of expressive inquiry through the use of storytelling. In their research they worked with a group of people who were concerned about gender issues. The group met for a two day workshop and explored gender issues through telling their stories and asking for expressive, rather than explanatory responses. The group reached some understandings about gender relationships based on the expressive knowledge they had come to gain as a result of this encounter. An exploration of the meaning of voice seems perfectly suited to this inquiry method.

The aim of most scholars quoted in this review, and certainly my own, is to facilitate the development of writers for the next generation. In doing so, voice must be continually explored. It can't be forgotten that voice has a creative aspect that goes deeper than exercises meant to stimulate thought and written activity. The

knowledge to be gained by asking professionals to meet a voice with a voice through story can only add to a depth of understanding and enrich the course of the future. A balance needs to be restored so that expressive modes can operate in tandem with explanatory ones to form a richer view.

CHAPTER 3

EXPERIMENTING WITH VOICE IN A SOCIAL SETTING

3

<u>Overview</u>

After reading the literature that is available about voice, I was struck by how voiceless it seemed to be. Arguments about whether voice was social or individual did not make sense to me either because I saw them as textured dimensions of a larger picture that describes the relationship of humanity to itself and that which surrounds it. As a result, I searched for a method of experimenting that would address the void I perceived in the literature and would allow for social interaction, but would at the same time give room for the self.

The first clue to searching for another way of investigating voice came in the form of a research article written by Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins about storytelling as a methodology for human inquiry. I found the idea of storytelling as a way of understanding voice to be compelling because it allows room for each individual to have a personal story or experience, but it takes place in a group setting. Furthermore, the medium of storytelling is the spoken voice, thereby employing the physical root of the metaphor as the vehicle for exploration.

Along with the idea of creating a social milieu, I wanted to foster an atmosphere where the researcher acted as a co-seeker of knowledge rather than a manipulator of carefully designed events.

Through years of teaching, I had learned that when a question is properly posed there is no predetermined answer and that when a teacher is an honest questioner, students are more likely to put their own thinking into a response. Likewise, I wanted the participants in this study to give authentic responses rather than the ones that they thought I would like to hear.

There is a theory about creativity that I call "brewing creativity" which speaks to the putting together of elements that are intuitively sensed as correct, even though the outcome is unknown, with an anticipation that something powerful will result. After the outcome, those intuitive senses can then come to conscious articulation through analysis and reflection. It was my intuitive feeling that this structure would create a setting for intense, personal understandings about voice.

Once I decided that an open, social environment was the one I wanted to create for participants, I realized that a way to ensure it was to structure the experiment so that the group would establish the exact procedure for responding to each other's stories. So, with this condition, both structure and flexibility were established from the beginning.

The group was kept intentionally small with four members, including myself. All were Caucasian women from early to late forties who had professional relationships with writing through teaching and as authors. I selected them because they had an interest in voice resulting from the inclusion of voice as a measured category in the Vermont Portfolio Assessment Project. The common class, race, and gender of the participants are obvious limitations to

this study, but the insights which come from these participants, despite their similar backgrounds, are so diverse.

As a participant and observer, I found that I did not need to chair or direct the group. Hearing each other's stories sparked such powerful responses that my primary role after having planned the beginning structure was to schedule the succeeding meetings and participate as one of the members. In this sense, the structure itself gave rise to the participants' voices which in turn led to a deeper understanding of voice.

I acted as the summarizer for most of the descriptions of the stories told so that I would avoid conflicts about plagiarism later on. The other participants regarded me as the researcher who was writing a dissertation, but they were actively participating in asking and answering their own questions, too. I was also the person who provided written transcripts of the stories, for which the others were eternally grateful. As the experiment progressed, there was less and less of a group sense that this collaboration was exclusively for my dissertation. In fact, the method turned out to be so useful that the group talked of continuing the work using other topics once my dissertation was finished.

Beginning the Collaboration

Our group gathered for the first time on January 30, 1993 to exchange stories about personal experiences with voice. We began in conversation and as the group evolved, the structure became more formally defined. Every participant arrived having thought of a

personal story beforehand and each story was told when the teller deemed it appropriate. I also gave the other members an article to read about expressive inquiry written by Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins (1990), entitled "Storytelling as Inquiry."

During the initial session some of the stories prompted expressive responses in the form of writing and sharing poetry. Other stories elicited personal responses, further questioning, and tangential storytelling. What emerged from the initial meeting was an enthusiasm to continue and to look more closely at each story.

What Is Meant By Expressive Inquiry

Reason and Hawkins put forth a method of inquiry designed to allow expressive rather than explanatory interaction. They use storytelling as a vehicle for interpersonal exchange. This exchange occurs through poetry, drawing, or any response agreed upon by the participating group. "Expression is the mode of allowing the meaning of experience to become manifest. It requires the inquirer to partake deeply of experience, rather than stand back in order to analyse" (p. 80). It is the expressive stance that can connect knowing and feeling with the transpersonal realms. "To make meaning manifest through expression requires the use of a creative medium through which the meaning can take form.... Creative expression is often relegated to the production of the beautiful or the entertaining. We see it also as a mode of inquiry, a form of meaning-making, and a way of knowing" (p. 81). Expressive and explanatory methods serve to inform each other. "Thus we create between them a space for

dialogue and for dialectical development, so that a theme may be illuminated by a story, or a theory may clarify a myth" (p. 85).

Reflection as a Procedure

After the Januray meeting, we met again two months later so that enough time would have lapsed for the stories to have a fresh reading. The group began that meeting with a structured reflection of the words "expression" and "express" because Emma and Peg had some questions about the research assertions made by Reason and Hawkins. In this reflection process, we wrote down our personal associations with each of the words so that as a group we could gain a sense of what the terms encompassed for all of us.

Our intent in holding a reflective session on "express" and "expression" was to specify some of the multiple meanings we held for these terms in hopes of identifying possible reasons for the lack of comfort with the expressive/explanatory theory posed by Reason and Hawkins. During the reflection, we recorded all of our associations with these two words and then shared them in turn. Thus, we built a group notion of "express" and "expression," incorporating all of the meanings presented.

Inquiry Group's Reaction to Expressive Inquiry

I would like to underscore the importance of establishing a shared understanding of "expression" as referred to in the group's reflection. Notably, our ideas went well beyond expression as

described by Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins as that of creative product. In fact, we did not describe products of expression in as much detail as we described the formative factors of expression. Our group viewed expression as how we take what is inside ourselves and put it out to the world. When you express, you are creating a work which may or may not be seen in the form of a tangible object. Products have a role in expression, but expression is not entirely limited to the production of a "thing."

Because of the broad scope that expression encompasses, it is not in a dual relationship with explanation as posited by Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins. Instead, expression crosses into the explanatory domain as well -- in that explanatory theories are also a means of personal expression. So, we used the frame presented by Reason and Hawkins, but did not endorse what was being done as an exploration of expressive versus explanatory inquiry.

At this point the group shifted the process radically from my original vision of using an expressive storytelling model identical to that in "Storytelling as Inquiry." By doing so, however, the group exerted its distinct social voice, the potential for which I had built into our collaborative process. This changing direction alerted me to a safeguard that the structure of the process carries when the researcher allows the process to run its course: the group expresses its voice despite researcher expectations.

Establishing the Descriptive Process

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After the reflections on "expression" and "express," we began to look at "Emma's Letters to Charity Bailey." Emma suggested that we use the descriptive process as set forth by Patricia Carini and the members of the Prospect Institute as a means to explore the stories that we had told. Peg and I also had experience with the process and agreed that it might be helpful. Claire, although unfamiliar with the work of Carini, was willing to try, especially after she heard the ground rules. A description of Emma's story then began during the third meeting.

Because our notions of description were slightly different, we developed an agreement of how to proceed. This turned out to be a very important aspect of the group process. Having to specify the procedures built a clarified boundary that was mutually agreed upon. The rules for description were established by us as follows:

1. Begin by having several people read the story so that it can be heard in several voices.

2. Taking systematic turns, each member will give first impressions. Talking will be done without interruption.

3. Respond to each sentence, line by line, starting with a paraphrase so that all participants can be in agreement over the

literal sense of each sentence. Every sentence will be described until all comments have been exhausted.

4. Descriptions include comments about choice of words, motifs, metaphors, or whatever is evoked from reading a piece.

5. Description is not psychoanalytic of either the person telling the story or the characters in it. It involves observation and interpretation, but not speculation. Description stays with the text.

These guidelines contributed to a sense of safety. It was clearly stated in the ground rules that we would base our comments on the text. The sentences served as safe boundaries which became permeable as the inquiry progressed. Participant comments tested some of the psychological undertones of the stories, but it was solely up to the individual participant to make meaning from them if so desired. In that way the public arena could enrich the private reflections in a manner that confirmed the individual and the sanctity of her space.

Because we were working with our own material, we were in the unique position of having the author present to add her perspective to the descriptions. This became a reality check for the efficacy of our comments. Despite some emotional tension, the descriptions given during these inquiry sessions left us feeling uplifted and with a heightened awareness about our own stories and those of others. As Peg explained, "For me, when my story was being

described there were a lot of things that people mentioned that I just hadn't seen there at all. They didn't feel like rejections of the ideas. It felt more like it was interesting because I hadn't thought about it with that perspective before."

Appropriate Use of Description

In a sense, description is like creating a conjunctive story which stands side by side with the actual story, related to it, but not its equivalent. It is a created work which is the expression of the combined members of the group, subject to change depending upon who is participating and what they bring to the session. Participants describe other people's themes and expressions while maintaining their own unique styles. This amounts to the making up of a new work which considers the themes of another person while still leaving an imprint from the describers.

After several descriptive rounds, the chairperson summarizes what has been said by collectively pooling the members' contributions. This next new work then becomes the summarizer's perspective of the group's descriptive contributions. The summaries and descriptions are not intended to represent truths in the sense of verifiable or objective statements. Rather, it is an individual's construction of the conjunctive stories made by those participating in the descriptions. In short, a need for scientific verification of the descriptions and summaries misses the point. As Jerome Bruner (1990) points out, narratives are interpreted rather than logically derived. Still, within all of this conjunctive storytelling, patterns

arose which contributed to the understanding of voice as it was revealed through the stories and in the group's interactions.

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Successive Phases of Inquiry

In addition to the expressive inquiry sessions, I conducted one hour interviews with all participants within two weeks of the final session. These interviews established the context and personal meaning of the inquiry sessions for the participants. It gave them a chance to respond individually to the group experience and to discuss with me their changing notions about voice. A peer at the University of Massachusetts posed these questions to me as well.

Interview Questions

1. What was it like for you to participate in the inquiry sessions?

2. How did you feel when your piece was described?

3. What do you think the meaning of voice is?

4. Are there any connections to voice that you made as a result of our inquiry?

5. Tell me a story about your participation in this session.

Creating Our Understandings

The collaborative group process used for this inquiry has taught me more than I ever thought possible to learn about the nature of voice and its inextricable link to social process and the vulnerabilities of the human heart and soul. Poignant stories emerged, but we did not internalize or recognize them for their fullness until we went through a rather lengthy process of examining small bits of the stories at very close range. To the onlooker this process may seem at times tangential, irrelevant, or downright boring. Yet to us, the steps we took were necessary to allow the brewing and building of ideas that brought out those deeper meanings. These meanings exist not because of the stories themselves (their object form), but because of the links to common human situations that we made in the process of this inquiry.

As participants we were not fully aware of the broader significance that our stories held until after much discussion. In one case, the discussion itself revealed pieces of the story with a bit here and a bit there, until by the end of the session, we felt like we could grapple with a few issues that had been previously hidden. One member mentioned that the printed form also rendered our tales universal which helped her to take an observer's view of her own work.

The nature of this inquiry has <u>everything</u> to do with voice. I gave us a loose structure so that the process itself would contribute to the development of voice. The only explicitly directed assignment

was to bring a personal story about voice to share orally with the group, after which the group would decided how to react to the stories. Models were shown of groups in England who had designed response formats to stories about gender issues. Having such gentle direction permitted the group to determine its own course, use its own voice. This became crucial to the success of the inquiry.

Throughout the study, I was able to pose my research questions about voice. But, just as powerfully, the other participants were able to privately pursue their own questions within the rich environment of human experience that the stories provided. The room to think their own thoughts and follow their own questions further allowed for personal voice.

A lack of openness to wonder and think one's own thoughts while participating in a research project can quite easily lead to disingenuous responses as well as stifling personal voice. When someone is being told what to do and how to think, or when someone's story is being manipulated to suit a narrowly defined topic, honor is not given to the person's experience. Without this honoring, many people will not openly present the wide range that their voices span. Peg's story and her interview comments will most clearly elucidate these statements.

I have limited the presentation of data in this chapter to the focus of inquiry. The reporting is designed to provide the reader with a flavor of the actual events without having to sift through hundreds of pages of detailed text. At the same time, if a report does not include some of the tangential comments made during an inquiry, it will perpetuate the myth that human experience and

thinking is direct and tidy. Therefore, to illustrate these complexities and to provide a context for the data herein, I have included an appendix. It presents the events of the group process in abbreviated form.

The Move to Written Text

We initially told our stories about voice orally. However, we treated the written transcripts as prose. To have taken oral story and transcribed it, creating a written text which was then treated as writing and not transcription, can be seen as a travesty of linguistic form. Roland Barthes carefully delineates between transcribed text and written prose. According to him, spoken language is made thoughtlessly and should not be preserved. He warns that transcription brings the spoken form into a realm for which it is not intended. Yet, as Peg stated, "It gave a universal quality to what we were reading and yet at the same time it was very clearly the person who was speaking." The text allowed us the distance to describe our stories that the telling did not. Ironically, this distance infused emotionality as well. Peg told her story lightly, but when she read it her response and that of others was to weep. The distance of the words permitted us to consider the intensely felt emotional aspects that were not conveyed in speech.

Disagreement over the function of ambiguity in the written form versus the seeming clarity of the spoken story surfaced. To clarify some of the questions about intended meaning, Emma thought it might be interesting to describe the stories along with listening to

the tape recordings at some later date. However, Peg did not know if that would be beneficial. I thought that the ambiguities reflected the complex, multiple meanings in some of the statements regardless of how they sounded and found the variations helpful in revealing alternative ways to interpret some of the stories.

The written transcript also served as the objective (in the Schutz sense) product of our storytelling. With it existed the opportunity for the work to meet in a group with its author physically present. The voice of the author then took two forms -- that of objective text and subjective describer. In this situation the author actively participated as writer and reader, moving in both the particular and universal realms simultaneously. It became a curious definitely me, possibly anyone relationship.

Telling the Stories

The stories told in the first session demonstrate the depth and diversity that the topic of voice can display. Each is enormously different from the other and yet all are so highly suggestive of the ways in which voice can leave emotional marks on a person's psyche. I am presenting the stories with brief discussions after each one. Italicized sections denote those passages which were selected by the group for closer study. A condensed version of that close study is found in the appendix on page 104.

After the presentation and discussion of the stories themselves, I will turn to an examination of the manner in which the stories were responded to and the importance of the climate we set for furthering

our understanding of the many dimensions of voice. That process itself became a play with boundaries.

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Emma's Letters to Charity Bailey

Emma: I was interested in going back and seeing what I could remember from my childhood. The strongest memory that I have.. it's actually not a specific memory.. it's really a very long span of my childhood, but it was about letter writing. I was a really avid letter writer as a child and it started when I was about six years old. And there was this woman named Charity Bailey.... She was probably in her forties or fifties then and she was a music teacher at a little private school in New York. She had a program on television for a while on Saturday mornings called "Sing Along with Charity Bailey" where she had these kids from her school and they would sing along with her and do these songs and she would invite the audience at home to sing along and make these little homemade in-struments which I had my father make me. She would also invite these people at the end of the program to write to her and there would be an address and I was probably.. I

must have been.. six or seven when I started watching that and I wrote to her in New York and she wrote back and she had this beautiful gray stationery with her address in Boston, purple letters on the top, and she also wrote in turquoise fountain pen ink.... I don't actually remember a lot of the specific things that she wrote about, but there was a real warmth in the letters. I always felt like she was writing really directly to me. And one time actually we were almost going to meet her in New York but something came through .. something screwed it up.... And then we moved away from there and I wrote to her actually for years after that, even though I couldn't anymore watch the program because we were really far away.... Probably until I was about nine or ten we kept up this correspondence.

... *This letter writing, it was really like a big part of what I did in my childhood. I liked chain letters also.. and anything to do with letters. I loved post offices and stamps, although I didn't collect them.... I don't re-member writing things in school. I know we had to do little compositions, but none of them actually stand out in the way that the*

letters do.... When I got older in school and we had to write reports, I was still writing lots of letters. And by that time I was sort of writing like 20 page letters to friends from camp. They were letters like I would tell about things that were going on, but they were almost like diary entries where it was sort of like I was able to think out loud and I think that having the distance from the person and not seeing them every day was really helpful. I don't think I could have like mused in that way to kids I saw everyday.

But when I got older and I had to write the reports I know that the way I wrote letters and the way I wrote reports was completely different and that my report writing.... I was sort of trying to do the things we were told to do in school like use transitions and topic sentences and correct grammar. And my letter writing was much more um sort of stream of consciousness. Sentences just sort of flowing or not ending.... Then when I was in high school I started to keep journals seriously. There was an ease about that. It felt like it was mine. I agonized to write papers and to do outlines. I could never do outlines. But I didn't have any trouble writing, you

know, thirty page letters. They would just sort of come and I would never run out of things to say and I could just sort of carry on this conversation that was probably as much with myself as with the person who was getting the letter....

Fern: Do you remember anything that Charity Bailey said to you?

Emma: There was one letter.. I think.. I was pretty old by then.... I must have been about 12 or 13 and we hadn't actually written for a few years and maybe I had found some old letters and written her a letter or something. I'm not really sure why I got this letter from her. And she asked me and I never did this because I felt so embarrassed about it, but she asked me if I would phone her. She said I just want to hear your voice. I was so embarrassed by it because of being a teenager and everything that I never did. Actually that's probably the line that I remember the most....

Fern: Did you stop writing back to her after she asked to hear your voice?

Emma: I think I did. I don't remember any letters after that. I know I didn't call her because I remember thinking about calling her and then I just didn't have the nerve to do it. It was just such a powerful thing and I was a teenager. I was a little bit embarrassed. I hadn't even thought about that. I mean talk about voice.

This story connects voice in writing directly back to the concrete voice and signals an evocative relationship between the spoken voice and voice in writing. The ideas of distance and boundaries reverberate through many of the details of Emma's story. Most notably, Emma revealed her need to send intimate musings far away and she rejected the closeness that a vocal contact with Charity Bailey might bring. Asking to hear Emma's voice completely cut the lines of communication between them. Emma was embarrassed to greet their relationship with any direct contact. Distance and boundaries enabled her to express herself freely.

Emma's letter writing was a way of making connections and sent threads of herself to many places -- to friends from camp, through chain letters, and to Charity Bailey. In the chain letters, however, exists an interesting tension between connection and anonymity. This theme repeats in the letter writing which at once reveals her innermost musings and yet remains anonymous because she is not physically available to the recipients.

In stark contrast to her letters is the writing done in school. Emma even uses the pronoun "we" which further emphasizes the lack of direct personal investment. There is a flatness to the story when she refers to work done at school. Emma talks about "little compositions" which suggests that her school work had minimal investment from the heart. The school writing is not connected to the reader, either. Emma does not speak of the audience as she does with her letters.

Even though the audience is a factor in her letter writing, there still remain definite boundaries. Distance is needed from her everyday, pedestrian life in order to allow her musings to come out. It was startling to me that Emma did not immediately remember what stopped her communications with Charity Bailey, especially given that the topic of the story was voice. This part of the story connects her speaking voice to the powerful vulnerability that lies in producing one's own voice. Because of Emma's illustration, we began to consider the power of the human voice in another way.

Peg's Search for a Voice

> Peg: One thing that is similar about my child-
> hood and Emma's is that we moved around a
> lot and I never wrote letters and I still have a
> hard time writing letters, even to my own
> children. And for me when we moved it was
> as though I disappeared off the face of the
> Earth, not the people. And people would

write to me who I loved and I would not answer them. The only times I've actually written letters, except sort of obligatory thank you letters when I actually forced myself to do it, is when I've been away from home. And then I've been able to do it. This is as an adult. And when sort of the first six months that Grant and I discovered that we'd loved each other all this time, I wrote three letters a week. I just poured out letters. And they weren't.. they weren't just love letters....

Writing has always been so hard and I've always felt trapped inside myself in terms of having to put stuff on paper.. um. So that ultimately when I did have to write stuff like reports I managed to get somebody inside me to do them, but it wasn't like it was me doing it. And that's continued as an adult.

And except for sort of a few very brief occasions and one was I gave the.. my senior high school graduation.. I gave the speech. And I read it the other day and I can recognize myself in it and it really feels like me. There is no.. I mean.. And plus I've eliminated all other pieces of writing from my life so.. from my past.. you know, so I have no way of

knowing if I would read them now and they would.. that I would recognize myself in them.

And I think I have sort of grown up and been an adult for a long time, thinking of myself as not having any voice. And there have been two things that have really jarred that for me. One is four years ago through just a series of chance things that happened there was a reunion from my high school which was this very small crazy girls' school that I had gone to. And there were fifteen of us and this was the 27th year and everybody was there. And people talked about my voice when I was in high school and how I had spoken. And I had.. it was like somehow I had constructed this image of me being silent and usually invisible, so I never expect somebody to recognize me when I go anywhere cause I am always moving and I disappear from the face of the Earth. And I have no voice. And I was so struck with that and I uh.. then just started thinking of all my work with children and how my voice is in that work and that it's.. you know, it's not a loud voice that says.. but it's, you know, it's more like a voice like the wind or something.. that's there.

And the last few years with VITA [Vermont Institute for Teaching the Arts] have really confronted this cause I've had to do papers and I hate doing them. And I've been almost a year late each time. And uh.. and even the um the first year of the VITA paper where the reflection.. or whatever the big thing we had to do.. was accurate, it still was as though, you know, I had finally set a deadline and I got the person inside me who does that piece of writing when the deadline happens. And so I now have two pieces of writing that I haven't done from last year and one is the last VITA paper and the other is um from this action research course that I took with someone last year. And I.. I think what the stuff in that course, the work that we were doing was so important to me that I wanted to write it in my own voice and not make the ghost writer in me, or whoever that is, basically document it.

I feel like all fall so much of my energy has been concentrating on.. getting ready to be able to write and I had a conversation with Claire last week about feeling that when something comes out of me and goes on to paper it gets taken away. And Claire said,

well you could keep it until you were ready.
This was like.. this was a revolutionary idea
and it came just at the time that I had to do
my comments for my report cards and usu-
ally what I do is sit there until I can get
something out and this time I went through
and did.. wrote images and feelings of things
next to each child' name and then I went back
and wrote and for the first time I really en-
joyed doing it. And I felt like each time I
wasn't struggling to find a different way of
saying something that I may have said about
another child or um.. And so I really feel like
I'm on the threshold of being able to use my
own voice on paper. But I still can't write
letters.

Peg's was the only story which spoke directly of voice in writ-
ing as being so problematic that she felt voiceless. Sensitive to her
vulnerable position, the other participants were initially reticent to
describe her work. Their immediate physical response was to weep
because a resonant chord had been struck. Feeling voiceless is a
highly charged emotional issue as Peg's story illustrates. The theme
of trust and what happens when a voice is put out into the open
recurred in our comments. As Claire stated, "And then, well, maybe
part of that resonance is if we really dare.. if we really dare to give
our authentic voice, what's going to happen then, to that image?"

Other issues of voice were brought out in Peg's story, too. Fleeting images like ghost, invisible, disappear, and wind surfaced as the narrator told of a voice that wasn't vocal. Claire stated, "We think of voice so often just with words and our certain diction, but it's more than that. It's presence. It's where we choose to be silent." This piece casts someone's voice as a presence like the wind that goes in and around and is there, not in voice, but in work. Despite these nonvocal associations, the narrator spoke comfortably using "voice" as a term to describe what she meant.

It was a redefinition of the term and an inclusion of the non-written aspects of voice which seemed to give Peg the latitude to consider herself as having voice. Paradoxically, once she believed that she had a voice of any kind, she began to want to use her own voice in writing and let the ghost writer disappear.

Change is another theme of this passage. The narrator speaks of an event that changes her view of herself. The major event related to this change is a high school reunion. Everybody was there, so that everybody had the potential to have an impact on the jarring moment. All of the possible high school perspectives were represented. The reunion itself is symbolic of the opportunity to look back and share perspectives, providing a sense of story within a story. The narrator attends this reunion through chance happenings, bringing up the image of a wind with no intentional direction, just blowing and making changes.

At the reunion, classmates acknowledge that the narrator has a memorable voice. It is spoken of in terms of quality, not amount. Their comments give evidence that the narrator is recognized

through her voice, forcing a reevaluation of her self-image. The voice referred to by the classmates is oral, relating back to a more literal use of the word. The idea about voice begins to link back to the physical relationship of that metaphor and the high school group has put an idea forth that runs counter to the narrator's perception. This frees the narrator to think of voice in other terms than writing.

Description of this passage also led the participants into checking assumptions about invisibility. Invisible does not have to mean non-existent; it can mean "disappearing." In this transformation other qualities of invisibility became apparent, especially that of silence.

This story shows how the event at the reunion jolted the narrator into rethinking so that she actually became voiceful rather than voiceless. Giving another definition to voice in the sense of having a tangible voice perhaps freed up an ability to think about the metaphor in other ways. The idea of "it's not a loud voice that <u>says</u>" is in itself a jolting statement because it contradicts the very metaphor that it is based on. The grounding of voice is, at least superficially, in something that does talk, that does say. And yet, there may be something more to even the physical act than what is commonly implied. Perhaps the association relates to a precursor of voice which is breath, a crucial life force.

A voice like the wind as portrayed here evokes a gentleness, rather than being a loud, dominating wind. There is also an emphasis on the nature of the wind as an agent of change. The narrator never actually refers to herself as a teacher, but instead

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eludes to "my work with children." This seems consonant with the image of gentle wind.

Claire's Conflicting Values

> Claire: I brought a poem by one of my stu-
> dents that really disturbed me and I don't
> know if it would be appropriate to share it.

> Emma: It's fine with me.

> Claire: Yeah? Okay. And I don't know if I
> should read it or have you read it. What's the
> best?

> Emma: Read it out loud first.

> Claire: Read? I hope I can without.. um..
> okay.. Yeah. I'd love some response to this
> poem. Okay? I had such a strong response
> and I think I won't tell you it because it
> would influence you right away. Did I talk to
> you about this?

> Peg: I'm not sure.

> Claire: Okay. This is by a thirteen year old.

READS THE POEM

SOME DISCUSSION AND REACTIONS FOLLOW.

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Claire: That's interesting because I had lunch
with her [the student author].   In the end it
was a wonderful opportunity, I think.   It was
a very difficult moment for me, I think.   But it
became an opportunity to have a dialogue and
be very real in our voices and that's basically
what we talked about was, you know, were
we all becoming so desensitized?   She said,
and I guess where I am having trouble is um..
how do I begin?   I had a real reaction, I have
to be really honest, to the class clapping and it
was just my gut.   And I.. they were about
ready to leave for lunch..   I mean I think I
told Peg this.. I'm just basically who I am
teaching someone.. I didn't have any time.. I
said I'm really upset that you're clapping.
And then there was no time for a dialogue so
I had a week to think since.. you know I
wasn't going to see them.   And this was not a
group I knew well so that wasn't.. And par-
tially I guess it's contextual too, talking about
tone and voice.   The whole class had been
really negative in energy, so I have to say

that. Um. so, I guess in my intuitive self I felt they were clapping for the violence.

When I went the next week I felt I had to respond. So, it was again a poem response to a poem. So, I should have brought it but I.. actually I might have sent it to you.. my Seamus Heaney poem? Did I send it to you for the New Year's?

Peg: I don't think so.

Claire: Well okay. It doesn't matter. I found a poem that I really love by Seamus Heaney that really deals with suffering in the world. And it's a pretty despairing poem, but then it goes to the other side of the sea in belief and hope and justice. And it's very eloquent. I read it to them as a response and said, you know, I really don't know why you clapped. You know. I'll tell you.. you know.. what I was scared you were clapping for. I was just really.. bore my.. revealed myself to them. Read the poem and my fears of coming into a world where people were getting desensitized and the whole baby being also a metaphor for such innocence. So I said, I'm opening the door to you. Tell me.. could you tell me why

you clapped?   And not many people took the opportunity.   Two students said they felt the poem was well expressed.   And that's what they said.   And they said their heros and voices in writing were Stephen King.

And I went home thinking, am I just so prejudiced, you know, in terms of wanting a peaceful world.   You know, I have to say to you that I really have problems with violence and I had to say that to the group.   I said, I'm being honest.   You know, you are talking to someone who has a lot of problems with violence, but I do want to hear from you. And I was so glad for the opportunity because we really had a dialogue about it and we were honest.   I had lunch with the girl and she said to me: we're living in this world and this is my way to deal with it.   And I said I really support you.   I come from a really hard past for a different reason and my poems are pretty dark and I need to deal with it.   So, I said believe me I am not saying that you should write pretty poems and we had a wonderful hour together and a wonderful talk.

I guess I suspect.. where I suspect it myself is again, did I bring all my prejudices

and I couldn't see that this was a well ex-
pressed poem. You and I was curious how
you.. you know because somebody asked me
later, well is it just a trashy poem? Is it gra-
tuitous violence?.. I just reacted to the
material. I could not even see it as a good
poem.

Our first impressions of this piece were that it had a sense of
being elliptical, with a struggle to find a language to communicate the
narrator's thoughts and feelings. There was the sense of Claire's
grappling with a moral dilemma while also coming to know her own
thoughts by thinking out loud. The narrator was not allowing herself
the right to have a response, whether that meant accepting the
content of the poem or having to conform to how she thought she
ought to respond. It was almost as though the narrator would not
give herself permission to be able to say her feelings about violence
without qualifying them. On the surface, it seemed like part of the
conflict also dealt with how to live with realities that are difficult for
us.

At a certain point in the inquiry session about Claire's story, we
digressed from following the rules of response to holding a discussion
about voice and competing personal values. We felt that embedded
in Claire's story was an essential dilemma -- when voices run in
opposition which do you choose and at what cost? Claire described
something shutting down inside of her when she heard her student's
violent poem. Indeed, the language that she used to tell her story

revealed this same shutting down whenever her heart, her emotions were at stake. Yet, as a creative educator and also in terms of working through personal grief, she realized that she needed to keep a door open, to be able to hear what her student had to say.

As we proceeded with our conversation, several ideas came to light. The first was the notion of competing goods and the chaos that brings to decision making. As Claire says, "It's so murky for me because you're dealing with voice and I'm a writer and that's one whole level. But then I think I get mixed up with.. more important to me than voice in writing is not to get desensitized towards violence, which is a whole other question. And I am totally confused."

Emma clarified another angle of the problem. "Part of why this is really hard for me is that I think it's not just that voices run in opposition, but behind, beneath that, values run in opposition.... It is a conflict of values... it's not about violence. The narrator does not seem to be conflicted about what she thinks about violence, but it's about when you have strong values, where is the place for you to say those out to kids? How do you do it in a way that leaves the door open? Because the other thing that it's really clear that she values is communication. And so how do you do it in a way that leaves the door open and enables communication to happen, but also doesn't pretend that your strong values about something as important as violence are on the same level as whether you prefer vanilla or chocolate?... And I think the hard thing for me about that is that that issue is so present all the time."

To this Peg responded that her huge issue was being able to state her beliefs in an environment that was safe enough so that the

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students didn't feel judged. Other group members shared this feeling and accentuated the need for honesty in that the idea wasn't to make the students simply feel unjudged. According to Emma, "This thing is about questioning my own judgments because people will feel judged if, in fact, I am judging them. So, it's not like I can judge them and pretend not to and hope they don't feel it."

Claire's narrative also contained overtones of not allowing herself the right to have a response. I raised a question about whether or not people who are overly sensitive to maintaining open communication actually deny their voices. Especially in the instance of violence, this voice that is being denied is perhaps the one that needs to be heard loudly and clearly. Is such a denial of voice counter productive?

By nature the issue of competing goods is unresolvable. Claire's emotionally charged story indicates this through the chaotic language that she brings to the retelling and her continuing uneasiness with the choices that she made. She was still struggling to bring a beginning, middle, and end to a story that is for her, presently unreconcilable. Having the chaos which surrounds dilemma brought to the surface by the group discussion has given Claire another framework for understanding her narrative.

Examining the Group Process

Even though these three stories open up questions about voice on a very deep level, the stories themselves represent only part of the search for understanding. Our group interactions both in

establishing a method of response and in setting an overall climate speak as much to personal voice as do the tales. In the next two sections I will examine the process the group chose for responding to each story and the environment in which the responses were given.

Vulnerability and Feelings of Safety

The social nature of voice manifests from the very base of human language and physical gesture. We are in a state of shaping and being shaped by our environment and by the very words we use. As Vygotsky explains, the inner and outer voices quickly become entangled and mutually shaping. The individual is inextricably linked to the group, while also being distinct from it. With this in mind, it is important to detail the conditions set in this group inquiry which contributed to an open exploration of voice and a _felt_ sense that the inner voice had a position in the social group.

All participants agreed that the inquiry process was one which allowed for a comfortable exchange of voices. Claire felt slightly "out of her element" because she does not consider herself to be at ease with speaking. She needs time to reflect before she can comfortably respond to something. However, the safety that she felt within the group provided an opportunity to take risks and utter incomplete thoughts without being paralyzed by a fear of judgment. Claire explained, "To hear each other's stories made us feel less alone. People shared their vulnerabilities, where they feel invisible."

The following is a list of the conditions of this group inquiry process which allowed those participant voices to emerge. The list

was derived from comments made during interviews and during informal conversation after the descriptive sessions. Once I categorized the comments, participants were asked to eliminate any statements that did not hold true for them. The result is a consensus list of group conditions which led to feelings of safety and a willingness to explore.

Climate of the Group

-- Group had the quality of stopping time

-- Felt uplifting to be engaged in something for the nature of itself and not necessarily for anything beyond that

-- Felt safe even though it felt risky at times

The inquiry sessions lasted for ninety minutes each. The time, however, went by very quickly. Everyone was surprised when the tape ended or when an outside distraction signalled that we had remained together past our specified limit. This absorption felt akin to many creative projects that also have the quality of stopping time.

Because the requirements for participation remained open-ended and flexible, a sense of attending the group for no higher purpose or follow-up assignment contributed to a positive group climate. The lack of expectations freed the members to establish their own purposes.

Even though members were entering into a territory that could be risky, there was a feeling of safety that permeated the experience. Peg's willingness to add humor to her emotionally charged story eased the intensity of the group's descriptions of her story. Claire was relieved to gain clarity about a story that could have otherwise made her appear inept. The respect and non-judgmental tone to the comments allowed tight boundaries to become permeable.

Qualities That Led to Comfortable Expression

-- No expectation of right and wrong

-- No measuring of which story was better

-- Building knowledge together instead of knowing something ahead

-- Rules were followed, but suspended if necessary

When members participated in the group it was felt that they could openly speak their minds. Comments were not judged as bad or wrong. As a matter of fact, the method of inquiry presupposed that human knowledge is cumulative and that each person adds another piece of understanding. With such a precondition, members are prepared to have a voice.

Each story illuminated a different facet of voice. In this sense the participants felt that there was no ranking of stories, but that each was considered for its illuminating elements. The comments

bore out this assumption as every story brought out new and different ideas about voice.

At one point during the description of Claire's story, I thought it appropriate to suspend the rules and maintain an unstructured conversation rather than continue with the procedure as established. This decision added to the group's comfort in that the rules then existed as guidelines, but not rigid forms of control. Breaking the boundary opened the topic up for a different and more effective look. It was what ultimately led to the discovery that Claire's story was not supposed to have a beginning, middle, and end.

Connection to Learning and Understanding

-- Learned to suspend judgment on self in terms of whether or not personal response in description session was adequate

-- Respectful time and attention acknowledges the value of people's lives and works

-- Descriptions prompted new discoveries in the narratives about possible themes that had not been noticed before

-- Comments felt resonant to participants in terms of what was being described about their own stories

-- Led to mulling own story over again outside of the group once it had been described

-- There is much to learn about life through spending more than a minute on something

The final reason why the discussions felt safe to the participants was due to personal discoveries and intellectual connections. Along with the creative explanations and connections that the participants were making grew a feeling of safety brought about by the uplifting discoveries which came while suspending judgment. Connections were made from one person's story to another's. Thought about what had transpired continued once participants had left the group. Moreover, giving time and attention to each story allowed the participants to feel like they were being heard both in presenting their own stories and in describing those of others.

The social nature of voice cannot be emphasized enough. Discussions showed that a core fear of permitting voice is the possibility of personal vulnerability. This was not shared universally among the participants, but for those for whom it was true, the feelings were felt deeply. Mary Belenky, et al. mention at the end of *Women's Ways of Knowing* that many women who do not feel safe or listened to stop communicating. This sentiment was reiterated in the post session interviews, especially by Peg who had fabricated what she called her ghost writer.

Illuminations About Voice Through Interviews

Interviews which occurred within two weeks of the final inquiry session gave participants a chance to reflect on their experiences and allowed me to have some insight into their inner

processes. During the interviews, each participant talked about the personal meanings that were being made about voice and about the group process. The comments from these interviews which concerned voice have been grouped into the following themes.

Voice As Presence

During the session when Peg's story was described, the most surprising idea which came to the group was that voice did not have to be defined exclusively within the realm of speech or writing. Peg's statement, "It's not a loud voice that says, but it's more like a voice like the wind or something that's there," opened up the idea of voice as "presence," leading to further thought about how to expand the meaning of the term.

It was very beautiful to stretch what voice is. I mean to embrace more the feeling of presence. Language is so limiting. But I think we need voice in that way and I think that was very empowering.

The other thing that's become really connected for me with voice, or associated, is being very present. That when you have a voice, you're also very present wherever it is.

The idea of "I don't have a voice that says"
really struck me and the reason it struck me
is because I didn't hear her say that. How
ironic! It wasn't until we had the transcrip-
tion that I really picked up on it. Yet, I still
got the idea that her voice was in the work
she does.

Voice As Social Relationship

Every person spoke of the way in which voice relates to others
and is not just contained in the self, although self does play a major
role.

Especially after having had these meetings I
feel like it [voice] is the way in which I,
meaning me and not a ghost writer, find to
express myself and interact with things and
people that I care about.

I guess it's coming back to the inner and outer
landscapes coming together and trying to find
the voice that will hold that. There is a line
that the chorus says in Antigone about man.
Something like how man needed to speak his
heart and so he created language. And then,
so that out of that language, he or she could

share his heart with the world. And so
maybe that's where voice comes in.

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Part of voice has to do with.. it's like the ex-
pression of yourself, but it's also the interplay
with other people because your voice isn't
there in a vacuum, at least mine isn't.... I also
think of my language as somehow at least
trying to be responsive to whatever is
around.... I want to be in conversations with
people.... There's a tone I certainly recognize,
and I would call that voice, when I'm talking
with people and I feel like in what they're
saying, they're inviting me to be part of the
conversation if only as a listener.... When I
hear some people speak I feel like my job is
to sit down, shut up, and listen. That's one
tone. It could be in the literal tone of the ac-
tual sound of their voice, but it may be in
their choice of words and their delivery of
that.

Voice and Vulnerability

References to feeling safe as a condition for allowing inner
voice to manifest repeated in many discussions, either from the point
of safety as empowering or lack of safety as restricting.

I mean, obviously this is for your thesis, but I think all of us felt a birthing in it and empowerment. Which is wonderful.... I must have really felt safe here. It's something I want my students to feel so much, to feel safe. Because that's the only time their voices are going to come out.

I know that when Emma said that it was very vulnerable that she reacted to it as either making the narrator very vulnerable, or the narrator being very vulnerable as though it had been.. in some way I thought as though it had been very hard to say, or that I was exposing myself in some way that was difficult. I didn't feel that way about it. What had been vulnerable was not being able to say it.

I think to some degree that part of not allowing my voice out was protecting it from being humiliated or devastated. And so that was acknowledging how vulnerable it was by not letting it out so that letting it out became less so. I mean I clearly didn't feel so vulner-able there [at the inquiry sessions].

At the same time, there was something compellingly vulnerable about the spoken voice.

Somebody asked me about, I can't remember the question now, but it was about the end of the correspondence and I remember saying when I got that final letter, the last one, one final letter, and she said, "I just want to hear your voice." And I hadn't thought about that in connection with voice. I mean for some reason I had remembered that line and it freaked me out.

I'm finding, and it's just very ironic, that the more I write, I'm almost getting in a position where I find it difficult to find a voice in speaking and I'm actually writing a poem about that now. That almost words are getting stuck in my throat. I have this image of bats. We have a bat in our attic and bats are just flying around trying to find an open space. And I feel like sometimes that's how words are when I'm speaking.

Distinct Means of Connecting to Voice

It's interesting, that whole image of like the gesture of almost bowing. I think of that, I guess, in terms of voice. When I write and if I'm going to discover my voice, it's almost bowing.... And so I guess a lot of my process is informed by turning inward.... And I'm so conscious of that in my work. That there are students in the circle who can't speak out, who need to go off and bow to themselves and take time to listen.

It's [voice] become so connected with being able to be who I am that I don't know, I just feel like that's a part of the definition of voice for me.

I have a friend who is telling me to be very cautious with my voice. She's saying only speak the truth to your inner circle of friends. I never understood that before. Other people are talking about taking their veils off and I'm at the point in my life where I'm learning to put one on. Stop running around naked. Get some clothes and use them.

Voice and Breath

The degree of comfort with which some participants used the term voice even when it did not relate to the actual voice or its metaphorical equivalent in writing was perplexing. Some of the participants connected the use of the term back to breath, an underlying essence of voice.

> And then when I think about it, when I think
> about the physical part of the metaphor, of
> this [points to throat], then what is connected
> to the utterance is the very breath of life.
> That you can't have that voice, that physical
> voice, without breath. And breathing is the
> basis of living.

> ...I think I said that there were two things
> that came to mind, one was expression... and
> the other was breath. I feel like that's my gut
> sense that that's probably very much at the
> heart. I mean you can't have voice without
> breath, literally. And breath, I mean beyond
> the literal level, breath feels like this just
> very basic human quality, very raw. I'm
> thinking about musical instruments and those
> instruments where the breath is the least
> mediated, like the flutes.... There's something

about wind instruments where I just feel a
chill go down my spine because you can hear
the breathing.... So, there's something about
the breath that's just so basic; it's like the
heartbeat and rhythm. It feels like it's so
fundamental. I mean without it we're dead.
And that seems like it's really at the core of
voice.

Difficulty of Definition

Even though stretching the meaning of voice opened up new
possibilities for interpretation, participants still searched for defini-
tion. When the term was used loosely, a lot of misinterpretation and
confusion arose. Yet, it seemed as though the loose meaning was
necessary in order to allow for the possible uses that arose.

When I started off my graduate thesis, I tried
all these definitions for creativity and finally
had to use some quotation about love. It was
so amorphous; you couldn't really pin it down.
I think voice is like that, but I like the idea. I
know you can feel it when you hear children's
poems. Right? If kids come up with facile
similes and there's nothing there of the inner
and outer meaning, it just remains form.

I'm feeling like I'm very confused about where the boundary lines are and not that I want them to be firm exactly, but voice is not everything. I mean one the one hand I'm saying it sort of stands for these bigger stylistic things and it's not just about language or song, but I also don't want to make it so mushy that it has no meaning at all.

Emma: ... I was thinking about how it's not just literally vocal but that you can have an accent and it is something to do with the expression of language.
Fern: Like a handwriting style, too?
Emma: Yeah. And that's where it starts to feel like it sort of borders over into everything and then I start to get a little uncomfortable because if it borders into everything then it has no meaning. So, it can't border into everything. I guess it's that it touches on personal expression and once you touch on that, it's like you touch on all aspects of personal expression, not just voice.

Summary

Through the results of this inquiry several points have come to surface.

* Voice is inextricably linked to social process and that feelings of vulnerability enter into its public emergence.

* Boundaries serve a dual purpose of adding comfort when installed and expanding voice and creative thought about voice when broken through. The safety of a boundary can lead to permeability. The breaking down of a boundary can also lead to increased comfort and the desire to find voice again within the original boundary. This poses a paradox of breaking out of a boundary in order to reestablish it and find one's place.

* When voice in writing is initially applied directly to writing it leaves some people feeling voiceless. Peg made a connection between the non-verbal idea of presence and her own uniqueness. Then, she searched for her uniqueness in writing.

* Voice is a term that is used comfortably even when it no longer applies to extrapolations of the grounding metaphor of physical voice. This is perhaps a result of its close tie to breath and hence life.

* This method of inquiry led to the climate necessary for members to feel comfortable in expressing their personal voices.

* Time, attention, and <u>felt</u> understanding lead to the emergence of personal voice.   8 3

* Methods for connecting to personal voice are necessarily varied. What may work for one person is not satisfactory for another.

* Voice does not fit completely into the category of object or thing. It is dynamic and, therefore, needs a broader and more flexible means for defining it. The social and individual forces which co-dependently shape a person's voice are not in the objective realm either.

* Situations of conflicting voices either internal or external can create chaos and provide rich opportunities for creativity.

CHAPTER 4
TAKING A BROADER VIEW

Overview

As the research group discovered and as many scholars have previously written, voice so touches on personal expression that it is difficult to establish boundaries without restricting some voices. A working frame is nonetheless necessary to give meaning to the term and to help clarify the confusions that result when people discuss voice in writing. Because the term is fluid and stands in odd tension with itself, we need to go beyond examination of the written page to understand its complexities.

Voice exists in a social relationship whether it is as Walter Ong says "a call for response" or the individual's struggle to bring an inner landscape into an outwardly communicable form. Ironically, seemingly unrelated outside references to expression can tie directly back into voice in writing and speech and they can affect a person's perception about self as having voice. The question then becomes: how do you define a fluid term so that it has an operable meaning while not restricting the emergence of voice? Where is the place for definition? Where is the place for loose structure?

The methodology used in this inquiry serves as a model for establishing a climate which encourages risk taking in a supportive environment. Through storytelling and sharing personal stories a place is guaranteed for each member's voice. The loose methodological guideline of allowing the group to determine the

response mechanisms to their stories permits the participants to set the level of structure they need in order to function safely and effectively. This provides both guidance and enormous choice. Voice is then socially mediated within the boundaries that are both set or broken. Using this method, the participants in the study left with an increased sense of self and voice that was derived as a result of the group's interaction.

Role of Collaborative Research

The reason why collaborative research was selected as the method of inquiry for this study was to provide for the social context of voice. Having set such a condition, it is not surprising that I highlighted the social aspects which emerged. However, the participants did not know of my interest in the social dynamics of voice and still made numerous remarks about it. Reference to communication of the inner world to the outer environment surfaced in several participant comments, either by the definition of voice as in the case of Claire or as an aspect of personal expression as seen in Emma's stated desire to maintain a conversational tone. Our discussions provided for conversations and connections which the participants later identified as valuable to a safe environment.

It seems as though Walter Ong's notion of voice as a call for response speaks to both these intents. The desire to communicate and to keep open channels was a strongly shared value of all participants in the inquiry group. In addition, they spoke of a _felt_ sense of understanding either through hearing outside insights into

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their stories or through the sense of comfort that some comments brought.

Description as a Climate for Response

When Walter Ong paraphrases and expands on Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship, he accentuates the speaker's ability to extend past self in order to communicate. This is precisely what happened in the descriptive process. Through communally building the conjunctive story, participants created a means for engaging the "other" in a way that connected the storytellers as a group that formed a combined story in which an individual's response pooled with the other group members'. The description then reflected a larger understanding which resonated for each storyteller. The ability to resonate with other group members' comments both in reference to her personal story and those of others gave each participant a strong sense of respect for the group members. Participants felt that they had been heard in the responses given by other group members. Therefore, for these participants, the process itself fulfilled Ong's basic assertion of voice as a call for response and helped overcome feelings of personal vulnerability.

Added Social Dimensions from Claire's Story

At the heart of the story told by Claire rest conflicting voices. Competing values which were both considered desirable and equally fostered by Claire left her with a dilemma so chaotic that she could

not describe it in a narrative that contained a normal flow of beginning, middle, and end. Her tale emerged as elliptical images and graceless stutterings. Because of her profession as a writer, Claire felt her stumbles painfully. Through the group process the problem of competing values became articulated, enabling some of the intense emotions to diffuse.

Claire's dilemma elucidates the notion of multiple voices in a way that internally challenges her different voices. In this case, the voices manifested, not for different purposes and at different times, but to compete for the guiding direction of Claire's response to the student poem. Internal voices in opposition can present an intense conflict, especially in situations where there cannot be a right or wrong answer. This particular conflict involved allowing student voice as opposed to asserting her own beliefs. It forced Claire to weigh whether she should permit her voice in opposition to a student's voice, knowing that it might close the door to communication. Claire's story is a testament to the social relationship of voice, both internally and externally driven and to the turmoil those conflicting social values churn.

Expanding Boundaries to Understand Phenomena

Chapter 2 details a lengthy explanation of the role of mapping and boundary setting in the formulating of theories and in interpreting the world around us. Likewise, one of the precepts of stimulating creative behavior is to push through obvious boundaries so that the innovative can come forth. The breaking of barriers can

then inform and enrich whatever is under question. In many ways the group rules emulated the precepts of creative problem solving: brainstorming, active group participation, inspiring ideas which lead to other inspiring thoughts, and deferred judgment. Therefore, the conditions were ripe to make some new discoveries.

Peg's Story as an Expanded Boundary

All of the definitions and qualities given to voice in Chapter 2 share one aspect in common regardless of stance: they are stagnant and categorized without the active participation of any person who might be seeking to use voice in writing. One of Peg's greatest fears was of doing exercises which had a right and wrong answer established before she began. She perceived herself as voiceless and wrote with the aid of an imagined ghost writer because none of the preconceived notions about voice seemed to apply to her. Peg's story broke the conventional boundaries of voice when she defined her voice as presence and then through renewed self-assuredness sought to explore that presence in written form. Therefore, making room by expanding the definition to include her presence allowed Peg to believe that she had a voice. This new image of having voice became corroborated by classmates at a reunion when they spoke of the importance of her voice. Now Peg is prepared to leave the ghost writer and search for a voice in writing which shows her presence.

The idea of the author's presence in a literary material is the underlying dictionary criterion given by Abrams (1988) for voice in writing. So, in one way, connecting voice to presence is the standard

sense in which it is used. However, presence as discussed by the inquiry group took on a much more reverent stance than the dictionary definition might imply. A _felt_ sense of self, not by reader, but by author, underscored the participants' use of the term. For Peg, this presence exposed vulnerability, but paradoxically the lack of presence made her feel even more vulnerable. She placed herself in an eternal dilemma while she believed herself to be voiceless. This state continued throughout a large part of Peg's adult life, during which time she studied at major United States educational institutions. Therefore, Peg employed her ghost writer to script the many papers necessary to complete her undergraduate and advanced degrees.

The need for a person to be able to see herself or an aspect of herself in the definition of voice is imperative. This room or space to belong is separate from whether or not anyone approves of or listens to the voice. Peg's definition of her voice as not being one that "says" startled the group because they never would have considered such an interpretation. Yet, the other members did not reject Peg's notion; they included it in a larger realm of possibilities. In this way the notion of voice became a socially mediated term with an expanded connotation. Whether or not voice can be defined as something that does not "say" misses the point. The point is that once she had a sense of belonging, Peg freed herself to explore her voice as a writer. That is, she began to look for ways in which she could recognize herself or her presence in her writing.

This part of the discussion points to the author's recognition of self in the work produced. It is separate from what the reader considers to be a well voiced piece of writing. So regardless of the reader's perception of the writing, the author must also find self in the work. Peg operated from a perception of self that did not coincide with the perception of others until she had two jolting experiences which forced her to change her boundaries and allowed her to develop the idea of voice as presence.

Boundaries of Physical Voice

Through the details of her letter writing versus the flat accounts of her school essays, Emma recounts a tale that is all too familiar for most school teachers -- the lack of meaning that school assignments hold for those who are performing them. Looking at the letter writing, a theme of safety in distance emerges. As a child, Emma did not feel free to muse with companions who were close by, whereas those friends with which she corresponded received outpourings of 20 pages. This theme is further reinforced in the abrupt halt of letters to Charity Bailey once Charity asked to hear Emma's voice. The ability to distance herself either physically or audibly from the recipients provided Emma the safety she needed to communicate freely.

Emma's story brought into focus the relationship of the spoken voice to its metaphorical counterpart in writing. The invitation to telephone Charity Bailey and Emma's subsequent discontinued communication lead to a consideration of the grounding metaphor of

voice and the vulnerability that it can contain. At the same time, Peg's story shows a voice that has no obvious connection to vocalizing at all. Yet, there remains a persistent and comfortable use of the metaphor because participants felt that an underlying condition of voice is breath.

In his writing Peter Elbow identifies this association of breath with voice as well. However, participants in this inquiry extended their association beyond the inner connection to the outside world and imagined breath as containing the rhythm of a person's life, especially palpable in the playing of a woodwind instrument. Hence, the participants stated that they resonated with Peg's idea of her voice as a presence like the wind. This notion erases a boundary and leaves a dramatic sense of freedom and creation.

The Theme of Distance

Distance from the actual spoken voice in the form of writing has served many purposes for the participants of this inquiry. It is a paradox that intimacy sometimes feels more comfortable when it is further away. Spoken voice can also act as the physical reminder of our frailty. At the same time, as shown by Peg's response to reading her oral story, the voice of text can seem more poignant and weighty than the conscious intentions of a speaker. The notion of distance as a cushion for personal vulnerability therefore manifests in seemingly oppositional manners.

Conclusions

Even though there is no universally accepted definition of voice, the term is used facilely and with intention by many people. Because of this, it is possible to ask someone to tell a story about his or her personal experience with voice without defining the word. These stories shed light on how the term is internalized and personally applied. Such storytelling allows a place for each person to be voiceful. A strict or limiting definition of voice can rule some people out before they begin. However, as a pool, individual stories of voice form a field of possibilities. What is told as possible within a group then becomes the socially created parameter for voice. This allows conventional and novel ideas to enter as conceptions. Using the loose group framework presented in this dissertation permits fluidity as well as structure. Obviously, this process takes time and does not allow for quick generalization. Yet, time and attention are underlying factors which build the necessary trust for a voice instead of an echo to emerge.

I am not suggesting that dry analysis and introspection be discarded. Rather, storytelling stands as a necessary complement. I have found both the literature and collaborative group work invaluable in forming my own constructs. In this particular study, Emma's desire to have a conversational tone of voice can be identified in the writings of many scholars. Karen LeFevre's plea for social contexts and a dialogic fit with Emma's will to listen, hear, and respond. Emma also uses voice to think out loud in the sense of the emergent voice that Spellmeyer depicts. In fact, Emma's comfort

with her own written and spoken voice and the attention she gives to it enable her to list countless tones of voice. She even considers the voice of sign language through her personal experiences with the deaf, something that fascinates Oliver Sacks (1989).

Claire seeks to empty herself in order for her voice to come forth. She refers to it as a filling of her empty bowl with the gift of words, a metaphor borrowed in part from Lewis Hyde. Claire identifies with the silent meditative voice that James Moffet so eloquently describes. While her story indicates that this is not the only voice that Claire possesses, she identifies it in her interview as key to her work as a poet. Claire's dilemma of internal voices with conflicting values remains unresolved when dealing with students, but her poetic voice and source are clear.

It is the example of voicelessness that Peg felt for most of her life to which I would like to address my final comments and suggestions for practice. Peg could not find her own territory in any of the models of voice. She believed she had no voice because there was no room for her presence in the discussion as long as it related to writing. It is important to note that I am talking about a felt sense of self. Without that, no matter what the reader response to her writing, Peg believed that a ghost was doing her work. Ironically, defining herself as "not having a voice that says" freed her to search for a comfortable voice in writing.

Even though aspects of Emma, Claire, and Peg's personal voices can be categorized according to the literature, the literature does not fully describe their voices. It is in this relationship of group overlapping themes to unique personal expression that the workings

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of voice occur. Overlapping themes allow us to discuss the commonalities and find group connections, but a balance needs to be maintained so that the self also has a place. Without that room, a personal voice can shut down.

I am suggesting that the storytelling sessions and subsequent group responses to the stories would provide the nourishing environment for socially mediating the definition of voice. The role of storytelling is extremely important in this process. Voice can be socially mediated in an intellectual manner through reflection. However, there is so much evidence that the participants of this inquiry connected emotionally and not just intellectually to the stories about voice. If the very rhythm of life rests as a core element, then emotion must have room to enter. Storytelling puts emotion into the understanding while allowing the tellers to choose the level of intimacy that they are willing to share, depending upon personal trust and comfort in the group.

Voice as a call for response lends itself to storytelling. Through my experience with this group and with others, I have witnessed the poignancy that comes from taking the time to listen, look, and re-spond to another's voice. The taking of time is a power that should not be overlooked. It was that time and attention for no extra purpose that remained for Peg one of the significant experiences of this group inquiry, something that made it seem almost therapeutic.

Once the concept of voice has been socially mediated through telling stories about voice and responding to them, a place will be secured for each person to have an opportunity for voice, either directly or by relating to the stories of others. It is from this firmer

base that someone such as a writing teacher can begin to challenge a student to search for multiple or scholastically differentiated types of voice. With a firm grounding in personal stories, reading for voice can be done more critically. There are times when comfort is desired and there are times when you wish to push yourself or a student out of the zone of comfort for the sake of growing. So, the intention is not always to provide constant "warm fuzzies." However, it is impossible to establish a voice in writing while feeling eliminated from the start.

Boundaries play a large role in the establishment or emergence of personal voice. Sometimes those boundaries create the security from which to expand. At other times those same boundaries need to be broken.

Limitations of the Study

All participants are of the same gender, race, and social class and have similar levels of education. This study was not designed to account for differences in background, but rather, to make a preliminary exploration of storytelling and voice. However, the lack of difference should be noted.

In the conclusions there is an assumption being made that because the term voice is so "in the air" right now, as part of our zeitgeist, that people will have stories. This assumption probably does not apply to elementary children and may also not be appropriate at the high school level. However, in the state of Vermont

where voice is one of five measured criteria on the writing portfolio assessment, children are becoming familiar with the term even though it has not been adequately explored.

Experienced group processing and the establishment of a comfortable and safe environment is essential to the success of storytelling as an effective inquiry. Without these conditions, future groups will not be able to exchange stories on the level that those participating in this inquiry could.

Suggestions for Further Study

The participants in this group seemed to be able to discuss voice and develop commonalties even though they had differing notions about self and consciousness, supporting contentions that Peter Elbow has already made. There seems to be something about voice which cuts across these barriers. This study was not designed to test the relevance of self-concept to formulations about voice, however, and a future study might be fruitful.

This research began through an inspiration from Peter Reason and Peter Hawkins about the use of storytelling as inquiry. Their report distinguishes expression from explanation, but discussions in this group led to a questioning of whether or not expression and explanation are polarities. Expression as the idea of "how we put ourselves out to the world" was viewed as being compatible with explanation because explanations reflect the values and expressions

of the people who assemble them. It was the emotional component of expression that was seen as quite distinct from explanation. This should be investigated further.

Our group inquiry left Claire's dilemma about internally opposing values unresolved because it was beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, this group plans to continue and will probably choose this topic as its next focus. A future dissertation question might be "What do you do when internal voices run in opposition?"

Storytelling and the descriptive process turned out to be a powerful combination. What struck me most powerfully as a researcher was that the stories were so rich on so many levels that the participants were able to privately ask their own questions while the group focused on mine. There was enough human material coming out of the inquiry sessions that all these questions existed simultaneously. Therefore, the participants in the group felt like active members in search of personal understanding. As their notions about voice expanded, so did their other human concerns. In this way, the method was truly participatory, rather than using the term as a new mask for the old concept of research subject. It might be interesting for someone to determine whether or not this process is equally empowering for other groups.

Broader Professional Significance

To me, the book *Ways with Words* by Shirley Brice Heath (1991) epitomizes the potential of qualitative research. Heath presents data in such rich fullness that the reader is able to pursue parallel questions that are not even posed by the author, and yet, the data are reported sufficiently to explore the reader's tangential questioning. A similar possibility existed for the participants in this inquiry group. Each came with personal questions from her own life quest and the richness of other human stories added to her explorations, even when those questions were not articulated to the group. This parallel potential to inquire, not only on the part of researcher, but on the part of the participant, rendered the storytelling method even more powerful. As a researcher, to have provided an environment of brewing creativity for my own questions while at the same time providing the "food" for other searches as well was a touching experience. Fittingly, this method allows for multiciplicity in questioning as well as searching. It, too, is fluid.

Voice in the Vermont Portfolio Project

In the state of Vermont educators are beginning to look at student writing through portfolios instead of measuring ability by standardized multiple choice tests. In doing so, "voice" has been selected as one of the dimensions for the scoring rubric. This

decision, while it focuses student and teacher attention on voice in writing, places some people in a tenuous position. It is extremely important for the teachers in Vermont to recognize that "voice" sits in a broader context than the word on the page or exercises designed to stimulate it. The emergence of voice is a slowly moving process. Enabling activities such as the one described in this dissertation, as well as a classroom environment which encourages self expression are crucial if authentic student voice in writing is a desired outcome. Voice will not come during writing time if there isn't already a culture of open inquiry in the classroom.

CHAPTER 5

BRINGING INTUITION TO CONSCIOUSNESS

There is a certain beauty that comes from hearing the words of a person who gazes into the future and names a course that is set, but unseen.

Background

Most of my life's work has in one way or another touched upon aspects of research. Beginning as a young child with constant questions and personal searches, I have struggled through many different methods in an attempt to find a way to look at the questions that I tend to ask most frequently. These questions are often unanswerable in a finite manner. They usually deal with human complexities and paradoxes on a level very different from that of verifiable truth. However, until recently, I was only versed in the methods of quantitative analysis and so most of my burning questions were left either unexplored or minimized. I believe that there is a place for quantifiable, objective knowledge in the field of human research, but these methods are too contrived or specific to be used for the broader questions about human experience.

The method that I selected for this dissertation comes from years of exploration and has been highly influenced by the writings of Karl Mannheim, Alfred Schutz, Lincoln and Guba, Patricia Carini, Ken Wilber, and Peter Reason. These are not scholars who would ever "sit down and have dinner together." If anything, they

probably disagree with each other to a very large degree. Yet, what they share in common is a belief that human inquiry needs to acknowledge humans as human.

Allowing for Human Potential

Karl Mannheim posed a difficult problem at the beginning of the twentieth century when he suggested, "The full emergence of the sociological point of view regarding knowledge inevitably carries with it the gradual uncovering of the irrational foundation of rational knowledge" (Mannheim, 1975, p. 31). This is a startling suggestion because it negates the sole use of logic with respect to human inquiry. Where does a belief like this leave those who are trying to become social scientists? Mannheim recognized that this problem would be overlooked when he predicted that,

> ... sociology must pass through this stage in which its contents will undergo a mechanistic dehumanization and formalization, just as psychology did, so that out of devotion to an ideal of narrow exactitude nothing will remain except statistical data, tests, surveys, etc. and in the end every significant formulation of a problem will be excluded. All that can be said here is that this reduction of everything to a measurable or inventory-like describability is significant as a serious attempt to determine what is unambiguously ascertainable and, further, to think through what becomes of our psychic and social world when it is restricted to purely external measurable relationships (Mannheim, 1975, p. 43).

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This "ideal of narrow exactitude" indeed came to pass. The rational response of humans to whatever was under investigation became an underlying assumption of most social research. Times have changed radically for social science research, however, especially in the last twenty years. Newer methods have been provided which help people to inquiry about human behavior while keeping the environments of humanity.

Multiple Meanings

In order for human inquiry to possess depth and dimension, that which is under study becomes endless in its possibilities because every view that a human can take is at least slightly different from that of another. In 1975 Patricia Carini offered a detailed account of the phenomenological inquiry method used by her and others at the Prospect School in Bennington, VT for nine years preceding the publication of **Observation and Description: An Alternative Methodology**:

> ... the function of observing in phenomeno-
> logical inquiry is to constitute the multiple
> meanings of the phenomenon, while the func-
> tion of recording the phenomenon is to reflect
> those meanings for the contemplation of the
> observer. In order to organize the observa-
> tions, they are juxtaposed to each other in
> documentary form -- revealing the patterns
> of reciprocities that constitute the coherence
> and durability of the meanings of the phe-

nomenon. These emergent patterns of re-
ciprocities, in turn, are employed systemati-
cally in a program of refined and delimited
observing to verify the limits of the available
meanings of a phenomenon and to reconsti-
tute the phenomenon as a unit of inquiry"
(Carini, 1975, p. 12).

At the base of Carini's phenomenological inquiry is observation
which occurs through time and context. The observer must grasp the
setting from his/her point of view, remembering that s/he partici-
pates in and helps shape its meaning. At the same time, "the phe-
nomenon under observation is assumed to be inexhaustible in its
meanings" (Carini, 1975, p. 14). This idea of inexhaustibility allows
for a multiplicity of meanings to exist and to unendingly change with
added views and circumstances.

The notion of inexhaustibility can be troublesome for many
reasons. It is certainly not a very tidy way to go about research nor
does it speak from a position of ultimate authority. Yet, when
research concerns matters that are not on the level of verifiable,
objective truth there is always room for one more view. This should
not be confused with the idea that nothing is, therefore, knowable.
The point is to maintain an open mind to added information.

Meaning is also multiple from the perspective of changing
views over time, given more input or a chance to revisit an idea or
experience. Alfred Schutz (1972) speaks to this multiplicity of
meaning when he uses Bergson's notion of living in the stream of
experience or the world of space and time. According to Schutz, the
intellect reflects back on events in the stream to give them spatio-
temporal meaning. That is why its conclusions must be temporally

related and the "truth" of its description subject to change or evolution. Each individual reflecting in the stream will focus on different constitutive events. Moreover, as Rom Harre states, "...much social activity passes into limbo unresolved in its essential ambiguity. Our actions are offered as open sets of possibilities to be more closely defined should the need arise" (Harre, 1981, p. 17).

Meaning is, therefore, personally ascribed since it is the ego's reflection on what was or what is thought to become. Meaning changes with personal context and with which pieces of human experience are joined together at any particular time. It is important to record personal meaning in order to understand a phenomenon. Context is likewise key because it helps to show which pieces from the stream have been picked up.

From doing the work in this project, I would like to add a practical dimension to the idea of multiple meanings. Any report or theory or story is a summary of a bigger event, distilled by the teller. Because these abbreviations represent a larger, richer field it is challenging to render a shortened account which still maintains a glimpse of the original fullness. Since we are summarizing and the richness gets lost, multiple meanings spring up not only from the original multiple meanings of each person, but from each person's reconstitution of the summary. Hence, meanings are multiple going into the understanding of a phenomenon and when that under-standing gets explained in shortened form, additional multiple meanings are created from each person's interpretation of the summary. Visually, I liken this to chards of pottery which are assembled into objects that then get smashed again and reformed

into other objects. Each object continues to carry something of the original, but is fashioned differently by each assembler.

Subjective Meaning

Thus far meaning has been used in the sense of individual personal meaning. This can be extended into the interpersonal realm by turning attention to the "subjective meaning-context" (Schutz, 1971, p. 133). Subjective meaning is given by focusing on the process of an individual rather than on the product. "Objective meaning therefore consists only in a meaning-context within the mind of the interpreter, whereas subjective meaning refers beyond it to a meaning-context in the mind of the producer" (Schutz, 1971, p. 134). In this sense the product is an object or entity and not an event.

Searching for subjective meaning-context requires taking an object back to its subjective events. Schutz uses physical gesture as a product which he then divides into the meanings assigned by the interpreter and the expresser. As long as the gesture itself is being examined, meaning is created on the objective level. Once this gesture is traced back to the experiences of both interpreter and expresser, a subjective understanding is approximated. Through this subjective understanding it becomes evident that meaning ascribed by one person is not the same meaning as that ascribed by another. Therefore, examining the subjective contexts of meaning expands into social relationships (Schutz, 1971).

In this research project, the objective text is taken back to its subjective readings in order to create a conjunctive story which

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exists on its own, related to, but not equivalent to the original story told. The conjunctive story is formed by the group and carries with it meanings well beyond those given by the original storyteller. By doing so, the essence of the story becomes transformed into a larger meaning context. In that sense it also becomes "larger than life."

Deciding what constituted the data of this dissertation became a puzzle. What we did turned out not to be as interesting to outside readers as how what we did was processed internally by the participants. Then, internal processing became the data. Ironically, this led to the discovery that allowing the opportunity for voices to arise and intermingle (the process) became a part of understanding it (the product). So, following an intuitive impulse about what might be good to do, led to the discovery that the doing of voice cannot be separated from an expansive thinking about it. In this way, the objective state is a subsection of the subjective proceedings.

Data Analysis

In a naturalistic paradigm it is impossible to predict a priori the exact nature of data analysis. Instead, an emergent design is employed. This being stated, I used a basic structure of seeking patterns, formulating themes, and looking for instances where the emerging patterns did not hold true. Materials from the transcribed texts generated at the inquiry sessions and subsequent interviews comprised the data to be used in this analysis. During the data analysis, I kept in mind a caveat offered by Reason and Hawkins (1990): "To treat a story as It means we treat the truth of the story

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as being of the same nature as the truth that pertains to the level of matter (Wilber) or personal ego-reality (Jung). To do this perverts the truth, collapsing levels of meaning and multiple meanings to support one world-view" (p. 99). Remembering to keep the stories within the contexts in which they were given added to the credibility of the statements made with respect to the data and prevented a lot of tempting researcher speculation.

Establishing Trustworthiness

I used naturalistic techniques to demonstrate credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The results of research "inevitably consist of both what is out there and what is in the observer" (Rogers, 1984, p. 92). Remembering this, "Qualitative researchers try to acknowledge and take into account their own biases as a method of dealing with them" (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p. 43). The summaries that I gave after each descriptive round during the sessions helped me to state before the group how I was connecting the comments that had been made. The rule of "sticking to the text" prevented what could have become idle researcher speculation. Also, my ideas were presented openly before the group and were at certain points either challenged or elaborated.

Credibility

Triangulation. Interviewing participants after the expressive inquiry session was a way of triangulating data, thereby adding to

the trustworthiness of the data. Group descriptions of the stories also provided a means of triangulation.

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Peer Debriefing. A fellow doctoral student with a common background in research explored aspects of the study with me for the purpose of asking searching questions, listening to working hypotheses as they emerged, and serving as a sympathetic listener when needed. The debriefing was tape recorded.

Member Checks. Participants were provided with patterns, themes, and theories as they emerged for me about the group setting from looking at the data in the inquiry sessions and the interviews. When themes were gathered for purposes of describing group climate, members were asked to identify which statements held true. Only statements to which all group members agreed were used as a list of conditions of the group process. While I found such consensus imperative when referring to the group climate, participants were not consulted for consensus purposes for any other discussions in this dissertation. However, all members have read the dissertation.

Transferability

In the naturalistic paradigm the individual case is described rather than attempting to supply universal generalizations because generalizations are, by definition, applicable to every member of a class or category and a researcher in human behavior cannot possibly supply such information. With this in mind, German

philosopher Wilhelm Windelband coined two terms, "nomothetic" and "ideographic" to describe the types of knowledge applicable to the natural sciences and the social sciences. "Nomothetic" refers to knowledge based on laws while "ideographic" describes knowledge that is based on a given particular. "The essential dilemma is simply this: Generalizations are nomothetic in nature, that is lawlike, but in order to use them - for purposes of prediction or control, say - the generalizations must be applied to particulars. And it is precisely at that point that their probabilistic, relative nature comes into sharpest focus" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 116). Social/behavioral scientists struggle continuously with the problem of whether or not a particular instance suits the general rule, no matter what that rule may be. Therefore, naturalistic inquiry uses idiographic statements. It is the role of a naturalistic researcher to provide enough specific data so that the reader of a study can supply his/her own judgments about transferability.

Dependability and Confirmability

The process undertaken was sufficiently documented so that an audit trail can be made. The trail consists of: raw data, data reduction and analysis products, data reconstruction and synthesis products, and process notes.

Fit of These Methods to the Focus of Inquiry

Group inquiry through storytelling allows for the multiplicity of subjective meaning to emerge from many levels of consciousness. It provides a sociological setting which acknowledges an inner/outer dynamic. Moreover, these conditions foster a brewing sense of creativity where the elements mutually shape the understandings which may arise. Voice is an idea with potentially inexhaustible meaning that cannot be separated from its social contexts. This inquiry was a peek at one of those many possible social contexts. The method provided the safety necessary for the participants to use what they considered to be true voices. In an atmosphere of safety more honest work about voice can be done.

A running theme through this entire dissertation is story. There is so much to be learned about human experience by just listening to each other, hearing and being heard.

APPENDIX

CONDENSED SAMPLE OF DESCRIPTIVE SESSIONS

Protocols for Reporting the Descriptive Sessions

Because including a verbatim transcript of the descriptive sessions would be unnecessarily cumbersome, I have collapsed the conversations regarding the description of each text. What follows is the complete text of three narratives, with the selected passage that was described by our group denoted by italics. My narrative has been eliminated from the report because the group chose to describe a section that was related to imagery rather than voice.

Underneath each story is a recounting of first impressions and an abbreviated version of each descriptive round, interspersed with the summaries provided during the sessions. These "summaries," as named by the Prospect Institute, consist of the chairperson's review of what has been said by all group members, grouped into what the chair views as emerging patterns, polarities, and surprising revelations. Because the word "summary" already carries a popular definition, I have used the term "collective pooling" to remind the reader of the distinct role that summarizing plays in the nature of our inquiry.

First Impressions

Before a description of a selected passage is begun, the entire text is read and first impressions of the piece are given by each

member of the group. These impressions are then summarized into a collective pool. It is from this pool that the first impressions reported herein are drawn.

Descriptive Round

The descriptive rounds as presented in this dissertation have been provided so that the reader can gain a sense of the flavor of the comments made during the inquiry sessions. They represent only a fraction of the actual conversations and were chosen to illustrate points made in the collective pooling.

Collective Pooling

The term "collective pooling" is being substituted for the Prospect word "summary" to avoid confusion between the common usage of this word and the specific nature of its meaning to our inquiry group. I chaired the sessions with Emma and Peg's stories and so those collective poolings come from the connections made by me during the actual inquiry sessions. Because Claire's story was chaired by Emma, I have reconstructed the collective pooling for that story so that all of the summarizing in the dissertation has been prepared by me.

It is necessary to remember that while the themes may be presented by me, the thoughts and ideas reflect those of the entire group. This pooling is an essential underlying element of the descriptive process where all understanding about a text is

considered to be inexhaustible. Polar interpretations exist in the same pool as indicators of possible ambiguities in a text, the nature of which may be teased out with added description. The addition of another person to the description serves to expand understanding even further. Pooling occurs during apparent stopping points in the text or when the chair feels saturated with information.

Emma's Letters to Charity Bailey

Emma: I was interested in going back and seeing what I could remember from my childhood. The strongest memory that I have.. it's actually not a specific memory.. it's really a very long span of my childhood, but it was about letter writing. I was a really avid letter writer as a child and it started when I was about six years old. And there was this woman named Charity Bailey.... She was probably in her forties or fifties then and she was a music teacher at a little private school in New York. She had a program on television for a while on Saturday mornings called "Sing Along with Charity Bailey" where she had these kids from her school and they would sing along with her and do these songs and she would invite the audience at home to sing along and make these little homemade in-struments which I had my father make me. She would also invite these people at the end of the program to write to her and there would be an address and I was probably.. I must have been.. six or seven when I started watching that and I wrote to her in New York and she wrote back and she had this beautiful gray stationery with her address in Boston, purple letters on the top, and she also wrote in turquoise fountain pen ink.... I don't

actually remember a lot of the specific things that she wrote about, but there was a real warmth in the letters. I always felt like she was writing really directly to me. And one time actually we were almost going to meet her in New York but something came through .. something screwed it up.... And then we moved away from there and I wrote to her actually for years after that, even though I couldn't anymore watch the program because we were really far away.... Probably until I was about nine or ten we kept up this correspondence.

... This letter writing, it was really like a big part of what I did in my childhood. I liked chain letters also.. and anything to do with letters. I loved post offices and stamps, although I didn't collect them.... I don't re-member writing things in school. I know we had to do little compositions, but none of them actually stand out in the way that the letters do.... When I got older in school and we had to write reports, I was still writing lots of letters. And by that time I was sort of writing like 20 page letters to friends from camp. They were letters like I would tell about things that were going on, but they were almost like diary entries where it was sort of like I was able to think out loud and I think that having the distance from the per-son and not seeing them every day was really helpful. I don't think I could have like mused in that way to kids I saw everyday.

But when I got older and I had to write the reports I know that the way I wrote let-ters and the way I wrote reports was com-pletely different and that my report writing.... I was sort of trying to do the things we were told to do in school like use transitions and topic sentences and correct grammar. And my letter writing was much more um sort of stream of consciousness. Sentences just sort of flowing or not ending.... Then when I was

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in high school I started to keep journals seri-
ously. There was an ease about that. It felt
like it was mine. I agonized to write papers
and to do outlines. I could never do outlines.
But I didn't have any trouble writing, you
know, thirty page letters. They would just
sort of come and I would never run out of
things to say and I could just sort of carry on
this conversation that was probably as much
with myself as with the person who was
getting the letter....

Fern: Do you remember anything that Charity
Bailey said to you?

Emma: There was one letter.. I think.. I was
pretty old by then.... I must have been about
12 or 13 and we hadn't actually written for a
few years and maybe I had found some old
letters and written her a letter or something.
I'm not really sure why I got this letter from
her. And she asked me and I never did this
because I felt so embarrassed about it, but
she asked me if I would phone her. She said I
just want to hear your voice. I was so embar-
rassed by it because of being a teenager and
everything that I never did. Actually that's
probably the line that I remember the most....

Fern: Did you stop writing back to her after
she asked to hear your voice?

Emma: I think I did. I don't remember any
letters after that. I know I didn't call her be-
cause I remember thinking about calling her
and then I just didn't have the nerve to do it.
It was just such a powerful thing and I was a
teenager. I was a little bit embarrassed. I
hadn't even thought about that. I mean talk
about voice.

First Impressions

First impressions of this story brought out themes of space, time, distance, and boundary. A reverberation of distance and boundary came through Emma when she revealed a need to send intimate musings far away. The group selected the italicized passage to describe because it was a recollection of letter writing rather than of Charity Bailey herself. Furthermore, it connected voice in writing directly back to the concrete voice and signalled an evocative relationship between the spoken voice and voice in writing.

Descriptive Round 1

This letter writing, it was really like a big part of what I did in my childhood.

Emma: The storyteller spent a lot of her young years writing letters. "A big part of what I did" - the image that's suggested to me by that is there is a whole, and then it's divided up into parts, and one part is this letter writing. That's one way of conceptualizing that. When I did the paraphrase, I stated it in a different way, and that was that I talked about spending a lot of time. But, in fact, here it doesn't say anything about spending a lot of time. There's the whole of childhood, and there was this big fraction of it that was letter writing.

Peg: Well, even though it isn't in this paragraph, because it refers back to it, I'm very conscious of "this letter writing" as being a big

part of your childhood begins at around age six, and that marks how much a part of one's childhood. It was from the moment that one started writing. And also because letter writing is one way of making connections, I had an image of cloth with lots of threads that had to do with letter writing.

Fern: I've seen that also, a sense of the past.

Claire: A lot of time was spent in this particular passion.

Descriptive Round 2

I liked chain letters also.. and anything to do with letters.

Emma: Chain letters are .. well, the image is of a chain. But they are also a little bit into the void because you never really know if you're going to get anything back at the end. And you never really know if people are going to break the chain.

Peg: And the second sentence takes on a much broader theme of letters. You know, like even calligraphy.

Claire: It's an ironic juxtaposition of the chain being an image of connection, and yet being anonymous.

Fern: The idea of bringing in chain letters into all of this letter writing also conjures up an image of obsession, of distance or removal, because the chain letter itself is impersonal.

Descriptive Round 3

I loved post offices and stamps, although I didn't collect them....

Fern: To me this sentence shows a connection to the process because it's not only letters, but what happens to them. You have the sense of the massiveness of the postal system and yet the unique qualities of every letter that makes up the larger system.

Claire: "I love post offices and stamps" has a mood to it. It has the voice of an ode.

Emma: The second part of this sentence is sort of like defining what it wasn't. Up until that point, the motion is all outward. "Although I didn't collect them" is the first boundary.

Peg: There is a clarifying that you weren't bringing things in, which is what a collection is in some ways.

Collective Pooling

In this first part, there's a sense of part to whole. There's the whole of childhood and a big fraction of it was letter writing. Even

though the selection does not mention age, there is a reference back to a previous statement about the writing beginning at age six. That age marks how much of a part of childhood it actually was, almost from the moment that she began writing. Perhaps because letter writing is a way of making connections, Peg noticed that this selection brings up an image of a piece of cloth, a tapestry, with lots of threads that had to do with letter writing.

The next couple of sentences bring up the whole world of letters. With the introduction of the idea *chain letter*, the narrative goes into a whole other image of letters and letter writing. In one sense it goes into a void because you never really know what happens to chain letters. Perhaps this void exists, if you continue the tapestry metaphor that Peg brought up, on the ends of the tapestry. At the same time, it also conjures up the image of collage. And the phrase "anything to do with letters" enters into the realm of any type of letter at all, not even perhaps letter as in write a letter and mail it, but maybe even the letters that you use to write, or the way a letter is written as in calligraphy. The word "chain letter" can sometimes bring up the idea of obsession. It can also be impersonal, and forms an interesting tension between connection and anonymity.

The post office brings in the idea of the process and being connected to process, and also the idea of "I love the post office and stamps" conjures the mood of an ode. With the mention of "didn't collect," we have the first boundary. Previous to this there's a sense of moving out and clarifying that you're not bringing things in.

Descriptive Round 4

I don't remember writing things in school.

Emma: The previous part seems like a personal activity. And suddenly here's the life of school, which in part is a reminder that this is about a child who would have spent a lot of time in school.

Peg: It's like whatever was going on in school was very flat, maybe even gray background of some kind.

Fern: There's also a sense of lack of importance of those things that happened in school, of not being part of the memory or not being part of the recollection.

Claire: The language lacks the passion of the previous voice.

Descriptive Round 5

I know we had to do little compositions, but none of them actually stand out in the way the letters do.... When I got older in school and we had to write reports, I was still writing lots of letters. And by that time I was sort of writing like 20 page letters to friends in camp.

Emma: There was sort of this sense that there's this life with the compositions and the reports, but alongside there's this other life with the letters and they're sort of going on these parallel courses.

And the words that are used to distinguish those courses are "but" and "still." They are in, not strong opposition, but they are kind of in opposition to each other. 121

Peg: The use of the "I" and the "we" -- somehow you're the anonymous "we" that does the reports and the compositions that don't particularly stand out, but the real you is over here still writing those letters.

Claire: I just had this image of a magnet which goes with the "we" and the "I." Then it keeps being pulled back to the "I." There is a reverberation between 20 page letters and the little compositions. Also, I was really struck, in terms of the word "things," by the connection between inner world and what matters and memory, what we recollect.

Fern: I keep hearing this and connecting it back to my students last year who didn't save their social studies essays. Even though I thought they were really insightful and thought provoking, they did not have personal meaning for the students.
Also, there is a sense of depth to the letters that you don't get with the reports. Yet, when I think of the word report, I think of something that is lengthy and in-depth.

Collective Pooling

An overriding idea for these few sentences is that what touches the inner world connects strongly to memory. We see this in the contrast between the life of the compositions at school and the life of the letters at home. There are some words that are used like "but" and "still" which reemphasize this contrast. The two worlds are running parallel, unconnected. They are in different spatial and emotional realms. The collective word "we" shows up for school, and the individual word "I" applies to home.

Along with this contrast is a sense of depth versus shallowness—the depth that a 20 page letter might have as opposed to a report with no description, referred to as a thing. The "we" and the "I" are acting like magnets, pulling more powerfully toward the personal and forgetting the events of the in school "we." No description accompanies the work at school. Yet, even though there is no description given to the letters themselves, images are given so that you can conjure them. There's nothing to surround the works at school—they're just things, dead. Either they're not recalled or they're not told, showing a lack of importance. The letters, on the other hand, have such a sense of connection and specifically the connection to the friends who are receiving them.

There's also a flatness to the work at school, and reference to how small it is—"little" composition, whether you take that literally or figuratively by how small a part or no part the heart plays in that. It just seems like the things that happened at school aren't part of the recollection, and they lack a passion of language.

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They were letters like I would tell about things that were going on, but they were almost like diary entries where it was sort of like I was able to think out loud and I think that having the distance from the person and not seeing them every day was really helpful. I don't think I could have like mused in that way to kids I saw every day.

Emma: This is a very different kind of sentence from anything that comes before. A little bit like the diary entry it's talking about, it's sort of like a stream of consciousness. It's really funny to use the expression "think out loud" in talking about a letter.

Peg: These three or four lines are very complicated. I start to get the impression of the receivers of the letters being anonymous in certain ways. It's true you might mail it to somebody else, but a diary entry isn't directed toward a particular person. And also neither is thinking out loud directed toward a particular person.

Fern: In it all there seems to be a place for the receiver, too, even though the receiver is becoming anonymous. Because letters were chosen rather than diary entries and they were mailed. And that seems to be an important piece of it. So there's the tension of anonymity and self-expression. It's like thinking out loud to no one, but still looking for connection.

Claire: The recollection is not of a specific moment, but it's of a thread passing through a life. I have a sort of funny thought about the last sentence. "Mused" is a very poetic word; it conjures up the Muses. And "kids" is a colloquial, school word. It's funny to have them right next to each other.

Collective Pooling

The form of this first sentence begins to sound like the diary entry it depicts, departing from the previously straightforward structure. The letters are described as a place for thinking out loud and for telling what was going on in the narrator's life. But even though it was described in both of those ways, the major part of it seems to be the diary aspect. The lines give an impression of the receiver becoming anonymous, even though the receiver's still connected and plays a role because the letters were mailed. Some of the ideas they give about the receiver being anonymous are the idea of thinking out loud, and that distance was helpful. It shows something that's evolving into something very personal. These letters are becoming a place for thoughts.

The whole story is a passage through time—even though it's not grounded in time with a lot of references to certain points—it's more like a recollection; it's a thread passing through a life. The theme of distance really comes through as a major idea in all of this, and it's reiterated in the last sentence with the choice of words selected. The idea of "kids" is a very everyday kind of word, and the word "muse" is very poetic, separating a sense of kids and everyday with the

musings of the poet. Distance is needed from her everyday, pedestrian life in order to allow the musings to come. The narrator is also recounting the evolution of more than one voice.

Peg's Search for a Voice

Peg: One thing that is similar about my childhood and Emma's is that we moved around a lot and I never wrote letters and I still have a hard time writing letters, even to my own children. And for me when we moved it was as though I disappeared off the face of the Earth, not the people. And people would write to me who I loved and I would not answer them. The only times I've actually written letters, except sort of obligatory thank you letters when I actually forced myself to do it, is when I've been away from home. And then I've been able to do it. This is as an adult. And when sort of the first six months that Grant and I discovered that we'd loved each other all this time, I wrote three letters a week. I just poured out letters. And they weren't.. they weren't just love letters....
    Writing has always been so hard and I've always felt trapped inside myself in terms of having to put stuff on paper.. um. So that ultimately when I did have to write stuff like reports I managed to get somebody inside me to do them, but it wasn't like it was me doing it. And that's continued as an adult.
    And except for sort of a few very brief occasions and one was I gave the.. my senior high school graduation.. I gave the speech. And I read it the other day and I can recognize myself in it and it really feels like me. There is no.. I mean.. And plus I've eliminated all other pieces of writing from my life so.. from my past.. you know, so I have no way of

knowing if I would read them now and they would.. that I would recognize myself in them.

And I think I have sort of grown up and been an adult for a long time, thinking of myself as not having any voice. And there have been two things that have really jarred that for me. One is four years ago through just a series of chance things that happened there was a reunion from my high school which was this very small crazy girls' school that I had gone to. And there were fifteen of us and this was the 27th year and everybody was there. And people talked about my voice when I was in high school and how I had spoken. And I had.. it was like somehow I had constructed this image of me being silent and usually invisible, so I never expect somebody to recognize me when I go anywhere cause I am always moving and I disappear from the face of the Earth. And I have no voice. And I was so struck with that and I uh.. then just started thinking of all my work with children and how my voice is in that work and that it's.. you know, it's not a loud voice that says.. but it's, you know, it's more like a voice like the wind or something.. that's there.

And the last few years with VITA [Vermont Institute for Teaching the Arts] have really confronted this cause I've had to do papers and I hate doing them. And I've been almost a year late each time. And uh.. and even the um the first year of the VITA paper where the reflection.. or whatever the big thing we had to do.. was accurate, it still was as though, you know, I had finally set a deadline and I got the person inside me who does that piece of writing when the deadline happens. And so I now have two pieces of writing that I haven't done from last year and one is the last VITA paper and the other is um from this action research course that I took with someone last year. And I.. I think what the stuff in that course, the work that

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we were doing was so important to me that I wanted to write it in my own voice and not make the ghost writer in me, or whoever that is, basically document it.

I feel like all fall so much of my energy has been concentrating on.. getting ready to be able to write and I had a conversation with Claire last week about feeling that when something comes out of me and goes on to paper it gets taken away. And Claire said, well you could keep it until you were ready. This was like.. this was a revolutionary idea and it came just at the time that I had to do my comments for my report cards and usually what I do is sit there until I can get something out and this time I went through and did.. wrote images and feelings of things next to each child' name and then I went back and wrote and for the first time I really enjoyed doing it. And I felt like each time I wasn't struggling to find a different way of saying something that I may have said about another child or um.. And so I really feel like I'm on the threshold of being able to use my own voice on paper. But I still can't write letters.

First Impressions

Participants responded to this story with a reluctance to describe it. As Emma began, "My first impression is of tremendous vulnerability, and that makes it really hard for me to talk about because I fear violating that." Peg broke the silence by replying that her story seemed to be "an immense outpouring about not being able to outpour." This touch of humor allowed the group to proceed more comfortably.

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The story had resonance for everyone in the group and many said they wanted to weep. The theme of trust and what happens when a voice is put out into the open recurred in our comments. As Claire stated, "And then, well, maybe part of that resonance is if we really dare.. if we really dare to give our authentic voice, what's going to happen then, to that image?" Despite hesitations, there was a feeling of trust reverberating off of the vulnerability that Peg showed in her story.

Other issues of voice were brought out in first impressions, too. Fleeting images like ghost, invisible, disappear, and wind surfaced as the narrator told of a voice that wasn't vocal. Claire stated, "We think of voice so often just with words and our certain diction, but it's more than that. It's presence. It's where we choose to be silent." This piece casts someone's voice as a presence like the wind that goes in and around and is there, not in voice, but in work. Despite the nonvocal associations, the narrator spoke comfortably using "voice" as a term to describe what she meant. Once the participants became assured that they were not violating a trust by describing the work, a passage was chosen to describe.

Descriptive Round 1

And I think I have sort of grown up and been an adult for a long time, thinking of myself as not having any voice.

Peg: One thing that stands out is the juxtaposition of "grown up" and "being an adult for a long time." It almost gives the impression that

the period of being an adult with no voice is even longer than the period of having grown up.

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Fern: I noticed the word "thinking" in that sentence. It doesn't say "I have not had any voice," but it says, "thinking of myself as not having any voice."

Claire: It's not that the narrator indeed didn't have a voice, but it goes back to perception.

Emma: I had this strong sense when I read this sentence that it was a transitional sentence. It's in a certain way a summary of the part that's gone before and stands between that part and the next.

Descriptive Round 2

And there have been two things that have really jarred that for me.

Peg: There's the implication that voice has been defined by speaking or writing. Somehow what's happening is a different definition of voice. When the definition changes, I can acknowledge that I do have a voice.

Fern: I noticed the use of the words "jarred," and "two things" so that it came as some thing and then maybe confirmed by a second thing. Also, there is a strength in the word "jarring."

Claire: By putting this sentence in the context of what was told before it, I think that the suggestion that I feel here as the real voice is when one can recognize oneself and give permission to that. And so that reverberates off not having any voice, not having found permission for that voice where you'd really recognize yourself.

Emma: I was also caught by the word "jarred" and the contrast between this sentence and the one before. Now it's like an announcement. I feel like I'm in the presence of some strong event. "Jarring" has the connotation of suddenness as well as strength. It opens the possibility that there's not just one way that it might be different. That "thinking of myself as not having any voice," that self perception might be challenged, but those two ways might be different.

Collective Pooling

This piece is a self-reflection by the narrator about having felt voiceless for a long period of her life. Looking back in the text, assumptions about voice having to do with writing are what prompted this feeling. We are at a transitional part of the text where the assumption gets challenged. The word "jarred" is used suggesting a prying open or suddenly bumping up against a change. Once the definition shifts, the self-perception can change. It seems like we're in the presence of some kind of personal discovery.

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Descriptive Round 3

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One is four years ago through just a series of chance things that happened there was a reunion from my high school which was this very small, crazy girls' school that I had gone to. And there were fifteen of us and this was the 27th year and everybody was there.

Peg: One thing that is interesting is referring to the event as being caused by chance in some way.

Fern: That section "a series of chance things that happened" brought up the idea of wind again, in terms of no intentional direction, but something just happening. Also "everybody was there" seems significant so that everybody has the potential to have an impact on whatever this jarring moment was. It's like there wasn't a witness who wasn't there for a perspective. All of the perspectives were going to be present at this moment.

Emma: The context changes; it's not reflecting on one's self, but meeting up with other people who knew each other. And I guess the part of it being a small girls' school suggested intimacy. So that it seemed like this would be the kind of reunion where people might talk about real things.

Claire: I keep finding myself having a really emotional reaction, though it's probably not permissible. It's very complicated because reunions bring up all kinds of things for me.

Descriptive Round 4

People talked about my voice when I was in high school and how I had spoken.

Peg: I want to refer back to the beginning because I think there was another assumption of a definition that invisible also meant non-existent. And that definition also comes to change. Just sort of recognizing that here I disappeared off the face of the earth, and that invisibility was connected to real disappearance rather than other qualities that invisibility can have.

Fern: In this sentence I see reference to oral language and to speech with the use of the word "voice," whereas the previous uses had other connotations. So that the idea of voice begins to link back to the physical relationship of that metaphor. And that this group, the group for which everybody was there, is putting an idea out that runs counter to the perception that the narrator has.

Claire: That could be the quality of what you spoke, not how often. That it was the quality that was remembered, and therefore, I think it reverberates with your [idea of voice as] presence.

Emma: This raised a lot of questions for me. Were people talking about everybody's voice? Was this a particular thing for the narrator?

Descriptive Round 5

And I had.. it was like somehow I had constructed this image of me being silent and usually invisible, so I never expect somebody to recognize me when I go anywhere cause I am always moving and I disappear from the face of the Earth.

Emma: I guess there's a couple of things that stand out to me. In this expression there is an image of building things; it's not just that I have an image, but that I've built it up. It hearkens back to the part about the years and years, that one constructs an image over time. And then, in the same sentence, there's a sudden switch from "I had constructed this image" which suggests a duration of time to talking in the present voice. And this whole story up until now has been about the past. It's ambiguous. It might be talking about now, but it also might be the kind of present tense when you're back in a story from a previous time but you're telling it in the present.

Collective Pooling

This section of the story is situated in time in many ways. It is about previous experiences and prior beliefs. As the story is told, the tense vacillates from past to present, creating an ambiguity. One

aspect of the ambiguity deals with whether the present exists in this moment or is being told through the sense of one who enters into a past event and experiences it as present.

Change is another theme of this passage. The narrator speaks of an event that changes her view of herself. The major event related to this change is a high school reunion. Everybody was there, so that everybody had the potential to have an impact on the jarring moment. All of the possible high school perspectives were represented. The reunion itself is symbolic of the opportunity to look back and share perspectives, providing a sense of story within a story. The narrator attends this reunion through chance happenings, bringing up the image of a wind with no intentional direction, just blowing and making changes.

At the reunion, classmates acknowledge that the narrator has a memorable voice. It is spoken of in terms of quality, not amount. Their comments give evidence that the narrator is recognized through her voice, forcing a reevaluation of her self-image. The voice referred to by the classmates is oral, relating back to a more literal use of the word. The idea about voice begins to link back to the physical relationship of that metaphor and the high school group has put an idea forth that runs counter to the narrator's perception. This frees the narrator to think of voice in other terms than writing.

Description of this passage also led the participants into checking assumptions about invisibility. Invisible does not have to mean non-existent, just disappearing. In this transformation other qualities of invisibility became apparent, especially that of silence.

And I was so struck with that and I uh.. then just started thinking of all my work with children and how my voice is in that work and that it's.. you know, it's not a loud voice that says.. but it's, you know, it's more like a voice like the wind or something.. that's there.

Fern: In this sentence the narrator becomes voiceful rather than voiceless. It's another definition of voice, in the sense that talking about her having a voice in the tangible sense maybe freed up an ability to think about the metaphor in other ways. And so we see the use of the metaphor coming out in the work that's done with children. The narrator redefines it so that it's not an authoritative voice, a loud voice that says, but that "it's a voice like the wind or something that's there." "Not a voice that says" is a jolting statement because in one sense it contradicts the very metaphor that it's based on. The grounding of voice is at least superficially in something that does talk, that does say. There must be something more to that physical act than what is commonly thought to be. It makes me think about the precursor to voice -- breath and life, rather than talk.

Claire: It was interesting because it's more like a voice like the wind, but the wind could be loud. But then I thought of the emphasis because of "not loud" that this is a gentle wind. Also, the emphasis here is on the nature of wind as an agent of change.

Emma: The narrator actually never talks about teaching. What she says is "my work with children." That seems to me to be consonant with the image of wind. This is all told in the present tense. It's ambiguous because it's the present as in now, but it's also the present as in always present. You know, that way we use the present tense to talk about enduring truths.

Collective Pooling

This first sentence shows how the event at the reunion jolted the narrator into rethinking so that she actually became voiceful rather than voiceless. Giving another definition to voice in the sense of having a tangible voice perhaps freed up an ability to think about the metaphor in other ways. The idea of "it's not a loud voice that says" is in itself a jolting statement because it contradicts the very metaphor that it is based on. The grounding of voice is, at least superficially, is in something that does talk, that does say. And yet, there may be something more to even the physical act than what is commonly implied. Perhaps the association relates to a precursor of voice which is breath, a crucial life force.

A voice like the wind as portrayed here evokes a gentleness, rather than being a loud, dominating wind. There is also an emphasis on the nature of the wind as an agent of change. The narrator never actually refers to herself as a teacher, but instead eludes to "my work with children." This seems consonant with the image of

gentle wind. References to teaching are told in the present tense which seems to carry both the weight of now and of enduring truth.

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Claire's Conflicting Values

Claire: I brought a poem by one of my students that really disturbed me and I don't know if it would be appropriate to share it.

Emma: It's fine with me.

Claire: Yeah? Okay. And I don't know if I should read it or have you read it. What's the best?

Emma: Read it out loud first.

Claire: Read? I hope I can without.. um.. okay.. Yeah. I'd love some response to this poem. Okay? I had such a strong response and I think I won't tell you it because it would influence you right away. Did I talk to you about this?

Peg: I'm not sure.

Claire: Okay. This is by a thirteen year old.

READS THE POEM

SOME DISCUSSION AND REACTIONS FOLLOW.

Claire: That's interesting because I had lunch with her [the student author]. In the end it was a wonderful opportunity, I think. It was a very difficult moment for me, I think. But it became an opportunity to have a dialogue and be very real in our voices and that's basically what we talked about was, you know, were we all becoming so desensitized? She said,

and I guess where I am having trouble is um..
how do I begin? I had a real reaction, I have
to be really honest, to the class clapping and it
was just my gut. And I.. they were about
ready to leave for lunch.. I mean I think I
told Peg this.. I'm just basically who I am
teaching someone.. I didn't have any time.. I
said I'm really upset that you're clapping.
And then there was no time for a dialogue so
I had a week to think since.. you know I
wasn't going to see them. And this was not a
group I knew well so that wasn't.. And par-
tially I guess it's contextual too, talking about
tone and voice. The whole class had been
really negative in energy, so I have to say
that. Um. so, I guess in my intuitive self I felt
they were clapping for the violence.

When I went the next week I felt I had
to respond. So, it was again a poem response
to a poem. So, I should have brought it but I..
actually I might have sent it to you.. my
Seamus Heaney poem? Did I send it to you
for the New Year's?

Peg: I don't think so.

Claire: Well okay. It doesn't matter. I found
a poem that I really love by Seamus Heaney
that really deals with suffering in the world.
And it's a pretty despairing poem, but then it
goes to the other side of the sea in belief and
hope and justice. And it's very eloquent. I
read it to them as a response and said, you
know, I really don't know why you clapped.
You know. I'll tell you.. you know.. what I
was scared you were clapping for. I was just
really.. bore my.. revealed myself to them.
Read the poem and my fears of coming into a
world where people were getting desensitized
and the whole baby being also a metaphor for
such innocence. So I said, I'm opening the
door to you. Tell me.. could you tell me why
you clapped? And not many people took the

opportunity. Two students said they felt the poem was well expressed. And that's what they said. And they said their heros and voices in writing were Stephen King.

And I went home thinking, am I just so prejudiced, you know, in terms of wanting a peaceful world. You know, I have to say to you that I really have problems with violence and I had to say that to the group. I said, I'm being honest. You know, you are talking to someone who has a lot of problems with violence, but I do want to hear from you. And I was so glad for the opportunity because we really had a dialogue about it and we were honest. I had lunch with the girl and she said to me: we're living in this world and this is my way to deal with it. And I said I really support you. I come from a really hard past for a different reason and my poems are pretty dark and I need to deal with it. So, I said believe me I am not saying that you should write pretty poems and we had a wonderful hour together and a wonderful talk.

I guess I suspect.. where I suspect it myself is again, did I bring all my prejudices and I couldn't see that this was a well expressed poem. You and I was curious how you.. you know because somebody asked me later, well is it just a trashy poem? Is it gratuitous violence?.. I just reacted to the material. I could not even see it as a good poem.

First Impressions

First impressions of this piece were that it had a sense of being elliptical, with a struggle to find a language to communicate the narrator's thoughts and feelings. There was the sense of grappling with

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a moral dilemma while also coming to know her own thoughts by thinking out loud. The narrator was not allowing herself the right to have a response, whether that meant accepting the content of the poem or having to conform to how she thought she ought to respond. It was almost as though the narrator would not give herself permission to be able to say her feelings about violence without qualifying them. On the surface, it seemed like part of the conflict also dealt with how to live with realities that are difficult for us. There was also a shifting of audience from self to us as the group to that school class and their reactions to the poem. This furthered the confusion because many people were being talked to at once, shifting from one audience to another

Descriptive Round 1

And I went home thinking, am I just so prejudiced, you know, in terms of wanting a peaceful world. You know, I have to say to you that I really have problems with violence and I had to say that to the group.

Emma: The word "so" has a lot of different meanings. I guess I'm realizing that there's a lot packed in. There's ambiguity. You don't usually talk about prejudice as being something wonderful to have and that the prejudice that the narrator is talking about is of wanting a peaceful world. It seems like an interesting twist on the idea of prejudice. The word to me carries the idea of judge and that's where I pick up the tone of judgment.

Claire: It's all so elliptical and it's leaving so much out in the stutterings. There was a lot implied that wasn't said. I also saw a new stress on the verb "have to." It was an urgency there. That there was almost a Rilkian sense of needing to share where I was coming from in terms of my attitude towards violence.

Peg: The first sentence is like a denial. There's something wrong with who I am that I am reacting this way. It's like some of the things that are not said are criticisms of self. "Am I so" is an expression that often brings some kind of, at least a mild form, of self-condemnation.

Fern: There was an assumption that I made in reading this sentence that the narrator was not allowing her own response to be valid. In the second sentence I see the narrator taking a firm stand. The narrator is telling this group, the research group, and the group of students what she needs to say.

Collective Pooling

In the first few sentences there are a few different strands that are being brought out. One is the elliptical nature of the piece. There is some ambiguity packed into these sentences and between the sentences. For example, with the use of the word "so". It could be a mild form of self-condemnation; it could be the transitional word to

an unstated clause "so prejudiced that...;" it could mean "so" in terms of "very."

Even though the passage is elliptical, it is not incoherent. There is a sense to the story as a whole. Judgment is being shown by the word "prejudiced" which has strong negative connotations. The word isn't based in objectivity, so it's very different from taking a moral stand on something. Being prejudiced in favor of a peaceful world seems like a twist.

There is also the idea of multiple audiences and in the second sentence, two of those audiences are being addressed. With the word "have to" there is a sense of urgency that in one sense ties back into audience in that there is an urgency to tell anyone, this audience, that audience or any other audience. This was mentioned in terms of "need to declare" in a Rilkian sense. This need to declare implies that you would have to say it to anybody.

Descriptive Round 2

I said, I'm being honest. You know, you are talking to someone who has a lot of problems with violence, but I do want to hear from you.

Emma: "I said I'm being honest" is a very short sentence and because it's so short it's a very strong assertion of value. It's not waffling. And then the next sentence, the "you know" at the beginning, there's a softness about that. It's conversational. It's inviting other people in. To say "you are talking" in fact literally at that moment they are not talking; they are listening. But to say "you're talking" is an

invitation to them. And then at the very end of that sentence, that's said very explicitly in "but I want to hear from you."

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Claire: I'm not sure I can add much except I think those words hold the conflict. I'm admitting here honestly that I have problems with violence. So, that's one statement and that admission. And in the same sentence "but I do want to hear from you" is an invitation. So I think the two are together, the admission and the invitation. It's that moral dilemma when you take such a strong stand and you admit it. Does it still leave the door opened, inviting your students to speak. There's a conflict.

Peg: "Prejudice" is something that one has a strong feeling about. It isn't based in objectivity. So that's very different from taking a moral stand on something. The other thing that I found myself thinking through this sentence is an awareness of how a powerful emotional response can really shut that door. And it's clear in this sentence, not just through the invitation, that there's a real softening of what was perhaps something more than a strong, moral dilemma.

Fern: I also see a lot of potential for pain in that sentence because of "You know you're talking to someone who has a lot of problems with violence." It's in a way, what you're saying really hurts me a lot, but I do want to hear from you. It makes me think of how desperately the narrator wants to keep that door open. That the door would be kept open despite what it would do to self.

Collective Pooling

These two sentences carry both an admission and an invitation. They begin with a short, strong assertion of value. It shows an evolution from mulling things over to bringing out what is truly felt. In that there is a softening of what was perhaps something more than a moral dilemma. There is a potential for pain in the first sentence. In a way the narrator is letting the class know that what they are saying hurts her a lot, but that she wants the door to be kept open despite what it might do to self. This indicates the extent to which the value of keeping the door open occurs.

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