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JAEPL, Vol. 11, Winter 2005-2006

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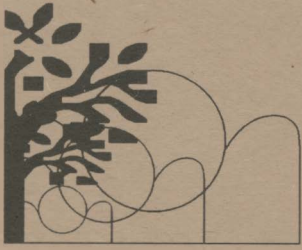
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J A E P L

The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

**Inner Work:
Teaching and Learning
(from) Within**

Volume 11 • Winter 2005-2006

The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

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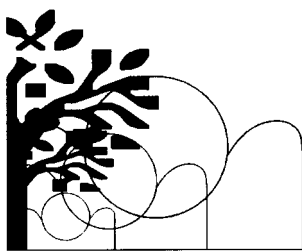
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J A E P L

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J A E P L

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

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

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

Topics of interest include but are not limited to: aesthetic, emotional, and moral intelligence; archetypes; body wisdom; care in education; creativity; felt sense theory; healing; holistic learning; humanistic and transpersonal psychology; imaging; intuition; kinesthetic knowledge; meditation; narration as knowledge; reflective teaching; silence; spirituality; and visualization.

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Editors' Message

“**T**here lives the dearest freshness deep down things,” Gerard Manley Hopkins writes in “God’s Grandeur,” capturing in this line, as he sought to reveal through the marvelously unique sounds and rhythms of his poetry, the “inscape” or the unique inner essence of all natural things. “The dearest freshness deep down things” is also Parker Palmer’s focus in *The Courage to Teach*, where he argues for a teacher’s and a learner’s inner work: exploring “the inner landscape of the teaching self” because “[t]he more familiar we are with our inner terrain, the more surefooted our teaching—and living—becomes” (4,5). As Hopkins—the Victorian poet, Jesuit priest, and keen natural observer—sought to create language and language forms that manifested an object’s inscape, so does Palmer—the Quaker educator—invite us to chart our inner landscape, our inscape, so that our teaching and learning become a “mirror to the soul” (2).

The seven essays in the eleventh volume of *JAEPL* celebrate the richness and diversity of the teacher’s and the student’s inner work. Palmer notes that our inner landscape is interlaced with intellectual, emotional, and spiritual paths, all of which are essential to our inner work. The intellectual path consists of “the form and content of our concepts of how people know and learn”; the emotional path is “how we feel as we teach and learn”; and the spiritual path is carved by the “diverse ways we answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life” (4-5). Implicit in *The Courage to Teach* is a fourth path, a corporeal one. As Hopkins emphasizes, inscape, the site of our inner work, is not separate from the body; it is complicit with our embodied existence. The intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and corporeal fuse in our inner terrain. The essays in “Inner Work: Teaching and Learning (from) Within” chart each of these paths.

We begin with Kami Day who, in “We Learn More Than Just Writing,” maps a spiritual path in her students’ inner landscape. Although fearing emotional connections with others, Day emphasizes the necessity of such connections for a spiritually rich life and pedagogy. Drawing on Parker Palmer’s formation principles, Day narrates the transformation of her pedagogy when she focuses on “the need for connection, the need to be heard and to listen deeply, the need to teach who I am and be who I am.” She describes a classroom strategy derived from a Quaker Clearness Committee that helps her writing students develop their own “inner writing teachers” in ways that facilitate their inner work through co-authorship. Approaches such as these, Day tells us, enable her to grow spiritually in her professional and her personal life.

Gina DeBlase in “‘I Have a New Understanding’: Critical Narrative Inquiry as Transformation in the English-History Classroom” carefully tracks the textual traces of a student’s intellectual inner work. Focusing on a case study from a larger ethnography of an interdisciplinary high school literature and history class, DeBlase explores the ways in which Kris, a student in the class, transformed her thinking and, in her own words, “changed my life.” Core to that transformation was narrative thinking deliberately fostered by the class, a fusion of empathy and critical thinking that “merge[d] the boundary of what *is* with those of what *can be* in our world.” By engaging in a “feeling/thinking dialogue with text and others,” Kris explores her inscape, in the process becoming a “constructed knower who claimed her own voices and [made] the effort to combine her intuitive

knowledge with knowledge learned from others.”

Emphasizing the crisscross of spiritual, corporeal, intellectual, and emotional paths, Geraldine DeLuca in “Headstands, Writing, and the Rhetoric of Radical Self-Acceptance” underscores the necessity of attending to all paths in teaching and learning. Building her essay around the *sirsasana*, or the headstand in yoga, which becomes both an act of faith and a metaphor for an act of faith, DeLuca suggests that our inner work is at the nexus point of body, mind, and spirit. Here at this crossroads is where we need to foster an ethic of compassion, of acceptance of self and other. We live in a culture, she says, “that accepts as useful the value of everyone feeling not good enough.” The combination of institutional edicts and institutional culture fosters a kind of discursive wildness or “monkey brain” that disrupts any effort at inner work and transforms writing into a scramble for correctness. Without time and space for stillness, without “a holding environment in which it is safe to take risk,” neither we nor our students can learn to treat our bodies, our minds, and our writing with dignity.

Complementing and extending DeLuca’s insights concerning the nexus point of bodies and minds, Sue Hum in “Idioms as Cultural Commonplaces: Corporeal Lessons from Hokkien Idioms” highlights a problem in conventional writing pedagogy: its failure to recognize that a teacher’s and student’s inner work involves language, intellect, cultural environments, and bodies. Focusing on Hokkien, a Chinese oral dialect, Hum counters “the Western predisposition of separating mind from body, bracketing the cognitive from the material.” By ignoring these connections, teachers fail to recognize the intellectual and corporeal changes that students, especially those from “working class backgrounds, marginalized ethnicities, and other countries,” must undergo to assimilate into Western literacy practices. Bodies as well as minds are required to mimic a middle-class orientation. Hum demonstrates through an exploration of Hokkien idioms how students can be invited to explore those intellectual and corporeal changes by collecting and analyzing the idioms of their home culture, enriching both their own and each other’s literacy practices.

Laurence Musgrove in “What Happens When We Read” seeks to provide teachers and students with a praxis that makes our students’ intellectual and emotional inner work visible. He is specifically interested in the challenges posed by reading, a process even more invisible than writing. Encouraging students to forge a “developing and active relationship between themselves and the objects of their study,” Musgrove invites students to create visual depictions of their reading. He models that activity by offering students his own image of responsive, reflective, responsible reading. That figure serves as the focus of his essay as he explores the four interconnective elements of reading: the text, the reader, the response, and the review. With this image of reading as a reference point, Musgrove argues that his students are better able to become “mature readers of themselves and of the texts offered to them.”

Attending to the emotional and intellectual paths crisscrossing our inner terrain, Alexandria Peary in “Mindfulness, Buddhism, and Rogerian Argument” sees empathy as both the problem and the solution to successful creation of Rogerian arguments. Rogerian argument is important because it offers a “therapeutic, humanistic approach to argument,” but it poses challenges for students who “must be able to visualize imaginatively that which is distinct from their current outlook” before they can communicate via Rogerian argument. The development of

that “rhetorical imagination” is difficult, but it can be nurtured by experiences with the Buddhist practices of deep listening and mindfulness. Peary describes two practices she incorporates into her undergraduate composition classroom: mindful speech and loving-kindness meditation. When these practices become integral to their thinking, students become “people blessed with imagination,” ready to engage in humane rather than adversarial argument.

We conclude with Stan Scott’s “Poetry and the Art of Meditation: Going behind the Symbols,” which returns us by a circuitous path to poetry and inner work. “Can poetry guide readers to spiritual experience,” Scott asks, and answers that the Benedictine practice of *lectio divina*, or sacred reading, can be a bridge to spiritual experience, especially when the object of contemplation is poetry centered on the mystical. Sacred reading is a meditative stance in which the reader commits complete attention to the text. By surrendering to the text, especially the poetic text which makes unusual demands on attention, readers are present with the text. Such a centering “sets us on a course of removing fear and so restoring our vital relations to Spirit.” Scott then illustrates *lectio divina* by a richly textured reading of poetic texts that evoke spiritual experiences and development. Engaging in sacred reading, Scott concludes, helps our students acts “with greater responsibility toward what is authentic in themselves and others.”

Contemplating and experiencing an object’s inscape drove Hopkins’ poetry and balanced him between his spiritual faith and his passionate appreciation for the “pied beauty” of the natural world. Wedded to his keen naturalist eye and infused with his spiritual calling, inscape served as the site of his inner work. As both teachers and learners, we too are called to commit ourselves to inner work, to an exploration and a charting of inscape that will foster excellence in teaching and learning. As Palmer reminds us, “the most practical thing we can achieve in any kind of work is insight into what is happening inside us as we do it” (5). The essays in this volume of *JAEPL* provide a map, a Beidecker, to just such an endeavor.

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Note: We apologize for omitting the following from the Table of Contents under “Connecting” in *JAEPL*’s Volume 10, “At Risk: Teaching and Writing outside the Safety Zone”:

We Learn More Than Just Writing

Kami Day

I am a person who is most at ease in solitude. I have never felt that I'm very good at connecting with people; in fact, I admit fearing those connections. In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer writes, "Our intense fear of connectedness, and the challenges it brings, is pursued by an equally intense desire for connectedness. . . . For all the fearful efforts we make to protect ourselves by disconnecting, the human soul yearns eternally for connection" (58-59). When I read those words, I knew Palmer was talking about me. I do fear the challenges that come with making connections, yet I yearn to make those connections. I teach writing and study people who write together successfully, and, in my research, I am drawn to projects that explore how people connect. Furthermore, my pedagogy is grounded in collaboration because I believe my students' learning and their lives are enriched by the connections they make with each other and with me, and my life and learning are enriched by those connections as well. Consequently, my research and my teaching force me into relationships and reinforce what I know to be true about the potentially spiritual nature of human connections. Palmer believes that the only way we can "transcend" fear is by acknowledging and fulfilling our spiritual needs (57), and I have come to realize that one of the best ways I can fill my spiritual needs is through my teaching. Moreover, as I have sought a spiritual life for myself, my pedagogy has come to include, more and more, consideration of the condition of my students' souls as well as my own.

Palmer focuses on "inner work," and, through careful reading of his words, I have come to understand the relationship between rigorous self-examination and authentic connection with others. Palmer is a devout Quaker, and his religious beliefs inform his work, but his work, while certainly about spirituality, is not about traditional religion or traditional views of or beliefs in God. The term *spirituality*—a term being used more and more unapologetically in the field of education—gives most academics pause because of its traditional association with religious dogma, but Palmer defines spiritual as "the diverse ways we answer the heart's longing to be connected with the largeness of life—a longing that animates love and work, especially the work called teaching" (5). He asks those who have difficulty with the term *spirit* to use instead the terms *identity* or *self* or *psyche*. Furthermore, he defines sacred as "worthy of respect," and Palmer believes everything is, in some way, worthy of respect (111). "Inner work" concerns formation of the individual soul, authentic connection between the inner and outer self, and then with the outer world, especially as it relates to teachers. The movement that has grown out of his work, particularly out of his

Kami Day is Associate Professor of English at Johnson County Community College. She teaches composition, including a learning community which she co-teaches with a mathematics instructor, and her research focuses on the cognitive and affective benefits of collaborative writing.

book *The Courage to Teach*, is called formation,¹ which focuses on rediscovering and listening to the inner teacher with which, Palmer maintains, we are all born.

In response to gentle nudging by *JAEPL* reviewers,² as I revised this essay, I engaged in some of the rigorous self-examination Palmer calls for. I explored the reasons I have been drawn to Palmer's work and to a pedagogy which, I believe, has the potential to nurture my students and me spiritually. My awareness of my own spiritual life did not begin in earnest until about 15 years ago, despite the fact that for over 40 years I was a member of an orthodox religion. For most of my life, I defined *spirituality* in the more traditional way: a belief in and "relationship" with an all-powerful creator, activity in a religious organization, obedience to the commandments of that creator and the tenets of that religion. When I finally left the religion in which I had been raised, my mother asked me, genuinely concerned, "How will you have a spiritual life?" Even then, early in my journey, I could tell her I was beginning to see that spirituality has to do with a way of living in the world that is mindful about how to *be* with other people. About six years ago, when I read Palmer's definitions of *spirit* and *spirituality*, those definitions rang true for me. And even though I am an introvert and always believed I worked best and grew most in solitude, spirituality for me was, ironically, becoming less about personal righteousness and obedience and more about connections with, and responsibility to, other human beings. The reasons for this change are hard to pin down, but I think my education, and my teaching, led me to it.

In 1989, I enrolled in graduate school and began working as an adjunct instructor at a local community college at the same time even though I had no experience teaching in an academic setting. I lectured about writing to students sitting dutifully in rows, and I put grades—including lots of Fs—on first drafts. But teaching in this way was not satisfying or meaningful for me or for my students. As I worked on my master's degree, I used every opportunity to conduct research on composition pedagogy, and I discovered the work of Peter Elbow and others concerning peer response.³ My pedagogy changed quickly; one semester the format of my classroom was traditional, and the next my students were responding to each other's drafts, revising, and acting like a community of learners. I found I could respect and trust them, and they thrived on that respect and trust and developed respectful and trusting relationships with each other. It felt good, and I wanted to know more about teaching writing, so I decided to work toward a Ph.D. in composition at Indiana University of Pennsylvania where

¹The formation movement grew out of the Teacher Formation program, which Parker Palmer, in partnership with the Fetzer Institute, created in 1994 for K-12 teachers (see more on the website at teacherformation.org). More recently, the Center for Formation in the Community College has been established in Dallas, and facilitators are being trained to bring formation to community college faculty and staff. I am a facilitator at my institution, and, in this capacity, I plan and guide retreats and other formation activities, such as book discussion groups.

²I'm indebted to the *JAEPL* reviewers—Kristie Fleckenstein, Kia Richmond, and Betsy Burris—for their careful consideration of my work and for their suggestion that I think about why I came to value connection and why formation principles and my pedagogy were a natural fit.

³See Elbow, *Embracing Contraries*; Elbow and Belanoff, *Writing with Pleasure: A Brief Edition of A Community of Writers*; Ponsot and Deen, *Beat Not the Poor Desk*.

I flourished in a program that fostered collaboration among its students. The connections our cohort formed supported me in the rigors of graduate school, but what seemed more important was that they nourished me spiritually. The year I began my work at IUP was a time of profound change for me (an explanation of which is far beyond the scope of this article!), and one of the changes was *not* that I suddenly yearned for connections but that I allowed myself to recognize that “yearning to connect” Palmer speaks of. My experience at IUP was transformative and led to my desire to study what happens both cognitively and affectively when people work together, so my dissertation became a study of successful academic co-authors. As I listened to these writers talk about their co-authoring, I came to see that they took a nurturing, caring, respectful approach to working together, and that they seemed to consider their process to be a personally enriching, even spiritual, experience which went far beyond producing text. One of the interviewees, C. Mark Hurlbert, who often co-authors with Michael Blitz (another of the interviewees), insists that “[co-authoring] has the capacity to bring love into our lives, to help us open up ourselves in ways we couldn’t do so quickly on our own. . . . There’s a spiritual and affective realm that’s life-affirming and safe”(Day and Eodice 39).⁴

Also, using the knowledge I was gaining through my studies at IUP and my research, I began to create more opportunities for my students to learn from and teach each other, and the only way I can describe how I felt (and feel) some days as I watched my students in their patient work with each other is *filled*. I grew spiritually as I created spaces where students could form caring relationships as they wrote together and responded to each other’s writing. I slowly began to realize that I was more mindful about my spiritual life and that my spiritual life was richer than when I had been involved in a traditionally religious culture. Yes, this awakening began before I discovered Palmer’s work, but formation helped me articulate my spiritual needs—the need for connection, the need to be heard and to listen deeply, the need to teach who I am and be who I am in my relationships with students, colleagues, and all others in my life.⁵ And the possibilities for these relationships in my classroom have been enriched because of ways I have found to incorporate formation principles into my pedagogy

Of course, my relationship with students has also been affected as I have come to see the spiritual nature of authentic connection. Shedding light on the

⁴C. Mark Hurlbert was one of my mentors at IUP and a member of my dissertation committee. In the book he co-authored with Michael Blitz, *Letters for the Living: Teaching Writing in a Violent Age*, he and Blitz ask the question “Can we say that our pedagogies are not about expressivist writing or about entrance to the academy but about learning how to live?”

⁵I do not necessarily think of having a unified self, but I agree with Candace Spigelman as she explains her notion of the writer self: “all selves are a composite of multiple social, cultural, and gendered discursive configurations, the self-who-writes must imagine an agency and individuality that will authorize putting pen to paper or hand to keyboard” (*Across* 4). And in our book, Michele Eodice and I contend that “each person combines a multitude of voices . . . in a unique way” (19). I think formation helped me put the configurations and voices together.

insights I have gained from Palmer's work, Nel Noddings, a mathematics teacher, has helped me understand why I have been drawn to a mindful collaborative pedagogy and what it has to do not only with my students' relationships with each other but also with the student/teacher relationship. When I read Noddings' *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, I will admit it changed my life. In addition to my fears about connecting with people, I have always felt that I do not *care* as often or as much as most other people seem able to do. Noddings' work helped me understand that all people care innately and that I should, and can, care, or at least perform caring acts, just as I ask my students to perform them. By performing caring acts, we can all develop our ability to care. I have often worried that I don't care enough about my students or that they don't know I care about them. But, as I perform caring acts, they believe I care about them, and in the process I care more and warm to their caring for me. Noddings believes that "the maintenance and enhancement of caring as the primary aim of education" is a process that somehow makes us all—students and teachers—better (174).

So how do Palmer's work and formation inform a pedagogy of collaboration and care? Central to formation work is the Quaker institution of the Clearness Committee, and the principles informing this practice have had a powerful effect on my teaching. In Quakerism, the person who will be the focus of the committee calls together trusted friends and associates to help her explore a question or problem in her life. The rules of the committee are strict and must be honored: the committee members carefully and thoughtfully formulate open, honest questions to ask the focus person; questions to which the answers are already known are not permitted, nor are leading questions allowed; the focus person listens and answers but does not defend herself; the committee members may not give advice or try to "fix" a problem proposed by the focus person; committee members must resist the temptation to comfort the focus person should she cry or otherwise express emotion; likewise, committee members must resist the natural urge to affirm if it means attempting to "make the focus person feel better." Finally, participants honor a "double confidentiality": they agree not to discuss what transpired in the committee with each other or with people outside the committee, and they even agree not to bring up the topics discussed with the focus person unless that person initiates the conversation. The committee meets from two to three hours, and, at the end, the members "mirror" for the focus person what they have heard that person say and what they have seen in her body language. Finally, there is a time to affirm, but this affirmation is not about the issues addressed during the meeting (a committee member would not say, "Don't worry, it will be all right" or "I agree with you that your boss was wrong"), but might, for example, take the form of expressions which acknowledge the courage of the focus person in choosing to deal with difficult or painful issues or which reveal how a committee member has been able to identify in some way with the focus person. The focus person is also given the notes that volunteer scribes have taken during the meeting so she can contemplate them later.

These rules (I usually prefer the word *guidelines*, but *rules* is right here) may seem rigid and even harsh in some ways, but they create a safe space in which the focus person is able to listen to and learn from his or her "inner teacher." Palmer asserts that we know the answers to our own questions, but we are not accustomed to listening to and trusting ourselves. The rules also give the focus

person the power to direct the meeting—she or he can slow down or accelerate the pace, not answer questions that don't seem helpful, and ask questioners to rephrase questions that seem leading or rhetorical. I have participated in several Clearness Committees, once as the focus person, and I can attest to the power of this activity. Like many people, in the past I have sought comforting words to make me feel better about my failures and weaknesses. During my committee, I was amazed at how liberating it felt not to be affirmed, not to be advised or "fixed," but to be given the space to think hard about the questions I was asked and to reach clarity (although not necessarily answers) on some questions that had bedeviled me for a very long time. I have found going back and looking at the notes taken during my committee to be especially helpful—I continue to learn about myself from them.

As I said, the principles of the Clearness Committee have become integral to my pedagogy, and some of the specific rules are now part of peer review activities and my thought processes as I respond to student writing. One of the basic tenets of formation work is that individual growth and awareness must happen in community. When I think of this apparent paradox, I think of Martin Buber's assertion that "spirit is not in the *I*, but between the *I* and *Thou*. . . . Only in virtue of [our] power to enter into relation [are we] able to live in the spirit" (39). Formation is about becoming individually aware as we "enter into relation" with a trusted cohort; consequently, my collaborative pedagogy and formation complement each other. Students are growing and developing—forming—as individual writers, but they do it best as part of a supportive, trusted, respectful group. In Noddings' words, "Small group work may enhance achievement" in a course, "and can provide caring occasions. The object is to develop a caring community" ("An Ethic of Caring" 177). However, some of the rules for the Clearness Committee cannot apply as my students respond to each other's work. I would never discourage my students from comforting each other, and I encourage them to affirm one another since most of them are sure their writing is worse than anyone else's. Also, while I advise students not to discuss each other's papers outside class, I do not try to enforce double confidentiality.

I do, though, spend quite a lot of time giving students practice in asking open, honest questions about their peers' writing, and I do discourage their urge to "fix" their peers' texts. In his article "A Pedagogy of Charity," Kevin J. Porter uncovers a painful reality: as our students "labor to respond to each other's writing, their voices frequently echo the authoritarian voices of past teachers" (577). Students are used to teachers reading their writing in order to find out what's wrong with it and then giving advice or even directions about fixing it. So, mimicking their teachers, students say, "You should add a sentence at the beginning to grab the reader's attention. You should use a quote—that's what I do," or "Your conclusion should summarize the paper," or "You need more details in the story about your accident." Or, taking a softer tack, as many of us teachers do, they say, "You might want to tell us more about how you came to make that decision," or "You could add an example here." Or they might ask a leading question like, "Don't you think your paper would be better if you didn't use so many short sentences?" Understandably, most students dread getting this kind of feedback. These statements and questions *could* lead to substantive revision, but they take the paper out of the hands of the writer, take away the writer's freedom and the privilege of making his or her own decisions about the

paper. And they might also reflect the assumption that the writer has not made conscious choices rather than “presuming that the author is in control of the text and chooses certain strategies for certain effects” (579).

In addition, my students practice making observations instead of giving directions. Making observations parallels the activity of mirroring in the Clearness Committee. In making observations about a peer’s writing, students might simply say, or mirror, what they saw (or heard) in the paper. If the introduction is general and unengaging, instead of issuing a command like, “You need to start your paper with a quote,” a student might say, “Your first paragraph was kind of general, but the quote by Jim Morrison in the second paragraph really got my attention!” Or say the writer takes a position supporting school prayer in the paper and has not acknowledged views other than his own. The reader (or listener) might simply state, “You didn’t include anything about other positions on school prayer.”

Our peer review process differs from the Clearness Committee in that the student whose paper is the focus of the feedback tries not to answer her peers’ questions when initially asked. She writes them down, and she can later think about an observation like, “I had trouble imagining what your teachers looked like” and say to herself, “Oh, yes, including a description would help my reader know my teacher better,” or “I don’t want to include more description of my teacher—my focus is on what I learned from her, not what she looked like.” She thinks about these questions after the peer review session is over, but, like the Clearness Committee’s focus person, she will have notes to review carefully at her leisure as she decides which feedback to incorporate in her revision and which not to use. In some sense, she is playing Peter Elbow’s “believing game”; she is practicing listening deeply to what her peers say, believing for a while that all the feedback she gets is useful rather than explaining why she wrote something or defending her writing choices (*Embracing Contraries*). Later, as she reviews what her peers have said, she can play Elbow’s “doubting game”—looking at the feedback with a more critical eye as she makes decisions about what revisions to make.

So, as my students prepare, often with a great deal of trepidation, to share first drafts of their papers with each other for the first time, we devote a class period to practice in affirming each other’s writing; asking open, honest questions; and making observations. They struggle with the concept, but they admit they like the idea of having the ultimate responsibility for their own papers—learning to trust their own knowledge about writing, being able to decide what to add, delete, etc., instead of being told what to do. Of course, we also talk about giving feedback respectfully and helpfully rather than attacking each other’s writing. First, I explain questioning and observing as feedback techniques. Rule one (for sharing a first draft) is that the writer asks the group a question about his own paper, and the group members write the question down. The writer then reads the paper as the group listens, repeating the reading if asked. At that point, the group members take a few minutes to first write down a positive observation about the paper and then questions and other observations. During this time, the writer reflects in writing on thoughts he had about his own paper as he was reading. Finally, the group members share their honest questions and observations, and the writer takes notes but does not answer their questions or address observations out loud.

For our practice, I use a student paper—one from long ago and far away—or a paper a current student has volunteered for this activity. When we practice initially, I play the role of the writer, and the students are the peer group. Before they start, I put up an overhead with both good questions and observations (like “Why did you choose to begin your paper with a general statement about your topic?”), and both commands or leading questions (like “Don’t you think your paper would be better if you started with a story?”), and we talk about which ones would be appropriate when giving feedback. Each group then gets one copy of the paper, and I ask a question I’d like them to consider about the paper. Next, a volunteer reads the paper to the group, after which the group members take a few moments to write down their observations and questions. Finally, they share these out loud with the rest of the class. We spend as much time as we need sharing questions and observations, and my job is to help them recast leading questions (or suggestions and directions) as honest questions or observations. When the students move to sharing their own papers, they add the steps of sharing questions and observations with the writers; the writers record this feedback to take with them and use as they revise. The students find this process quite challenging, and, the first time (and subsequent times, actually) that they respond to each other’s papers, I circulate, assisting them as they work to respond in this new way. I’ll admit that such response gets easier every time they do it, but they (and I) must be vigilant because sometimes they revert to old habits. Still, their feedback to me about this kind of responding tells me they feel more knowledgeable and responsible concerning their own writing, and amazed at how skilled they become at helping their peers.

When my students share second drafts, they usually write their feedback, and the rules are the same. The students bring in copies of their papers for their group members, and each student receives a response sheet I have created. On the sheet are spaces for the writer’s name, the responders’ names, and one question the writer wants to ask about his or her paper. Occasionally I include a few questions I want to ask (like “What is the main idea of the paper?” or “Did the paper change your mind or cause you to think in a new way about the topic?”). Most of the sheet, though, is blank with ample space for the recorder of the group to write the group’s feedback. Sometimes a class decides they want to exchange papers among groups, but more often they choose to keep their papers within their groups. To begin the process, the group decides who will be the recorder and who will be the clerk, the one who keeps the process going and makes sure the students reach consensus about what questions and observations they want to write on the response sheet. After reading the draft silently and taking notes about what feedback they want to give, the readers collaboratively answer the writer’s question (and mine if I have included any), and then add their own questions and observations (which the recorder writes down on the response sheet) for the writer to consider for revision. The writer must sit quietly—playing the “believing game”—as the group addresses his paper; then he takes the feedback and mulls it over—playing the “doubting game”—as he works to revise the draft.

I add my written responses to the group members’ responses to the second draft, and I work to honor the rules of the Clearness Committee by striving to respond as a human being who respects them, as a reader and not just a teacher. In a wonderful essay about responding to student writing, Russell Hunt relates an anecdote told by Lucy McCormick Calkins. In it, a homesick kindergartener

writes a short story which reads, “The girl is sad/She has no friends.” According to Calkins, “Several children raised their hands with comments like, ‘I like your picture,’ and ‘I like your writing,’ but one small boy understood; he looked up and said simply, ‘I’ll be your friend’”(232). I believe that by responding as one person to another (I often think of it as continuing the conversation), I attend to the souls of my students, to their need for authentic response as well as teacherly guidance.⁶ I share with them my reactions to and feelings about their words, I affirm them and their writing, I ask questions to which I do not know the answers, and I make observations to mirror what I think they have said. I strive to honor what they bring to their writing and to help them discover their “inner writing teacher.” And I invite them to play the believing and doubting game as they consider my feedback as well.

I would like to say a word here about co-authoring. What I have described above I would call collaborative work about writing; students collaborate with each other as they work to develop and enrich their individual texts. But I also ask my students—at the end of the semester when they have been working together for about 11 weeks—to write together, face-to-face, during several class periods set aside for this activity. As students invent, compose, revise, and edit together, they practice the concepts and skills we have worked with all semester, including—and most important—listening to each other respectfully, acknowledging each other’s strengths, and working to assure the success of all members of the group. I hear them (not always, of course, but encouragingly often) asking each other open questions, mirroring what other group members have said, listening carefully, and working to make sure everyone’s voice is represented in the collective voice they create together. The formation principles and practices are conflated into an experience that most students report as deeply satisfying. They often choose to include the co-authored paper in their portfolios because they value the experience of writing it even though they may not consider it to be their best writing.

Finally, reflective practice is another principle of formation; we cannot come to know our “inner teacher” unless we develop the habit of looking carefully at who we are and what we do and find ways to articulate, even if only for ourselves, what we learn from that reflection. Likewise, students cannot discover their “inner teachers” and develop identities as writers unless they are given opportunities for reflective practice, opportunities seldom offered to them in their academic experience. I ask my students to reflect often: on their histories as writers, on their purposes in writing, on what they are learning, on what they would like to learn, on how they think the class is going, on the peer response activities, on their roles in their groups, on the co-authoring process, and especially on their revision processes. They write about the feedback they receive, which feedback they choose to use and not use, why they will use it or not use it, and where they would like their papers to go next. I ask them to be specific about these reflections; as the author, they have the last word in what feedback they will incorporate, but they must be able to articulate their reasons, to talk like writers.⁷ For instance, recently a student chose to begin a paper with an anecdote

⁶I learned this concept from my colleague Maureen Fitzpatrick, who learned it in a graduate course taught by Kate Ronald.

⁷I am indebted to Kathleen Blake Yancey for her work on the value of reflection, and I recommend her book *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*.

told in first person, and one of his peers mentioned that the rest of the essay was in second person. The writer explained in his reflection that he wanted to write the introductory story in first person to convey a sense of immediacy, so the reader could feel as if she was right there in the story. He knew what he wanted to do and why, and the point of view remained as he had written it.

Students are able to develop awareness of their own inner teachers in part because of the connections they make with each other. A sixteen-week semester seems like too short a time to allow for strong relationships to develop, but students who work hard and carefully at helping each other with their writing often develop trusting and respectful relationships that amaze me. One semester, we were preparing to share second drafts, and the class had agreed during a previous class period that they would like to share papers with students outside their groups. As most of the students were involved in piling their drafts on a table (so I could distribute them), I noticed one group making arrangements among themselves. They saw me looking at them, so a spokesperson for the group took me aside and explained that they had all chosen to write about subjects they wanted to share only with their group. These students had known each other for only seven weeks, and yet they were comfortable trusting each other with pieces of themselves.

In another semester, a Somalian student chose to write about female circumcision. She mentioned this practice in passing in her first paper (about moving to the United States), gave it a little more space in her second paper (about Somalian culture), and finally decided to devote her entire research paper to educating herself and her peers about a practice she learned is called Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Her interest in this topic stemmed from her discovery, soon after arriving in the United States, that FGM is not a procedure practiced world-wide and from her anger at having been subjected to this procedure. When she read her first paper to her group, not much was said about the mention of female circumcision, but by the second paper (when they knew each other better), she was asking her group if she should leave in the section about FGM, and they—three white, middle-class young people—encouraged her to include it and asked her questions about the procedure. None of them had ever heard of it before. By the time she began work on her research paper, they were cheering her on and creating a safe space for her to write about a difficult and personal topic. Students often choose topics they have never written about before, and sometimes these topics are risky; they trust their peers to treat that topic—and the student who wrote about it—with care as they also help the writers express more clearly what they want to say.

I believe that as my students learn to respect and listen to their own inner teachers, and come to care about the success and well being of their peers, their spirits are nourished. Furthermore, I would like to go so far as to say they practice peacemaking. Rosalind J. Gabin,⁸ in her careful exploration of the relationship between *ethos* and ethics, defines ethics this way: “the awareness of others as we speak and act, the awareness of not only our own interests but of the interests of others” (122). She goes on to ask, “Can students develop their ethical capacity to perform ethical actions from which might flow ethical habits?” (129). In her article “What Role Virtue,” Candace Spigelman asks, “Can we—and should we—teach human un-

⁸My late friend and co-author, Candace Spigelman, led me to Gabin’s work in her article “What Role Virtue.”

derstanding and ethical responsibility in the first-year composition course?” (321). And many of us are familiar with the burning question Mary Rose O’Reilley attributes to one of her professors, Ihab Hassan: “Is it possible to teach English so that people stop killing each other?” (9). O’Reilley, Gabin, and Spigelman believe the answer to the questions they raise is “yes,” and so do I. Moreover, J. Elspeth Stuckey, author of *The Violence of Literacy*, makes this bold statement: “We promote greater literacy, or we promote greater humanity” (124), and based on his extensive experience with collaboration, Blitz asserts:

Collaboration requires peacemaking, an ongoing process. It’s simply not possible, I don’t think, to be in perfect harmony through every moment of collaborative effort. So, collaborators have to figure out ways to keep the peace—or to live in conflict, which is far less productive. But keeping the peace cannot mean compromising on the quality of the effort or of the outcome. Keeping the peace, in this context, means placing things like common goals, kindness, civility, creativity in the foreground. It means surrendering a fair amount of ego-requirements, too. So, I guess I would say that one of the greatest values in co-authoring is that it allows for the forging of new bonds of trust and care between and among people. (qtd. in Day and Eodice 172)

As O’Reilley contends, “what happens in the classroom determines the shape of culture and evolution of consciousness” (8), and most language and literature educators would agree. In 1938, Louise Rosenblatt wrote that language teachers fill the essential role of “nurtur[ing] men and women capable of building a fully democratic society” (297). According to composition scholars (and I apologize for simplifying the complex work of these scholars and for leaving so many off the list), teaching writing has the potential to raise our students’ consciousness about environmental issues (Owen), acculturate them to academic discourse (Bartholomae), help them interrogate traditional, Western concepts of gender (Jarratt and Worsham), lead them to greater self-awareness (Elbow, *Writing*), make them aware of oppressive dominant discourses (Myers), and give them the opportunity to question and resist “cultural codes—the various competing discourses—that attempt to influence who they are” (Berlin), to name only a few of the ways students can change and grow as a result of their experience in a composition class. In the past ten years, Gabin points out, “stress has been placed . . . on the power and the politics of discourse.” However, she is optimistic that

the stress is now shifting to cooperation and the ethics of discourse . . . the political aim in composition of empowering students to get what they want from the systems that rule them through powerful discourse is winding down, and that an ethical aim is replacing it—the aim of promoting sounder human relationships through encouraging attention to others and through responsible discourse. (125-26)

A classroom in which formation principles are valued provides a safe but charged space which promotes “sounder human relationships,” one in which students practice kindness and civility, perhaps leading to “new bonds of trust and care.” They feel supported as they take risks, such as examining their own

beliefs and sharing their writing with their peers. They are asked to practice listening to views different from their own, to show respect for a variety of positions and voices, to reflect on their own views and values, and to acknowledge their own intuition and expertise. They have the opportunity to make peace because the focus is not on persuading or convincing or converting their peers and other readers to a certain point of view, but rather on seeing the possibility that several views can exist simultaneously without one being the correct one. In the microcosm of the group within the microcosm of the classroom, students make peace in their “small spheres of influence” (Woolman qtd. in O’Reilly 21).

Palmer asserts that our students often come into our classrooms full of fear: “afraid of failing, of not understanding, of being drawn into issues they would rather avoid, of having their ignorance exposed or their prejudices challenged, of looking foolish in front of their peers” (37). That fear not only undermines their confidence and ability to take the risks necessary for cognitive growth, but it also “shuts down the capacity for connectedness” (40). In using principles of formation to nurture their own inner teachers, students learn to trust their intuition about their own writing, and they get glimpses of—and sometimes revelations about—who they are and what they value. In using principles of formation to connect with each other, they experience “genuine encounters of caring and being cared for” (Noddings, *Caring* 175) and support each other in a “caring community” (“An Ethic of Caring” 177), filling—after perhaps discovering for the first time—a spiritual need. As Palmer says, they find a way to “answer the heart’s longing to be connected with the largeness of life” (5). Students who have, for years, feared sharing their writing and themselves discover they have something to say and become eager to hear their peers’ responses to what they have written. They speak, often with surprise, of the trust they have in their group members and the concern they have for each other. As one student told me recently, “We learn more than just writing.”

As for me, my spirit has been nourished as I have found a pedagogy that reflects who I am and what I care about. Palmer says that yearning for something often brings it into being,⁹ and my yearning for connection has led me to self-knowledge and a number of rich relationships. Coming to know my self and making connections with others are still tasks often fraught with peril for me, but as Palmer says, while we all have fears, “we do not need to be our fears” (57). Asking myself the question “Who is the self that teaches?” (7) has helped me find my own inner teacher and realize that my vocation is in the classroom. In addition, my students often say they can tell I care about them, and my person and my pedagogy are affirmed by that. Both exploring my selfhood and connecting with students and others involve difficult and sometimes painful work for me, but I welcome it as necessary to living a meaningful life. And I have support. As we—my students and I—become more “at home with our own souls, we become more at home with each other” (5). ☺

Author’s Note: *I would like to thank my partner Michele Eodice for her careful, sensitive readings of my essay, and I would also like to thank Parker Palmer for his encouraging words in response to an early draft.*

⁹Palmer made this statement in a talk at Johnson County Community College on October 29, 2001.

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“I Have a New Understanding”: Critical Narrative Inquiry as Transformation in the English-History Classroom

Gina DeBlase

Recent analysis of literacy and literature instruction contends that pluralistic approaches to education require changes in curricular content to include voices of cultural groups who have been excluded from literary study in schools (Applebee, Burroughs, Stevens 396; Smith and Strickland 137). However, the addition of cultural information and multicultural literary texts in the curriculum, by themselves, appears to be insufficient for meeting many goals of multicultural education, where voices interact and students reflect, think critically, increase cultural awareness, decrease ethnocentrism, and create a global perspective. Students limited by narrow cultural perspectives need to engage in discussion, writing, and other dialectical activities which prompt examination of knowledge constructed from multiple perspectives. Developing students' ability to *use* cultural knowledge and perspectives to think about literature, history, society, *and themselves* is emerging as a necessary part of a pluralistic approach to education.

Case Study Background

This case study of Kris, an eleventh grade student, is embedded in an ethnographic study of an interdisciplinary literature-history class where students had opportunities to reflect about multicultural texts in their historical contexts through open-forum discussion, writing, and other dialectical activities which emphasized thinking critically about perspectives (Miller). The site for this study was a largely white suburban high school in upstate New York located in a community at the state median on measures of wealth. Sharon, an English teacher, and Ron, a social studies teacher, felt these students, in particular, needed a course focusing on multicultural perspectives because the students came from a more or less homogenous community. The teachers believed a goal of their school should be “stating outcomes, developing curricula, and providing experiences that address this imbalance.” Students taking their course—American Dreams, Lost and Found: Interdisciplinary U.S. History and English 11—produced a portfolio of written work, which included a response journal (5-7 pages per week); 2 multiple-source research papers; 22 pieces of writing of mixed creative and expository genres; an extensive multiple source and media anthology representing a selected historical theme, time period, or event(s); and a culminating American Dream paper, synthesizing students' learning and thinking over the school year (10-15 pages). For an overview of the integrated curricula, please see Appendix A.

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This interdisciplinary class was team taught. Reading texts from different cultural perspectives, engaging in open-forum discussion and writing, and participating in other dialectical activities were meant to foster student awareness of the multiple, sometimes conflicting, languages for understanding texts and social issues. Teachers provided assistance at points of need, sometimes in the form of posing problems, juxtaposing texts/perspectives (e.g., stories, reports, personal experiences), and initiating multivocal activities, often in the form of conversational strategies for moving from unreflective speech to conscious reflection about one's own and others' assumptions and values.

Kris claimed that participating in the integrated class changed her life. The analysis presented here emerged as I engaged in content analysis of Kris's journals, writing folders, interpretive field notes, and interviews with Kris and her teachers. My goal was to understand what happened to Kris and her ways of knowing over the course of the year. I had a couple of questions in mind: What changes do I detect and what themes occur and recur in her writing, her class participation, and her thinking over time? Finally, what happens to Kris when she is allowed to voice opinions that are not mainstream?

As I read, I began to see clear themes. For example, over time, she showed an increased awareness of and concurrent anger over issues of social injustice and social apathy. In the dialectic between Kris's work and the relevant theory and research, I saw patterns that suggested a movement through women's intellectual development as described by Mary Belenky and colleagues in their groundbreaking book, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, which provided an explanatory framework for this case analysis.

Narrative Thinking

Conceptions of knowledge and truth historically have been defined by a majority culture which often excludes the notion that knowledge can be constructed as a function of personal experience or stories. As a result, educational institutions have generally not attended to methods of learning and understanding which address the potential of dialogue and narrative thinking as an alternative or complement to logical, analytical thinking. Entering into dialogue to understand others' stories produces an alternative to intellectualizing (Bruner). Such aesthetic response and reflection can act against our tendency to "intellectualize" understandings of, for example, oppression and injustice, by distancing self, making detached reports, or instructing others what to do. Such perspective-taking through a feeling/thinking dialogue with the text and others formed the center of narrative thinking in this class. Kris was among those students who, in dialogue with the play of voices in these texts, were transformed by new knowing.

Women's Ways of Knowing

In their book, researcher Mary Belenky and her colleagues describe the ways of knowing that women most value and that contribute to the development of women's voice. After analyzing 135 interviews, they group these ways into five major epistemological perspectives. Movement through these perspectives, or ways of knowing, is directly connected to personal experience and relationship to the

world and the self-perception that is an effect of this experience. Further, these perspectives change as the search for an understanding of self leads to an enhanced development of a critical, reflective voice. A summary of these phases follows:

The silent knower “believe[s] that the source of self-knowledge is lodged in others—not in the self” (31). These women exhibit unquestioned submission to the immediate commands of authorities, not to the directives of their own inner voices.

The received knower equates receiving, retaining, and returning the words of authorities with learning. In a complex and pluralistic world such as ours, this reliance on authority for a single view of the truth is inefficient. As she experiences increasing frustration at her inability to find the source of growth and change, the received knower is compelled to move forward and begin to listen to herself.

The subjective knower conceives of truth as personal and subjectively known or intuited. These women still hold the conviction that there are right answers, but truth now resides within the person, and she can negate answers the outside world provides. These women do not see themselves as constructors of truth but as conduits through which truth emerges.

The procedural knower acknowledges that intuitions may deceive, that truth can be shared, and that expertise can be respected. Procedural knowers “believe that each of us construes the world differently. They are interested not just in *what* people think but in *how* people go about forming their opinions and feelings and ideas” (97, my emphasis).

The constructed knower desires to connect reason with intuition—to construct *one’s own way of knowing*. At the crux of this constructivist way of knowing is the insight that “[a]ll knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an intimate part of the known” (137, my emphasis). Constructed knowers “feel responsible for examining, questioning, and developing the systems that they will use for constructing knowledge. Question posing, problem posing, and dialogue become prominent methods of inquiry” (139). The constructed knower claims her own voice and makes the effort to combine her intuitive knowledge with knowledge learned from others.

It is important to note that individuals do not necessarily move through the positions they describe in a linear, ordered manner. I found that to be the case with the recursive course of change over time in Kris’s ways of knowing.

Kris: Tracing One Young Woman’s Development

This paper traces Kris’s developing awareness of the relation between self and culture using these five phases, or ways of knowing, as an explanatory lens.

Kris's work in this course demonstrates the educational power of narrative writing and personal experience to create empathy between one's self and the experiences of those who lived not only in a different time, but also in cultures representing different customs, beliefs, and social classes. Joining her empathic feeling with her ability to think critically and reflectively transcends mere knowledge of history and experience, in that it contributes to an understanding of that which makes us human and, perhaps, merges the boundaries of what *is* with those of what *can be* in our world.

Reclaiming a Silenced Voice

To appreciate more fully her journey, it is important to have a sense of where Kris had been. Like the silent women in Belenky's study, a journal entry from the beginning of the school year reflects Kris's concern that her own voice is silenced as she listens to others speak:

Sometimes I feel like I don't have anything to say about anything, and that bothers me a whole lot because people say it for you. So you can't make arguments for yourself. Like I always say, okay, I believe this, and like wait a minute, no I don't. And if somebody is already telling me the other side of it, I have nothing to talk about.

However, in her later journals, class discussions, and interviews, Kris acknowledges that the classroom, as well as the course content, assists her in recognizing her ability to create change in her own life and to evolve toward more complex ways of thinking and knowing. This is a shift from her earlier perspective at the beginning of the course. Kris confirms this change when she writes:

The most helpful thing during this class was the atmosphere in which it is safe to express your views without the fear of rejection. . . . I'm not one bit afraid of expressing my views, and my individuality to anyone.

Further into the year, she realized that fellow students listen to her. She said of this realization: "It became something where I wouldn't just have them listen to me, I'd try to teach them something . . . I don't want to look smart. I want you to know that you're smart." This concern for knowledge as something that is shared is characteristic of the constructed knower. Kris is eager to engage in dialogue with others where the intent is to create understanding and meaning rather than just to talk, which does not necessarily imply mutual engagement between conversants. That is, she sees the intent of discussion and the sharing of experiences as involving questioning and argument rather than just holding the floor and talking.

Reaching Toward Connectedness: Kris's Emerging Voice

As I read and reread Kris's work and related materials, I began to recognize three major phases in her intellectual and social development over the school

year. These phases seem to dovetail with her construction of knowledge as outlined by Belenky et al., and I will make these links as I discuss each of the phases. These recursive phases were 1) her emerging insight into the *mutuality of lived experience* and the accompanying empathy and anger she feels toward the social injustice and apathy she perceives as part of the human condition, 2) her search for *explanations and consequences* of social injustice, and 3) her recognition of herself as an *agent of change* in a diverse world.

In fact, her anger, which initially spurs her thinking, is apparent throughout her writing. Kris's strong feelings give voice to her own experiences and stories that in the past she had not been able to articulate or define. Her anger derives, in part, from her personal connection to the heretofore silenced voices she came to know in the literature she reads for class. She questions the world and the word around her as the result of her strong emotional responses to the injustice she discovers. The braiding of literature with history, the dialogic between content and context, gives rise to the empathy which leads to intellectual and social growth. In her final interview, Kris is asked to talk about the way in which she has changed over the year. She responds,

I was always opposed to the oppression of women, the oppression of African Americans, Native Americans, and so on. But until you learn these things, it sets a fire inside you. You just want to scream. . . . And it just, it got to a point where I was taking in so many things and I was getting so passionate about everything, that I would leave the classroom and I would have so much on my mind. I just think I gotta save the world. I have to do something.

In her response, Kris distinguishes between her previous awareness of oppression as a concept and her current understanding of oppression by feeling its real consequences on lived lives. She stresses that it is this felt understanding of oppression that "sets a fire inside you." Kris feels this strong emotional connection because, in her aesthetic transaction with the texts, the boundaries between the characters she reads about and her own lived experience are blurred (Rosenblatt). She becomes more than a passive observer; rather, she has entered into their lives and so is consciously aware of the potentialities of her own life.

For example, in the same interview she relates her reaction to Lutie Johnson, a poor African-American character in *The Street*, and the way in which people in the story blame her because she is a single mother. "But we didn't hear once the blame go on the father, who left the woman and her child. . . . And that made me angry because . . . I feel like sexism is so invisible in society . . . people just blurt out awful things about women, without even thinking about it, because it has been chiseled into their heads." Kris clearly identifies sexism here, not as individual failing, but as socially constructed yet "invisible in society," where what is "chiseled into their heads" shapes what people unconsciously "blurt out." Kris is aware of the play of social voices in the text, too, hearing the blaming voices opposing Lutie's own voiced experience.

It is a literary text, the narrative story of one woman, then, that angers Kris and causes her to reflect on the nature of sexism in society. In her formal essay about this novel, she writes:

Isn't that what society is out to do. [sic] Rape our women; rape them of their pride, humanity, and human rights. . . . When men are aggressive it is considered an asset but when women have similar qualities they are bitchy. What if gender roles were switched around and men were looked upon as inferior? . . . These things stem from something greater than race, or sex. Possibly despair, a hope for something better with a readiness to push anyone out of your way to get ahead. . . . Despair very possibly may be the reason why hate has been such a common feeling since the beginning of time. People are so wrapped up in . . . themselves . . . they don't take the time to understand the thing that makes this world so rich; diversity. When we fail to recognize what is different we can't begin to understand, but we can harbor a fear of it.

Kris's choice of "rape" as a metaphor to explain society's violence toward women suggests her anger and sense of injustice. She makes a general observation about the opposing ways in which society views aggression in men and women. But then something important happens. Her anger moves her forward and causes her to think about the social forces which might motivate sexism and racism. She speculates that uncertainty and despair are root causes of hate and fear and that a possible effect of people becoming so involved with themselves is that they don't recognize or understand diversity and, as a result, begin to "harbor a fear of it."

This reflection represents a critical juncture in Kris's intellectual development for a few reasons. First, she does not dwell on her anger as someone at the subjective phase of knowing might do. Instead, the anger she feels spurs her process of reflecting, questioning, and seeking answers. However, her anger is not the direct cause of this process. This is a significant point because it is important to understand that her anger alone doesn't motivate her growth. It motivates her rethinking. Dewey discusses this notion of reflective thinking as "(1) a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and (2) an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity" (12). Kris seeks a more comprehensive explanation for human behaviors than sexism or racism and finds some tentative coherence in her account of human uncertainty and greed, breeding self-involvement and fear. It is a solid piece of abstract thinking, prompted by the concrete puzzlement the story posed and her own further inquiry into the nature of felt experience.

A second critical point in Kris's writing about *The Street* is this: it is through her rethinking that Kris moves closer to constructed knowledge, the final phase in Belenky's system, as she begins to understand that her frame of reference matters. This knowledge enables her to examine and question, to construct (that is, to take on) modes of inquiry that simultaneously prompt and signal her developing voice. Kris poses a question of herself ("Isn't that what society is out to do") and presents an elaborated metaphorical answer, with repetition ("Rape our women; rape them of their pride, humanity, and human rights"). Her question formulates society (not a man or even men) as a culprit and constructs a rhetorically powerful answer. Instead of working out the persuasive details of that posi-

tion, though, she makes a dialectical move to examine the differential language for describing men and women, uncovering this tool which "invisibly" (she said earlier) constructs us beyond our consciousness. She seems to intuit that "[t]hese things stem from something greater than race, or sex," then seeks further answers tentatively ("Possibly despair"), an unusual path of explanation. Finally, recognizing the potential source of hate in the need for certainty and sameness suggests seeds of insight. Kris is in a reflective dialogue with herself here and begins to see that others are alienated from dialogue which could help them "begin to understand."

Jerome Bruner argues that this aesthetic or narrative mode of understanding that Kris experiences functions to "open us to dilemmas, to the hypothetical, to the range of possible worlds that a text can refer to. . . . Literature, in this spirit, is an instrument of freedom" (159). In the integrated class, though, literature as "an instrument of freedom" gained power because the class situated texts within their sociohistorical contexts. As literature provided understanding of the human consequences of public events, history provided the sociocultural public context for personal experience and action.

This dialogue of history, story, and events was evident in a mock trial the class held in which Christopher Columbus was the defendant; this was the class project which Kris said caused her to think most deeply. Kris acted as a prosecuting attorney in the simulation, which included research, reading, trial preparation, and actual dramatized trial. While the students were preparing for the trial, they read fiction and historical biography by and about Native Americans. As Kris read and responded in her journal, it was evident that she looked through diverse others' eyes and was moved by the plight of the Native American as told through such texts as *Lakota Woman*, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, and *In the Spirit of Crazy Horse*. Kris initially responded by expressing feelings of anger, hate, and sadness. In the following quote from her final interview, we can see her empathic understanding of these narratives in their sociohistorical contexts as the impetus for her critical reflection:

I just started getting really angry. . . . And I thought [about] the fact that Columbus invaded these people's land and it wasn't just that he had done that, but the people behind it. . . . I got really sad about the fact that I missed out on so much because . . . all these things were destroyed. The culture. . . . These people were killed because they were who they were. And I could just picture me getting killed for who I was. And I thought about it a lot. . . . everybody in the world one day is going to be in the Nazi's place, and they're gonna be in the Jew's place, they're gonna be in the African-American's place and my place now . . . they're gonna want somebody to say this is wrong. And I think it takes you to be put in that place for you to say, "look at this. I have to do something." And I think that helped me to understand I have a place and have to do something.

Significantly, Kris's language is laden in a sense of personal connectedness to a culture and a way of life that has been virtually eradicated. This connectedness leads her to think about the authenticity of history and to recognize her own

commonality with voices ostensibly different. Kris is angry that Columbus's invasion involved more than land. More importantly, it involved "the people behind it." Her critical voice finds expression because the personal narrative, the story of the people, matters to her. She recognizes the human consequences of what happened more than 500 years ago when she writes, "I missed out on so much . . . because all these things were destroyed." She empathizes with those who were destroyed when she pictures herself being killed for who she is. These images cause her to "think about it a lot." Further, Kris contemplates that at some point, each of us will be either in the position of the oppressor or the oppressed, and, if we are one of the oppressed, we will want someone to "say this is wrong." She transcends the past as narrated by those who lived centuries ago and looks at the multiple perspectives of both the oppressors and the oppressed of more modern times when she writes about the Nazi's place, the Jew's place, the African American's place, and even "my place now."

Like the procedural knowers in Belenky et al.'s study, Kris recognizes that the world is constructed differently for different people, and she analyzes, or thinks through, what she has learned from these different perceptions. She begins to question not only *what* people think and do but also *why*. Perhaps this is what enables Kris to define herself in relation to other groups and cultures. She learns to define knowledge through her perceived connections with others, and this enables her to situate their experiences, as well as her own, within a social-historical context. In other words, her critical reflection about their experiences challenges her to a new self-representation, one in which she begins to renegotiate the boundaries between herself and others in society.

Kris's empathy with diverse cultural and ethnic groups indicates not only a concern for the situation of others but also the assumption of responsibility for taking her place as an agent of change, as someone who has "to do something." The connections she discovers between herself and others bring her to a new understanding of her own historical narrative. Perhaps Kris is willing to share her story because she understands, through the personal narratives the class has read, the ability of the narrative voice to recognize previously silenced perspectives and to hold up what has been previously assumed to be true against lived experiences. This is a necessary component to her emerging recognition of herself as subject, not object, which, in turn, is a precondition to her perception of herself as an agent of change.

Kris at an Intellectual Crossroad: Her Search for Explanations and Consequences

Eventually, Kris begins to turn her somewhat rhetorical "why" questions into a sincere and interested search for the causes and effects of the injustice which angers her. As is common to those who construct knowledge by listening to their own voice and also reflecting critically on the voices of others, Kris begins to formulate answers that make sense to her by posing critical questions for discussion. She begins the process of learning that knowledge can be reconstructed to accommodate both what the outside world provides and what she knows, or intuitions, to be true.

For example, during a discussion about whether or not mainstream history textbooks are biased in their interpretation of events, the class is divided

between whether textbooks should present only the "straight facts" or include stories of the people. One student, Andy, states that he believes texts should "be straight facts." Kris responds, "This is for Andy . . . if you were in a concentration camp and someone was writing about that in a history book, wouldn't you want the story of the people in there [the camp] to be in the book?" What is significant in this exchange is not only what Kris has said but also that she frames her remarks in the form of a question, which suggests the dialogic intent of the conversation she has initiated. She has begun to value the voices of others, and she uses question posing as a method of inquiry in an effort to combine intuitive knowledge with knowledge learned from others.

Kris demonstrates remarkable insight in her efforts to think critically about the causes of injustice and its effects. For example, although she comments that she "hated" Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* and that it was a "low point" for her, her discussion of the novel in her "American Dream" essay leads her to acknowledge the state of American education:

One stand that Hester took was that she wanted something better for her child. . . . Maybe if people wanted more for other people's children as well as their own something would be done to better society. Which leads me into the trial we did on education. It infuriates me that we as a society are so money hungry that we allow children to attend school in horrible conditions. . . . And as long as they are living the good life, who the hell cares if some African American child gets the raw end of the stick? This country thinks it is so much better than all of the others because we don't trap our people in caste systems. But if we don't have unbreakable class systems why is it so hard for a child from the ghetto to break out?

Kris's comments regarding caste systems identify effects of racism and classism on education. She has moved beyond reacting solely with anger (although anger is still very much evident in the tone of her voice) and is genuinely concerned about the reasons for injustice. Her method for pursuing reasons is a dialogic one: she imaginatively puts languages in dialogue, to question one language or perspective through the eyes of another as a means of thinking critically about the world. She is engaged in critical-narrative thinking (Miller), and out of this dialectic she is constructing sense provisionally in an honest coherence composed of tensions and multiple possibilities. As Kris learns to move among these conflicting meanings for the same event, she and other students become conscious of silenced voices, multiple perspectives, and the limits of monologic ways of knowing.

Agent of Change

Perhaps the most exciting transformation in Kris's thinking is her recognition of herself as an agent of both self and societal change. The knowledge and new understanding she gained from the class's critical and narrative reflections led her to evaluate her ability and authority to enact transformations in her own life as well as in the larger society.

In the following example, Kris engages in dialogue with the author of a piece entitled “Gee, You Don’t Seem Like an Indian from the Reservation,” and in her response she resists the authoritative voice of the writer. This act alone constitutes a perception of herself as someone who can contribute to the development of ideas and knowledge. It demonstrates movement away from procedural knowledge, when external truths are still dominant, toward constructed knowledge. In her response, she speaks with a sense of authority as she disagrees with the writer.

I felt as if the author was slaughtering all whites. . . . I feel the need to speak out against racism, but slandering other races is not the answer. . . . Feeling sorry for ourselves isn’t going to end the hating, it is going to strengthen it. There will always be hating and white people didn’t invent it. So in order to end it, we have to turn over a new leaf and begin by educating a new generation of people. And I will be more than happy to lead the way.

In this example, Kris has begun to construct her own way of knowing, which is a hallmark of the fifth and final category defined by Belenky et al., constructed knowledge. At this stage, the knower understands that all knowledge is relative and is constructed through individual frames of reference. Kris claims her own voice when she examines, questions, and speculates upon the text. She engages in problem posing, and, through a blending of her own voice and outside knowledge, her own way of knowing emerges.

Kris’s sense of empowerment comes from her realization that her frame of reference matters in the construction of knowledge. Earlier in this section I mentioned that, in addition to seeing herself as an enabler of social transformation, Kris had undergone a personal transformation, one which she recognized. This personal transformation, along with her cognizance of it, contributes to Kris’s journey toward a power of thought that is “not a mirror of reality, not a mere reflection, but is *reflexive and reflective* of reality” (Shor and Freire 13). The following is her comment on her perception of how she works with groups and individuals in her class. It is also indicative of the contribution the work of the class has made to her.

I really like to listen to other people and what their opinions are, and I like to change them. And I can see a big change . . . before I just wanted so much for people to listen to me, and I wanted them to believe what I believed. But now I kind of just want them to believe what they believe, and think about it.

Kris is writing about the change she has undergone from someone who only wanted others to hear her and then believe as she believed to someone who likes to listen to others and engage them in constructive argument. Significantly, this dialogue with others is successful, according to Kris, not necessarily if people believe what she believes but rather if they think about what they believe. This new insight represents an astounding level of intellectual development from the Kris who referred to herself in the beginning of the course as someone who could

never have effective arguments with people about things she believed. In fact, we can clearly see her progress through several phases of knowing.

Like the silent and received knowers, prior to this class Kris seemed to have little confidence in her own ability to speak, and, although she recognized that words were central to the process of knowing, she believed that truth came from others. Later, she expressed a need to have people listen to her exclusively. She was not interested in the voices and ideas of others. This corresponds to the subjective phase of knowing although Kris did not exhibit all of the characteristics of this phase. Like the subjective knower, Kris believed that truth resides within herself and that she could negate answers that the outside world provides. However, she was unlike the subjective knower in that she was willing to reveal her thoughts to others. Often, the subjective knower will elect to keep her ideas to herself rather than reveal her critical stance toward others' points of view.

Kris's desire to have others "believe what they believe, and think about it" is a step toward procedural knowledge. She recognizes that truth can be shared and that expertise can be respected. She clearly is interested "not just in what people think but in how people go about forming their opinions and feelings and ideas" (Belenky et al. 97). Kris's question posing, which is central to constructivist thinking, indicates her consideration for the context of particular situations and individuals rather than relying on mere generalization in her decision making. By the end of the year, Kris claims her own voice and combines her own intuitive knowledge with knowledge learned from others to construct her own meanings from the web of conflicting meanings and languages available for understanding the world.

One year after graduating from the integrated class, Kris volunteered to take part in a discussion among 17 students who had been students in the integrated class. In the lively conversation about multicultural education and the integrated class, Kris was an active participant. In her final retrospective comment about the influence of the class, she said:

This class has changed my life. Sounds so corny, but it's true. I always thought that I was stupid, and that nobody thought I had a worthwhile opinion, or anything like that, and it really made me feel better, and I think it made me a more educated person. I know when I go out into the world now, for example, I went to a rape crisis seminar and the county legislator is still calling me up on the phone and talking about me. It's changed my life. I grew as a writer. The things I'm writing now, I never would have thought I could have written. I also feel like, my life has changed because of all the different things that I have been exposed to here. The literature, the different opinions. I've always been a really, a big hot head, where I can't stand to argue with people, I had to push my idea on them. But now, I feel I can tolerate your opinion.

Kris sees herself as an active agent in the community and a constructor of meaning in her own life. She understands, in retrospect, how the reading, writing, and dialogue in the class prompted her growth but sees, too, how difficult to believe or "corny" it sounds to attribute so much to her work in the integrated

class. She describes clearly, though, the journey she has taken: from the silence of feeling stupid and not worthwhile, to being a “hot head” who couldn’t listen to others, and, finally, to accepting differences to act as “a more educated person” in the world.

Discussion

Kris’s work demonstrates that lived-through aesthetic response to personal narrative is intimately connected to her developing critical and narrative thinking. She becomes conscious that understanding is more than just an *intellectual* process or task. The stories in the literature Kris encounters about the effects of oppression on individuals ignite deep passion in her. Responding to multicultural literature in journals and discussions prompts Kris’s sense-making by stimulating her attention to new dilemmas, alternative human possibilities, and the many-sidedness of the human situation in the landscape of action and mind (Greene). Because she connects her experiences to others, she seems to understand that words such as racism, sexism, and oppression are much more than abstract concepts but have real consequences for those who suffer these injustices and have real social-historical roots which people need to understand. Kris is developing a critical subjectivity that shows genders, classes, and races in dialogue rather than in opposition.

The focus of the integrated class on validating the marginalized and silenced voices of oppressed and minority groups provides Kris with a space where her own voice can be heard and acknowledged. This validation, in turn, allows her to discover that she can be a source of knowledge as well as make determinations about knowledge derived from outside sources. Through personal narrative, she discovers “connections between self and others, [she] penetrates barriers to understanding and come[s] to know more deeply the meaning of . . . her own historical and cultural narrative” (Witherell 94). The recognition of this power within herself allows her to become an active participant in self-directed change and growth in her own life and to redefine herself as an agent of change in society.

Kris’s experience carries important implications for the ways in which academic discourse and pedagogy either assist or hinder a student’s ability to shape a sense of self in society. We need to continue to question the ways in which traditional classroom discourse and curriculum may operate to sacrifice certain student voices to a more culturally mainstream social order. These findings suggest that, as teachers and researchers concerned about education as a transformative practice, we need to provide students with opportunities for self-reflexive critiques regarding issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity *which begin with lived experience*. As we work toward a more multicultural curriculum, reflexive practice can assist students in interpreting their construction of knowledge to encompass the diversity of experiences, perspectives, and social issues that comprise the American quilt. What is central to Kris’s work and the work of this paper is the recognition of the emergence of her *conscious* understanding of the way she encounters the world and her developing ability to transcend and reveal cultural ideologies that suppress herself and others in a democratic society.

Kris’s change results from a pedagogy that values the lived experiences of others and creates space for dialogue and connectedness. Narrative and dialogue

can be a powerful paradigm for teaching and learning. It allowed Kris the space to discover the power of her own voice, to locate herself within a social and cultural context, and, over time, to engage in dialogue with society. When she learned to use her voice in these ways, she became subject rather than object. The pedagogy of this classroom and its curriculum construct knowledge as multilayered and evolving rather than objective and static. We must rethink not only how knowledge is created, but also what knowledge is and who creates it. In the process of rethinking, we can begin to create a learning environment that opens up spaces for the unexpressed voices and perspectives that remain silent in our classrooms. ☐

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Appendix A

Overview of Integrated Curricula: Key Activities and Texts within Themes

Theme 1: The Native American and Immigrant Experiences

- Student reports on family history, written and presented orally
- Important events in history as seen through perspectives of different cultural groups
- Whole class reads and discusses Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*
- Why do we believe what we believe? Journals, small groups, large group discussions
- Watch and discuss the film *Avalon* (immigrant experience)
- Christopher Columbus trial
- Independent reading of Native American novels, autobiographies, biographies, histories
- Individual presentations on Native American books (e.g., *Lakota Woman*, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, *Black Elk Speaks*, *The Life of Tecumseh*, *Education of Little Tree*)
- Watch and discuss films *Thunderheart* and *Where the Spirit Lives* (Native American experience)
- Videotape report on Geronimo
- Student-written poems from Native American perspective

Theme 2: Justice and Oppression

- Multiple source papers researched, written, presented, discussed (e.g., on people—Rosa Parks, Hurricane Carter, Jackie Robinson, Langston Hughes, Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey; topics related to specific groups—Laws and Practices of Discrimination against African Americans, Black Panthers, Negro Baseball Leagues, Mexican Americans; and on periods and events—The Harlem Renaissance, Sandcreek Massacre, Racial Riots, Wounded Knee)
- Watch and discuss videotape on Maya Angelou
- Whole class reads Ann Petrie's novel *The Street* and writes responses
- Read and respond to Martin Luther King, Jr. packet of materials; discuss as a class
- Watch and discuss the civil rights documentary *Eye on the Prize*.

Theme 3: Labor/Working

- Whole class reads and discusses Sinclair's *The Jungle*
- Write short story, rewriting an incident from *The Jungle* in the voice of one of the characters
- Read excerpt from *Labor's Untold Story* (Boyer and Morais) and respond in discussion and writing
- Watch and discuss film *Matewan*
- Read Denise Giardina's novel *Storming Heaven*
- Read choice of Steinbeck's novels *The Grapes of Wrath* or *In Dubious Battle*
- Research a strike in U.S. history; write a script for an in-depth newscast; film the drama; present it
- Make links between *Storming Heaven* and other novels, between *The Street* and *The Jungle*
- Watch and discuss the film *Out of Darkness*
- Multiple-source papers on labor researched, written, presented orally (e.g., on people—Samuel Gompers, Elizabeth G. Flynn, Sacco and Vanzetti, Helen Keller, Emma Goldman; and on events—The Railroad Strike of 1877, NFL Strike)
- Watch and discuss the film *Roger and Me*

Headstands, Writing, and the Rhetoric of Radical Self-Acceptance

Geraldine DeLuca

*True yoga starts with radical self-acceptance.
You are fully present with what is, observing the self without judgment.
When the body knows that the mind is kind, it will open and release.*
—Richard Faulds, qtd. in Krucoff

“The way in becomes the way out.”
—Kurt Spellmeyer

Headstand Practice

It is fall 2002, and I am 55 years old. I have been practicing yoga for four months, and I am learning to do headstand, or, as it's called in Sanskrit, *sirsasana*. “*Sirsasana*,” says yoga teacher Cyndi Lee on the CD class I'm listening to, “is the father of all *asanas*, the single most beneficial pose, but ONLY”—emphasis here—“if practiced carefully and mindfully.” In other words, you don't want to break your neck. I have been practicing since July, ever since I took a five-day workshop with Cyndi and her husband David Nichtern at the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies in Rhinebeck, New York. For a while, headstand seems like a ridiculous concept: the weight of your whole body balanced on the crown of your delicate head, centimeters away from your brain. I am too old, I think, too uncoordinated. I have never done anything like this in my life. Why start now? And yet, each time I do the CD, I go through the poses that Cyndi calls “headstand preparation,” placing my head on the floor in the triangle of my forearms, pulling my legs, one at a time, into my chest. I murmur that this is hopeless, but I keep doing it. As Cyndi would say, I have a “headstand practice.” It is a dignified pursuit of a goal, like sitting down at a desk each morning to write a novel and being on page five.

The real challenge of headstand is not balancing on one's head because the forearms create a triangular support and, as one becomes more proficient, one establishes a line of balance that runs through the center of the body. But a beginner has to start by getting up there in the first place, against the secure prop of the wall. It takes me a long time to learn these moves: to tuck my legs into my

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chest, to straighten my spine, to activate my arms and shoulders, at the crucial moment, courageously, mindfully, to lift my hips above my waist, to rest the soles of my feet against the wall, and finally to straighten my legs.

For months the pose eludes me. But I feel tiny markers of progress: my legs pulling in more tightly, my body saying to me, “Oh, I see. This is the way it will happen.” But I can’t raise my hips up far enough to get my legs against the wall. I am mindful of my neck and back, mindful of my age, mindful of my grandmother’s voice saying, “What are you, crazy?” Each time I do yoga, I must be patient with myself, and, after a certain number of tries at headstand, I must let go of the effort and move on.

I can’t rush it. . . . This is a huge insight.

But I don’t need to give up. . . . This is a second huge insight.

I need to have faith in the process, knowing that even if my progress is infinitesimal, it is progress. I trust that one day I will actually do a headstand, and that inspires me. “When the body knows that the mind is kind, it will open and release.”

In theory, certainly, and in the practice of yoga as I have experienced it, teachers embrace a rhetoric of radical self-acceptance. This doesn’t mean that everyone is perfect but just that whatever conditions exist are part of the reality that we notice and try not to avoid or reject. We are where we are. There is always a tension between the desire of both teacher and learner for forward movement and the reality of where the learner is at the moment. Maybe a different teacher, or a different method, would produce more immediate results? Or maybe the student just needs time to grow.

In school, we have a curriculum that reflects our interests and the goals of the school, and students have their bodies and their minds. Where do we intersect? How much and how fast can one adapt to reach the other? Maybe we have a student of wild imagination who veers off into incoherence. Or another who lines up words in safe sentences but is cut off from the complexity of his subject or the sources of his own intelligence. Both must have a grade. We know what model the course asks them to replicate, what knowledge they are supposed to demonstrate, but do we really know what they need for their own best development? Can we create a holding environment where what they need can be found? We look for a balance between structure and freedom, effort and ease. We know that patience is required. But the final grade is only four months away. So we keep our records, maybe the students keep a portfolio, maybe there is a standardized test, and all of this creates a sense of legitimacy in teachers, administrators, and accrediting agencies. But what happens to the talents, skills, habits of mind, or body, that aren’t being measured? What happens to the students who aren’t measuring up? What happens even to those who *are* measuring up but who may lose other ways of knowing not nurtured by the course?

The practice of yoga may seem far from this conventional situation. It is a voluntary activity usually undertaken by adults with spare time and strong motivation. Maybe they want a perfect body, maybe they’re looking for inner peace, maybe some combination. But they are seekers of a sort. And while there is no pressure on yoga teachers from an accrediting board to produce perfect yogis, there is pressure on them to be clear enough—and kind enough—so that people will come back the next week. One shows up to practice, to connect body and mind, to exert oneself and to calm down, to be present. One doesn’t practice

yoga to get a grade and be finished with it. One practices to practice, as one sings or dances, for the feeling of it, for the wholeness it brings into one's life.

Are there lessons here for school learning? Insights about the nature of being a student? A teacher? Insights about the relationship between practice and results? How much do we have a right to demand from students? How much can we let them follow their own lights? There is nothing casual about yoga. You must do the pose precisely because you don't want to injure yourself and because yoga involves developing awareness. What are your muscles doing? Your fingers? Your eyes? Your throat? You take a pose that you may or may not like and you say, "Okay, how does this feel? What's coming up?" But there are also many ways to adapt the poses so that you don't hurt yourself, endless variations so that the most basic learner can practice—which means taking a position with awareness—and so that the most advanced can still face a challenge. The ultimate goal both is and is not the pose. It is about finding the courage, strength, discipline to undertake the practice. It is also about developing awareness in the context of self-acceptance, learning to be compassionate toward the self and others, embracing *ahimsa* or non-violence—a broad term that encompasses both the physical and psychic ways we can harm ourselves and others. What you learn in your yoga practice, you take into the world. When you find yourself in an uncomfortable position, on or off your mat, you breathe and pay attention. Is there room for such teaching in the average classroom?

Gym Class, the Body, and the Pursuit of Higher Education

I remember myself as a child standing on the sidewalk watching my cousin do cartwheels and handstands on the concrete. The movements seem impossible. I feel lumbering and inept. In the schoolyard, I wish not to be counted into the game. I am afraid to swing a bat, catch a ball, shoot a basket. I don't want to be responsible for the team's losing. I do love to swim, however, and I learn to do the crawl more or less correctly in high school. There is no team; there are no races. We just swim.

In gym my main concern is to have a clean gymsuit and sneakers so that I won't get a zero for the day. It doesn't matter what sort of athlete I am. What matters is the uniform. There is a merciful logic to that, a way to insure that someone like me, who hates competitive sports, can still pass. So I stand on my numbered spot and get inspected. At the time, I have little relationship to my body that is not sexualized. I wear French twists and high heels, and for special occasions I wear strapless, padded corsets called *brasselettes*. "You have to suffer to be beautiful," my mother says. I would like to think that things are better now, half a century after the second wave of feminism, but, as I emerge from the subway in Manhattan and my eyes meet the giant Calvin Klein billboards of brooding teenagers in various stages of seduction, I know we're still suffering.

Outside of gym class, the competitions of school and college do not bother me much. Or maybe I am just not aware of how much I am bothered. I am a middle-class girl who likes to study. The classroom is set up for bookish people like me who don't move around too much in their seats. At graduation, when I look out at the world, it seems to me that the safest thing for me to do is to sign up for another four years.

In graduate school, the ground begins to shift. School, which used to be a

refuge, now becomes threatening. An attitude of real or perceived disdain intimidates me at every turn. Suddenly everyone has read the complete works of Henry James. I lean toward the Middle Ages myself, and many of the texts we use are in Everyman's Library, an imprint of Dutton. The frontispiece of these books has the inscription, "Everyman I will go with thee and be thy guide,/In thy most need to go by thy side." I am moved by that promise, but I never feel in graduate school that anybody is my guide. The classes are cold, erudite to a fault, and, even though I'm doing well, I always feel wanting. This becomes the normal condition of life, the effect of a culture that accepts as useful the value of everyone feeling not good enough. If we are anxious, we will work harder, collect more information, achieve more, and be better citizens. I feel congested just writing about it. In fact people have colds and upset stomachs all the time, and, although they are young, their skin is pallid and pasty. But the body is irrelevant. Fear and exhaustion are exalted. I lose sleep trying to read the complete poems of John Donne from one week to the next. I am worried, tired, bored, and feel utterly fraudulent. Sometimes I am greatly moved by a novel or a poem. But hundreds of poems all in the same week?

Completing graduate school is like finishing a prison sentence. I walk through the gates with carfare in my pocket, and the world opens up again. I get a job as an adjunct, and, like all adjuncts in English, I teach freshman composition. And there, in my classroom, I find myself again. The students don't care if I've read all of Henry James. They just want me to help them, to be their guide. Their work, even the simplest argumentative essay, seems intimate to me: the words they choose, the ideas they espouse, their handwriting. And they know me by the way I respond to them. If my formal lesson falls flat, I can still reach them at night when I read their work and write back to them. Later I teach memoir: writing memoir, reading memoir. And they tell me their stories. They tell me that writing stories helps them. "I didn't even know I *had* a story," one says. What I'm teaching them, teaching myself, though I don't call it this yet, is a kind of meditation, letting go of restriction, self-doubt, and self-consciousness long enough, through putting words on paper, to locate thoughts, to see them on the page, to let them be, and thus to find a part of the self that may be silenced in the fray of ordinary life.

The public debates that swirl around the teaching of reading and writing may challenge the value of this fundamental experience. Even the act of revision, whose importance compositionists fought to have recognized for 40 years, is being questioned. "Substantive writing on demand," says Brent Staples in *The New York Times*, "is now a common feature of corporate life." Of course. But missing from his essay is an acknowledgement of the years of immersion in the writing process that will ultimately lead to that kind of facility—as well as a questioning of the corporate model that puts speed at such a premium. Students already work too fast. They need time to learn that a deep knowledge of how to write comes only from giving it time.

Of course, I'm immersed in—constructed by—this value system, too. I am often impatient with my own processes. To be the best, my nerves tell me, I must be quick. I must measure myself against the other, who may, sadly, be my best friend. I must find fault, be jealous, be superior. I live much of my life attending to what the child psychologist D.W. Winnicott calls the "false self," a self that is comfortable only when people approve of it. A small Zen-like voice knows that

the approval of others is an unstable foundation on which to build one's life. And yet it's the air I breathe. The disapproval (or perceived disapproval) of people in authority can send me into a depression. I go to a preemptive dark place where I have the illusion that I control the potential outer darkness. There is even a peculiar sense of order in that, however bleak and unproductive.

Directed Effort vs. Habitual Aggression

At night, to illuminate the darkness, I go to another community which embraces different values, what is called New Age, what Kurt Spellmeyer calls "a separate tradition of humanistic thinking," which is "public and democratic," rather than "academic and elitist" (179). It's been there all along, under one name or another, this version of reality where people assume that others are all right, where they accept as natural the value of being kind to one another. In college, I read the American Transcendentalists. I read Blake and Wordsworth. I could tell you what they said, but I never *felt* them. "Shades of the prison house begin to close/Upon the growing boy." "The things which I have seen I now can see no more." That was true of me. I could no longer see. When I was in my twenties, I found A.S. Neill's *Summerhill*. That was a nice idea: children following their own lights. And in the 80s and 90s, I read American interpretations of Buddhism: Jack Kornfield, Jon Kabat Zinn, Stephen Levine, Mark Epstein. I read liberation theologian Matthew Fox, who offers the tradition of an egalitarian Christianity that locates God inside us. I learned that Paulo Freire's work grew not only from Marxism but also from this same egalitarian Christianity. I discovered Parker Palmer, who writes of his own depression in a ferocious academic environment, who has become a spokesman for many of us. He describes:

the way I was formed—or deformed—in the educational systems of this country to live out of the top inch and a half of the human self: to live exclusively through cognitive rationality and the powers of the intellect; to live out of touch with anything that lay below that top inch and a half—body, intuition, feeling, emotion, relationship. ("The Grace of Great Things" 17)

I discover that many other people are reading these writers. I give thanks for their bravery. After reading for a while each night, I can relax and close my eyes.

From time to time I take a writing workshop at the Omega Institute, where there are open yoga classes early in the morning and after the formal workshops. The people who come to Omega are, like me, interested in the experience of a relaxed and self-reflective pedagogy. They are teachers, social workers, artists, pediatricians, people with disposable income, but also young people who work in the kitchen and camp out at night by the lake. There are free yoga, meditation, tai chi chuan classes every day. From the classes I take there, I construct my own series of simple yoga poses to do at home, and sometimes, but not regularly, I also meditate. If you're interested in Buddhism, if you accept its first noble truth that life is suffering—or, as Mark Epstein more precisely puts it, that there is a sense of pervasive unsatisfactoriness, bittersweetness, to most experience (36ff)—if you understand that your own sadness is not just some inconvenience you ought to get rid of right away, if you accept the law of karma, that all our thoughts and

actions have consequences, if you imagine that there is some wisdom that may reside *inside* yourself that you might want to locate, then the Buddhist suggestion is that you sit in a comfortable position on the ground or in a chair with your back straight, you calm yourself by watching your breath and your thoughts without judgment, you get some perspective on your own pain, you consider the suffering of all beings everywhere including yourself, and you pray for peace.

In June 2002, I sign up for the five-day yoga and meditation workshop, “Yoga Body, Buddha Mind,” given by Cyndi Lee and David Nichtern. I’m initially more interested in the Buddha mind, but it is yoga that takes up the most time. The workshop is demanding, and, by the end of the second day, I am very tired. I find it hard to take Cyndi’s offer of “yogi’s choice”—that I “rest in child’s pose,” whenever I want to. The challenge to keep up is always with me, just as it is in the rest of my life. But I’m still happy to be there.

At the end of the workshop, I buy Cyndi’s CD and begin practicing at home two or three times a week. “Be patient and observant,” she says again and again. “Go where you can. . . . You have to start somewhere. Don’t even consider worrying about it.”

Don’t even consider worrying about it!

As I work with this CD, I have the distinct feeling that I’m understanding something new about learning in general. I’m practicing headstand, *sirsasana*, I’m learning *urdhva dhanurasana*, a backbend called wheel, or upward bow, that I find extremely challenging—a high drama I’ve rarely engaged. It is very hard. But I’m progressing. And at the same time I am accepting the distance between the “goal” and my practice, learning more and more that *the practice is the goal*.

I sit on the floor in head-to-knee pose, *janu sirsasana*, one leg straight out, the other bent with the sole of one foot resting against the other thigh, and I lean forward and breathe. Gradually my head comes to touch my knee. But on the CD Cyndi says she likes to call this pose “not head to knee, but chin to shin.” If one directs attention to bringing one’s chin to one’s shin, the neck and spine stay straighter as one leans forward. So there is the pose as I’m doing it, and there is the goal of chin to shin, which remains in some realm of possibility I haven’t reached. But I also know that the perfect pose is not the point. The point, as teacher Rodney Yee says, is to “receive the pose” as I’m in it right now. As Cyndi moves to the related pose, seated forward bend, *pascimottanasana*, she observes that “the job description of this pose is to calm your mind and subdue your ego.” The comment astonishes me. How deeply it goes to the heart of my struggle. In my sweatiest, clumsiest moments, I hold on to Cyndi’s assurance that, wherever my practice is, she’s not judging me. Or if she is—if she is judging someone doing *pascimottanasana* in front of her—she will, in her own practice as a teacher, notice that and let it go. And if I am judging myself—or if I feel a teacher is judging me—I will notice that too and let it go.

She moves to *baddhakonasana*, cobbler’s pose, another forward bend, for which one is seated on the floor, the soles of the feet together, knees apart. “Don’t ever press down on your knees,” she says. “That’s an invitation for an injury. It is not recommended to push or pull in any yoga pose or just ever in your life. Watch yourself and figure out the difference between directed effort and habitual aggression.”

How much of what we see around us—on television, in films, in traffic, on the streets, on the news, on campus, in playgrounds, in ordinary social relations,

in our own minds—falls under the heading of habitual aggression? Heeding her words, can I begin by not being aggressive to my own body, not forcing it, not hating it, simply paying attention to what it is telling me? In the bathroom of the yoga studio, there is a small framed quotation by the American Buddhist nun Pema Chodron: “Our true nature is not some ideal that we have to live up to. It’s who we are right now” (12). Can I refrain from reading a secret challenge into that observation? “So, are you happy with who you are right now? Shouldn’t you get better, do more yoga?” Chodron says that sort of thinking is a “subtle aggression against who we really are” (3). It is hard just to be in this present moment, to accept the self right now, to sit with our self and breathe.

Which Self?

In the academic world, people define themselves by their *curriculum vitae*. Maybe they have a book with a head shot on the jacket flap. I stare at the pictures, trying to imagine who the authors are, what their true nature is like, what they do in the morning. I’m drawn to the acknowledgements page, the footnotes, the index. Often I am grateful for their work, but, depending on the subject, I may also feel anxious and competitive. That person is obviously not wasting time the way I am. That person is serious. Only if I can do what that person does will I be all right. Only then will my self be happy.

In both eastern and western thought, scholars distinguish between false selves and a true self. The ancient goal of yoga, according to its texts, is to find the “true self” which yogis envision as the self that is united with God. By contrast, the self on the book jacket is illusory. It suffers because of its identifications with its various accomplishments, disabilities, and fears, and because of the “residue” and “latencies” (*samskaras* and *vasanas*) of the experiences it no longer remembers (Eliade 42ff). But maybe the person on the book jacket has found her true self in writing that book. I sit on the yoga mat, and I think about that. What residues and latencies keep me from my own creating self?

The idea of a singular self that is “true” is, of course, oversimplified. And yet we tend to know when we’re far from the experiences that give us a sense of fulfillment in our lives, when the “false self” or selves have the upper hand. Like psychoanalysts, yogis see the self as haunted by the unconscious. Psychoanalysis invites us to talk about our problems with an analyst to recover the hidden content, which, when illuminated, may cease to hold us in its grip and offer us greater freedom. Yogis engage both the mind and the body through meditation, the *asanas*, the breath, as another integrated route to that understanding and freedom. The yoga class can become, like the psychotherapeutic relationship, another holding environment where it is safe to feel. Sometimes people find themselves crying in the middle of a pose. Something mysterious rises, some memory locked in the body that gets expressed in a pose. Maybe we know what it is, maybe we don’t. Maybe we talk about it with a psychotherapist, maybe we don’t. But we understand that body, mind, emotions, spirit are all connected, that there is wisdom in this practice.

The word yoga means both “union” and “yoke” in Sanskrit. We take on the yoke of the discipline to find a sense of integration, a still small voice, the God within—call it what we will. We focus on the breath, a thought rises, we notice it, and we gently put it aside. We struggle to stay in a difficult pose and watch the

way our attention moves from one part of our body to another. We feel pain or sweat runs into our eyes, or maybe we fall out of a pose altogether, and again we notice what we feel—embarrassment, frustration, anger at the teacher, anger at ourselves. Or maybe something opens, and we feel a sense of peace and spaciousness. This happens over and over. We develop a witness consciousness, like our own inner therapist, that acknowledges and separates us from our thoughts, that says “you are not only that” or “you don’t have to do that,” and maybe we get a glimpse of a new way of seeing ourselves. We treat our bodies and our minds with dignity. We “take our seat,” as meditation teacher David Nichtern says, with a straight spine. And we move toward freedom.

It is not my purpose to say that yoga is better than psychotherapy. Yogis have teachers, as analysts have analysts, people who observe with them, who help them understand their suffering. The two practices can work together. What is important is the recognition that, as Spellmeyer and others say, “the way in becomes the way out.” Whatever happens is expressive. We don’t need to deny anything. Rest awhile, say the Buddhists, the yogis, the legions of teachers who see children as starting from a good place from which they should not be pushed or pulled in the direction of someone else’s goal. They remind us that we’re larger than our defensive self-conceptions, our frightened false selves. If we felt safe enough to stop defending ourselves, what would we discover that we already know?

Taking Our Selves to School

I acknowledge that the institution has goals that it pays me to support. And students need certain skills and knowledge for graduate school and careers. But I notice that my yoga experience dramatically supports my belief that my students are already okay as they are, and I want to help them to be courageous as they make their way through school, to ask “to what end?” and to choose lives for themselves that include compassionate awareness of themselves and others. I understand that their emotional and physical lives and the emotional climate that exists in my classroom are as important as the books on the syllabus, that their intuition is a form of knowledge, that their becoming attuned to emotions as they arise is part of the knowledge making.

There is growing support in cognitive science, medicine, and psychology for the importance of attending to our intuitive, emotional selves. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio and psychologist Daniel Goleman both write about the way we know ourselves and our world by paying attention to what Goleman calls emotional intelligence. Damasio challenges Descartes’ dualist principle that mind and body are separate. He observes that a thought often begins with the production of hormones that create a feeling, that that feeling becomes part of what we call thinking. We may know things before they register as thoughts. Goleman argues that people who have emotional intelligence, which means a constructive relationship to their emotions, are more likely to function well in the world than those who are cut off from their emotions (*Emotional Intelligence*). Scientists are also demonstrating the brain’s neuroplasticity, the capacity of one part of the brain to take over a function that it does not normally have. In a blind person, for example, the part of the brain associated with sight does not necessarily lie fallow but can become active in reading braille. Likewise, says Jeffrey Schwartz,

we can, by conscious force of will, train the brain to function differently—to change a behavior that is causing us pain.

In their collaborative work *Destructive Emotions*, Goleman, the Dalai Lama, and a team of scientists, teachers, philosophers, and monks demonstrate that we can, through meditation and innovative pedagogies, diminish the experience and effects of negative emotions and behaviors. Goleman describes “the lama in the lab,” a highly trained monk whose brain activity is tracked as he meditates. The resulting MRIs show enormous activity in the left prefrontal cortex, which is associated with feelings of “happiness, enthusiasm, joy, high energy, and alertness” (12). This, says Goleman, is the “neuroanatomy of compassion,” and if it is something that is nurtured through meditation, then it is something we can learn.

Wild Mind and Monkey Mind

How do these notions of the self and the meditative practice of writing unfold themselves in the discourse of composition and rhetoric? Writing, like graphic arts and crafts, like music-making, dancing, cooking, like any creative act, has long been recognized as a form of meditation. One loses the self in the work. One finds peace, joy, focus. One calls on that elusive self and does something beautiful with its energy and vision. But in the current conservative educational climate, busy with technological innovation, obsessed with standards and prescribed outcomes, these artful pursuits are often the first ones cut from the budget. When I started teaching, in 1973, I came up against the product-oriented five-paragraph essay and the notion that first one lines up one’s thoughts and then one writes. I taught people to write thesis sentences and topic sentences and complex deductive paragraphs that widened and narrowed in levels of generality like an accordion. And maybe well-written paragraphs do look that way when you stand back from them. But is that the consciousness with which they were composed?

That same year, Peter Elbow published *Writing without Teachers*, and I sat on the subway, gratefully reading the work of this teacher who gave us all permission to write without him. Another escapee, I thought, another person who’d done it all wrong and lived to tell about it. Write freely, said Elbow, without stopping, for a set period of time, and see what you’ve got. “Meaning,” he wrote, “is not what you start out with but what you end up with” (15). Immediately I incorporated this practice into my classes. Later, as Elbow wrote for teachers across the disciplines, free writing came to be called “low stakes” writing (as prior to and in preparation for “high stakes” writing), which sounds more respectable (“High Stakes”). In the eighties, Toby Fulwiler called upon James Britton’s categories of writing—expressive, transactional, and poetic—to demonstrate that the first, the expressive, Elbow’s free writing, was least often used in classrooms across the disciplines. Writing was used as formal communication but not as a tool for articulating and understanding one’s thoughts. This sometimes playful, formless, questioning kind of writing remained untapped as a resource because it seemed to run counter to the needs of disciplines for rational, well-organized thought. And yet we also know that the process, with all its messing around, is a boon to creativity. We need the hunches, intuitions, the ways of knowing and feeling bubbling below the surface. We also need the acknowledgement of uncertainty and humility in offering our thoughts and permission to acknowledge that just maybe we’re wrong.

Every spring, my colleague Myra Kogen and I run a faculty development seminar in the uses of writing across the disciplines. Early in the seminar we distribute an Elbow essay—sometimes the Elbow/Bartholomae debate that appeared in *College Composition and Communication* in 1995 about whether there is in fact any writing without teachers. Most people in the social sciences and the humanities side with Bartholomae because we're all "situated" in our discourses, in our cultures, all postmodern, all inescapably tied to our masks. (The science people, on the other hand, think that the whole debate is, as one physicist puts it, "blah, blah"—just two overwrought academics splitting hairs.)

The scientists' impatience with our rhetoric notwithstanding, we are, of course, all connected, dependent on the labor and ingenuity of countless others not only for our forms of discourse but for the water we drink, the floor we stand on, the paper on which we record our work. But still there is the simple and profound human impulse to express oneself freely. And Elbow cheers on every other writer who has the temerity to think that his or her work is the fresh work of a "self" inquiring into its own nature, ever so slightly different from the self sitting in the next chair. "What can I learn about my own mind," asks this individual writer, "by observing what I put on the page? What do I have to say that is an aspect of me and that is worth someone else's attention? How can these thoughts take shape and become a formal piece of work?" Bartholomae might call this "the syllabus built into the learner"—what's the individual configuration despite the social constructivist nature of learning ("Teaching Basic Writing" 30).

What invariably happens at the faculty development workshops, as we ask faculty members to write freely about their thoughts on a reading, their own experiences as writers, and their struggles with current writing projects, is that they find themselves engrossed in the process, operating just as if they were free. As their thoughts unfold on the page, they begin to see the possibilities of writing without teachers: the long-gone teachers in their heads, the critical editors, the most unforgiving of their colleagues. It is a revelation to some to tolerate their own hesitations, to be patient as they wait for something interesting to emerge. And, as we talk, barriers come down. We understand each other better. It is a simple yet thrilling experience because, in that period of kind exploration, accepting language as it comes, talking frankly about what dogs us in our teaching, we honor our minds and the demands of our work, and we feel supported. The group becomes another holding environment in which it is safe to take risks.

Across the hall, in my graduate course in Theories and Practice of Teaching Composition, the students enter with many anxieties. Some are being asked to teach freshman English with no prior training. Their jobs are the relatively easy ones. Many others are teaching in middle or high schools, following the rigid agendas of supervisors who are in turn overwhelmed by the numbers they are going to have to produce when their students are tested for reading, writing, and math competency and those scores are published in the newspapers. It is the age of outcomes assessment and No Child Left Behind, the age of the war on terrorism, where Army recruiters in starched uniforms stand in pairs at urban high school doors, encouraging teenagers to sign up. State examining boards suspiciously construct ever more elaborate apparatuses to make sure that everyone learns the same thing at the same time. And the new teachers are all commanded to hurry up and get their Masters degrees so that they can be quickly certified and then pronounced excellent. They are often taking two graduate courses while teaching

full-time in high schools with 35 students in each of five classes (subject to supervisors walking into their classrooms unannounced to make sure the script is being followed, using outdated texts), spending their own money on supplies, preparing their students for high-stakes exams. Thus many new teachers in my class are exhausted at 27 and looking either for hard rules to ease their burdens or another job.

We take the obvious path: we read a range of essays on process, revision, and responding to student work, helpful practices in teaching grammar, in understanding models of learning language and rhetoric, in finding ways to bridge the gap between students' literacies outside the classroom and the academic literacy they need to succeed inside. We read stories and poems together; we ask questions, and we work in groups. And we also read a small chapter or two each week of Natalie Goldberg's bold and simple book *Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life*, as a counterbalance to all that complexity, to make her point that writing is like drinking a glass of water.

What do I do after I drink a glass of water? . . . What do I do with waking up in the morning or going to sleep at night? . . . Writing practice is simply something fundamental. . . . it makes you notice your mind and begin to trust it and understand it. . . . If you get this the rest is none of my business. (6-7)

She learns to write by writing. "Over and over, we begin." And her final message is: "don't listen to me. What do I know?" (9).

Some students find Goldberg annoying. "What is this, kung fu? Our students need to pass the New York State Regents Exam." They want formulas. I acknowledge that constraints can be clarifying, as they certainly are in yoga. But, in the tiny space of those tense English classrooms, writing practice often narrows itself down to dreary formulations which can, as Ann Berthoff and others have observed, kill the very faculty the writer needs most: an ability to question the premise that this straight line of boxes of thought will take us where we need to go (129). I look at some of the papers, and it seems to me at times that the students might just as well have filled in the frames with happy faces or question marks: "Is this what you want? Is this what you want?" Their own thought doesn't matter. What matters is the getting in, the gesture acknowledging that the next three boxes are where their thought would go, and the getting out. Unless another experience intervenes, this container is what writing becomes.

What Goldberg teaches is patient practice, kindness to oneself, a willingness to sit with what's difficult, to find the joy in it, *not* to go for the formula, whether it's an idea or the shape it takes. She offers some patterns herself—to start, for example, with "I remember," and then maybe "I don't remember"—*samskaras* and *vasanas*—what's underneath. But then she steps out of the way. Her metaphor for writing is the Buddhist "wild mind." Most of us, she says, are stuck in "monkey mind," that small dot in the sky where we go to find all our assumptions about life.

We put all our attention on that one dot. Meanwhile, wild mind surrounds us. Western psychology calls wild mind *the unconscious*, but I think *the unconscious* is a limiting term. If

it is true that we are all interpenetrated and interconnected, then wild mind includes mountains, rivers, Cadillacs, humidity, plains, emeralds, poverty, old streets in London, snow, and moon. A river and a tree are not unconscious. They are part of wild mind. (32–33)

And thus, from this perspective, Elbow and Bartholomae unite: free writing and the strong, oppositional reading. Maybe there *is* no writing without teachers, without models, but we also know that the teachers we find most important in the end are those who encourage us to lift out of the predictable boundaries of our lives. Both Elbow and Bartholomae hold out for the same inquiring breadth, the same acknowledgement that we are each out there on our own. And we are also connected not only to other thinkers but to poverty, rivers, history, all living under the same literal, metaphorical sky.

Poets in the School

It is striking to observe that when an artist enters the school system, whether for a single session or ongoing teaching, the first things to go are grades and penalties. We understand that a special situation is upon us and that we can work from a deeper sense of commitment that is connected also to a sense of openness, simplicity, and play. The beauty of Goldberg's teaching is that it rests on a few fundamental principles. Not because art is simple, but because artists become artists by having the faith to show up every day at their workspace to trust their curiosity and intuitions, because they know that the complexity of their thoughts and work cannot always be separated into "skills," because they come to their own rules, because, as they testify over and over, they live in a state of waiting to see what happens. The time when the artist comes to class is the time when something less rigid, less paranoid is allowed to happen. It is the time when the students are permitted to relax into themselves and find the joy of their own creativity.

In *Writing in the Asylum*, Jennifer McCormick describes her work at an overcrowded urban high school in Brooklyn in the early 1990's. Some students have walked into classrooms with guns, so now there are security guards and metal detectors at the entrance. Why these guns are so readily available, why these young people think that carrying them is the only way to feel safe and powerful, are, of course, questions of bitter national debate. But in this high school the students experience the results of the deadly combination of poverty, joblessness, and guns, and here at the metal detector is the spot where damage control lives. Working as a tutor, McCormick develops a close relationship with five women students. As she helps them with their writing and the problems of their lives, they become her guides as well. Unlike their more privileged contemporaries, who are busy multi-tasking, these women spend a lot of time waiting. They go through the metal detectors, empty their pockets, stand with their legs apart. They are always under suspicion, locked out of lunchrooms and libraries for security purposes. They learn, both in school and in their lives, to stand in line. They call themselves "Dixie Cups": human throwaways in a throwaway society.

McCormick works with Hermine Meinhard, the resident poet in this school, to subvert this bleak landscape. Meinhard asks the students to go deep into an inner world, to try on masks, other selves that support self-reflection and strength.

A young woman named Tanzania writes in a poem she calls “My Abstract Life”:

. . . I am destined to be
 Lost . . .
 If I speak, I am to be
 quieted.
 If I move, I am to be
 stopped.
 . . . no one knows anything about
 me.
 Yet they can tell stories
 about me.
 I don't question their
 actions any more, I let
 it be. I have succumbed
 to the madness.
 I have become madness. (qtd. in McCormick 79)

In writing the poem, McCormick observes, Tanzania “reconfigures the boundary between self and world” (80). She begins to tell her own story. She develops a witness consciousness through which she reflects critically on her conditions and asserts some control over her life. She does not become the madness because there are opposing forces: her own ability to write and the support of teachers who affirm that what she sees and writes matters, that *she* matters.

Other examples abound of teachers and artists who go into public classrooms, hospitals, nursing homes, prisons and, with a sense of kindness, aesthetics, and an ear to listen to their students, evoke all the beauty and sadness that have been pushed away by the routines of a too-busy life or a too-empty life or a life of deprivation and abuse. They all work from a sense of radical self-acceptance. They believe in the ability of ordinary young people to respond to beauty, kindness, humor; to find their passion; to make art. And in response to that belief, people do make art—not so that it can be judged but for the sheer joy and relief of it. (See, for example, *Speak Your Mind*.) The work ceases to be about being the best but about finding, creating oneself, and finding a community of others who share a vision and are eager to listen and to share.

Learning to Live in the Present

In *On Paradise Drive*, culture critic and *New York Times* columnist David Brooks does a comical rendering of the middle and upper-middle class in America. He writes of children being programmed to enter the Ivy League from the time their Apgar scores are taken in the delivery room. Their childhoods, says Brooks, are being “professionalized” by parents who see childhood as a time for maximum programming so that their children will become competitive for entrance into the best nursery schools, high schools, colleges, law firms, corporations. They are busy all the time, just as their parents are. *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnik writes a funny, sad piece about his daughter who tells him that her imaginary friend is too busy to play with her (80). Carl Honore observes himself contemplating the “one-minute bedtime story” for the parent on the go (2).

The story of the too-busy, affluent American child, offspring of driven adults, aided and abetted by driven teachers, has become a scripted narrative that drives our country and is hard to interrupt, a deadly enacting of monkey mind. As Parker Palmer observes, affluent Americans believe, as Palmer did himself, “that they can ‘win’ while everyone around them is losing” (*To Know* 4). They can block out poverty, violence, the suffering of others. Brooks looks for the bright light in all this activity. It is, he says, a distinctly American orientation toward the future. We are energetic, exuberant people with the pioneer spirit written into our heritage. Our ancestors all came here from someplace else with the readiness to till the land, take the lowest paying jobs, and work their way up by virtue of their ingenuity and courage—except, of course, for the African slaves, who had no choice about coming, and native Americans, who were here already, whom we killed, enslaved, stole from when they stood in our way. The ideology of the United States has always been to conquer the unknown and adapt to the Protestant work ethic. The dark side of that spirit is a rapacious sense that everything belongs to us, everything unknown needs to be conquered. This ideology drives the “real world” for which my students are to be prepared. But as teachers we also have an opportunity and an obligation to shape that reality by suggesting that time and space for stillness are important, that our connection to all other beings on earth is important.

Savasana: Corpse Pose

At the end of each yoga session, we lie on our back on the floor in *savasana*, corpse pose. Arms and legs resting quietly, we close our eyes and “watch our thoughts coming and going, like birds” (Lee). After all our work, this position is what we come to. Does “our mindstream leave our body and continue on,” as Cyndi says, or do we simply take our place in nature with the decaying, ever renewing trees? I don’t know. But it is useful to remember, as we lie in “final relaxation,” that we won’t be here forever. We must bequeath what we’ve done to future generations. May we leave them the beauty of the earth that we enjoyed, the knowledge and values to preserve it, the minds and hearts to feel their connection to it all. ☪

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Idioms as Cultural Commonplaces: Corporeal Lessons from Hokkien Idioms

Sue Hum

“**A**i pang sai kah-lai or kang,” my parents would tell me throughout my adolescence in Malaysia. With rueful acceptance and finger wagging admonishment, they would repeat, “ai pang sai kah-lai or kang.” Roughly translated as “wait until [you] need to pass shit, only to dig a hole,” this widely used Hokkien idiom was my parents’ commentary on my habitual tendency to procrastinate. Whether it was completing homework, practicing before my piano lessons, or preparing the dinner meal, I always delayed until the last moment. Then, with my parents watching in amusement and “ai pang sai kah-lai or kang” waiting in the wings, I would rush around in panic and apprehension, both consequences of my own behavior. Finally, when my circumstances became too desperate, I would solicit help, knowing what I was about to hear: “Ai pang sai kah-lai or kang, Ah Sue.”

My family’s crude, biologically grounded assessment of my procrastination demonstrates how the corporeal body constitutes a metaphor and an acceptable semiotic within which the practices of everyday life are conducted. This commonly used, scatological idiom emphasizes the physical experience of the panic that follows procrastination. It refers literally to being overcome by the breakout-sweats, hand-shivering, gut-wrenching, buttock-squeezing sensations that come from failing to prepare in a timely fashion for defecation. By not planning ahead, a person experiences physical discomfort, anxiety, alarm, and strain: biological and cultural consequences from having not chosen a private spot, not cleared a space of possible impediments, not protected him or herself from possible attack of wild animals (or one’s enemies), not taken out the appropriate digging implement, and not loosened one’s clothing ahead of time. Such an idiom represents perfectly the panic I felt whenever I procrastinated. Fused in this idiom are the natural physical urges and the connotative meanings we impose on those urges that emerge in relation to community and society. In short, with every utterance of “ai pang sai kah-lai or kang,” the material world and the social world fuse with one another.

In this essay, I use idioms, especially Hokkien idioms, to counter the Western predisposition to separate mind and body, bracketing the cognitive from the material, a stance injurious to students and teachers. By failing to recognize the permeable, inextricable relationship between mind and body, semiotic and mate-

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rial, we simultaneously fail as teachers to recognize that many of our students—particularly those from working class backgrounds, marginalized ethnicities, and other countries—must undergo both cognitive and corporeal changes in order to assimilate and acculturate successfully into American academic literacy practices. Not only do these students have to learn an unfamiliar way of speaking and writing, but their bodies must also shift toward an acceptable, usually middle-class, orientation. That is, to engage effectively in the university's discourse conventions, students must assume a white, middle-class, heterosexual body-orientation (see Bloom). However, because of the systematic, historical separation of body and mind in the West, most teachers are blind to the fundamental material changes that necessarily accompany the accumulation of academic literacy. If we as teachers are blind to these changes, then we will be unable to help our students perceive these changes and to help them understand both their own learning and the cost of that learning. I argue that we can use corporeally based idioms, whether they are in English or another language, to provide a valuable contrastive framework, underscoring the mind-body shift that inevitably occurs with the acquisition of academic discourses. I illustrate the power of that approach through Hokkien idioms, which are not simply abstract, exotic, albeit entertaining explorations of a distant culture's ways of speaking and ways of being. Rather, these idioms highlight how the bodies that students bring into their writing classrooms influence and mediate their literacy learning.

I begin with the work of linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson who argue that metaphors—and by extension, clichés, idioms, and aphorisms—govern our everyday functioning, playing a central role in structuring our perceptions, conceptions, and actions. I discuss how our cognitive and conceptual systems are both linguistic and embodied in nature. Building on Lakoff and Johnson, I rescue clichés, idioms, and aphorisms in student writing, frequently treated with disdain by our profession. Rejected as stale modes of thinking and writing, idioms, instead, highlight communal ways of knowing—cultural commonplaces or accepted sentiments—that combine the cognitive with the material. Next, I demonstrate the pedagogical value of analyzing idiomatic prose by exploring some Hokkien idioms. Finally, I provide guidelines for a similar classroom exploration of students' home idioms, which enable us to focus on the confluence between discourse and body habits in the teaching of writing.

Embodied Metaphors

In their seminal work *Metaphors We Live By*, which highlights the tenacity and pervasiveness of metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson explain that “[o]ur ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (3). Countering the belief that metaphors are solely poetic embellishments and/or rhetorical flourishes, Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate how metaphors structure our thoughts and understanding, particularly of abstract concepts. Metaphorical expressions, such as idioms, clichés, and aphorisms, are accepted, fixed, naturalized expressions, part of a community's cognitive, emotional, and rhetorical lexicon. Thus, the study of the metaphors of a community or culture, Lakoff and Johnson contend, provides a window into the cognitive assumptions and beliefs of those participants: “what we call ‘direct

physical experience' is never merely a matter of having a body of a certain sort; rather, *every* experience takes place within a vast background of cultural presuppositions. . . . all experience is cultural through and through" (57).

Although less complicated than metaphors, clichés and idioms perform a similar function, encapsulating a commonly held belief in a brief, pithy phrase. Like my family's use of a biological process to refer to and criticize my procrastination, idioms highlight the mundane, everyday nature of concepts, not just the intellectual or the abstract. Because metaphors are used as natural "turns of phrases" or linguistic short cuts, they signify not objects *of* thought, but concepts *in* thought, otherwise known as "functional embodiment" (Lakoff 12, 335). Lakoff and Johnson explain how metaphors operate cognitively: "*The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.* . . . the concept is metaphorically structured, the activity is metaphorically structured, and, consequently, the language is metaphorically structured" (5, authors' emphasis). According to James E. Seitz, metaphors ask "that we ourselves identify with the 'world' of its fiction, that we provisionally take that fiction as literally true" (195). We are often unaware of metaphors' filtering and selecting capability, of their ability to construct a schematic of our world, of their tendency to structure our perceptions of reality.

Our bodies and our postures *do* configure language and language use, best exemplified in what Lakoff and Johnson call "orientational metaphors," which spotlight a certain kind of spatial orientation—e.g., low man on the totem pole—arising from "the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment" (14). Lakoff further explains in *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* that "conceptual embodiment" points to "the properties of certain categories [that] are a consequence of the nature of human biological capacities and of the experience of functioning in a physical and social environment" (12). We impose meaning on our experiences of the world in terms of our bodily posture and our bodily experiences. Thus metaphors are not only linguistic but also experiential and material, offering us an understanding of how bodies structure language. In *The Body in the Mind*, Johnson argues that our concrete bodily experiences not only serve as the basis but also constrain our meaning making, imagination, and reason (xv). By examining the metaphors of a language, we can uncover that culture's values, beliefs, and epistemology; at the same time, we learn how bodies operate within a culture, how they influence language and knowledge. Johnson observes, "Our community helps us interpret and codify many of our felt patterns. They become shared cultural modes of experience and help to determine the nature of our meaningful, coherent understanding of our 'world'" (14). In short, we come to recognize the reciprocity between literacy and materiality.

In detailing how literacy is simultaneously linguistic and corporeal, Kristie S. Fleckenstein in *Embodied Literacies: Imageword and a Poetics of Teaching* contrasts the logics of word and image. She urges teachers to stop defining literacy and imagery through a linguistic framework, emphasizing that all learning involves both mind and body. As she works to destabilize the boundaries between imagery and words, Fleckenstein explains that images cohere through metaphoric *is logic*, which functions in the present tense, bears no linguistic markers of modality, and, most importantly, "serves as the grammar by which the reality, the materiality, of our natural world is created" (23). *Is logic*, or ana-logic, fo-

cuses on the “relationships between things—particularly the relationships between self and other, self and environment—not the things in themselves” (“Writing” 291). In addition, metaphoric *is logic* is “corporeal logic,” so that bodies and environments are inextricable from our language use (*Embodied* 24). Drawing on Gregory Bateson’s work, Fleckenstein explains that “corporeal codes stabilize discursive codes and produce a language from pulse beats, memories, and images” (“Writing” 290). Metaphoric, corporeal *is logic* highlights how bodies permeate language and culture, how “there can be no textuality without materiality” (290). Eschewing the isolation of bodies from our literacies, Fleckenstein underscores how our habits of meaning making must involve both mind and body.

Many Hokkien idioms draw on the body’s biological responses; the *is logic* of a narrow, private, individualized realm is inextricable from the generative level of socio-behavioral norms. The idiom “cheak han cheau chai luak” (the person who eats the chilies feels the heat) captures the smoldering, ear-tingling, sudden-break-out-of-sweat sensations a person feels when she or he bites into a hot pepper. The literal heat of the pepper becomes analogous to the heat (or consequences) a person endures for his or her actions. A slight alteration to that idiom “cheak han cheau *beh* chai luak” (the person who eats the chilies, but does not feel/know the heat) refers to an insensitive person, one who is incapable of knowing danger. Since experiencing a pepper’s heat is a natural, biological response, the ability to predict and avoid the consequences of one’s behavior is also presumed to be a biological given. With the Chinese predisposition for indirectness, this idiom allows the speaker to be honestly critical without the harshness of a direct rebuke. This idiom derives its metaphoric perspective from biology, and, at the same time, influences perception by reflecting or revealing a system of accepted social behavior. Thus, social accountability is assumed to be an innate quality of one’s physical existence as a human being.

The above idioms represent an essentialist, legitimate evaluation, serving as a social corrective at the biopsychological-behavioral level. Similarly, the idiom “ae kou hor phang teng teok,” or “deaf-mute stung by bees,” images the feelings of frustration and inaction a deaf-mute experiences when she or he is stung by bees, unable to express his or her pain or announce the injustice of that sting. This idiom highlights the backlash a person must endure without the luxury of complaint due to his or her own foolish actions. To have to suffer in silence is painful indeed, but the appropriateness of the person’s silencing “speaks volumes” of the person’s behavior as judged by the community. The evaluative content of the idiom is based on the similarity of biological responses among Hokkien speakers, if not all humans. The individual must self-regulate and self-police as a responsible member of the public sphere. Here, biological responses serve as privileged metaphors—cultural commonplaces—for defining the expectations of a community.

The *is logic* in these Hokkien idioms demonstrates a lack of distinction between private and public, mind and body, politeness and candor in Malaysian-Chinese culture. The three following idioms, obviously rooted in male physiology, can be used indiscriminately to describe and criticize both men and women. While some of us may never experience the discomfort that comes with “teah tiaui,” or “squeeze your testes,” we can imagine it. The pain to which this idiom refers is long, slow, and drawn out, similar to the ongoing negative consequences arising from a momentary thoughtlessness. Similarly, the physical and social

problematics of speaking without thought is criticized with the idiom “cheh-kong lan,” literally translated as “a hurried penis.” This idiom judges thoughtless speech or behaviors. With the Chinese predisposition for reflection, actions conducted hurriedly are condemned in the most derogatory terms. When a person is “chung theok lan par,” or “caught by the testes,” that person’s weak points have been found out publicly. These three idioms rely on metaphoric *is logic* to emphasize the negative outcomes of imprudent actions. Not only do clichés, idioms, and aphorisms underscore the cultural commonplaces in our ways of knowing, they also highlight the inextricability of corporeality from our discourse conventions.

A Taste for a Plain, Unadorned Style

By focusing on rather than dismissing conventional sayings, we can disinter the social, cultural, and epistemological imperatives that permeate our ways of speaking, thinking, and writing, a first step in helping our students recognize the corporeal and intellectual changes elicited by university education. Unfortunately, much of our training as writing teachers militates against the use of idioms, clichés, and aphorisms, discouraging students from saying they’re as “happy as a clam” or, in the Texan embellishment, “happy as a pig in shit” because these express neither creativity nor individuality, two cherished American virtues. Students’ use of idioms, clichés, and aphorisms—also considered dead metaphors, trite sayings, or tired language—has long been denigrated by writing teachers and the textbooks they use. Many composition handbooks and style manuals criticize their use as unoriginal and inefficient, offering dicta such as “avoid clichés like the plague” and “clichés kill creativity.” In general, a cliché is an “expression made stale and boring by overuse” (Carter and Skates 702). Use of idioms and clichés represent, in many teachers’ minds, conformity, not only in thought but also language, preventing writers from achieving a “freshness in discovery” (Thomas and Turner 57). By contrast, metaphors, usually literary or poetic, are considered “a great achievement” (Williams 169).

Despite the dominant predisposition against clichés, idioms, and aphorisms, the call for accepting clichés in student writing dates back almost thirty years. Published in 1976, Don Nilsen’s proposition that teachers allow the use of clichés because of their communicative effectiveness has gone unheeded. Nilsen distinguishes between the purpose of a dead metaphor, which is basic communication, and a literary metaphor, which is emotional impact, arguing that teachers should be “more *respectful* of clichés and stale figures of speech” because students enjoy reviving these dead metaphors (279, author’s emphasis). Emphasizing the referential function of clichés and metaphors, Nilsen explains that metaphors use “common everyday terms as a way of dealing with new, unfamiliar concepts” (280). Although Nilsen provides solid rhetorical reasons for using clichés and metaphors, he fails to undermine the prejudice against their use.

Dawn Skorczewski extends Nilsen’s advocacy of clichés and idioms, arguing that their use does not necessarily indicate students’ uncreative thoughts, complacency, or stunted critical consciousness. Perplexed by students’ writing that contains evidence of critical thinking and complete acquiescence to cultural beliefs, Skorczewski wonders why students’ conclusions rely on clichés that “contradicted everything they had said” (224). She concludes that clichés function as an anchor in alien waters, not unlike a cultural commonplace, to which students

willingly and readily acquiesce (224). Scorzewski points out that teachers respond in simplistic, if not clichéd ways, to students' use of clichés: "Our own situations and histories can tell us a lot about how we respond and why we say the things we do on student papers, and they can help us understand the reasons for what we perceive as our students' limited vision as well" (236). In short, the prejudice against clichés, idioms, and aphorisms is rooted in a narrow definition of communication, institutional conventions, and social ideology.

Most teachers continue to believe that the use of idioms, clichés, and aphorisms is evidence of poor writing, and, by extension, representative of a conventional mind and an uncultivated sensibility. As "ai pang sai kah-lai or kang" illustrates, an idiom is interpellated with cultural dictates; natural, biological urges serve as a cultural commonplace. However, such an embodied way of knowing conflicts with a civilized American sensibility as inculcated by institutions of learning. By failing to acknowledge these embodied ways of knowing and by disparaging idioms that reflect a cultural-cognitive-corporeal fusion, American teachers unconsciously blind themselves to the cultural and corporeal shifts required of their students as they gain competency in a new discourse register or even a second language. Lynn Bloom persuasively identifies these shifts as reinforcing "the values and virtues embodied not only in the very existence of America's vast middle class, but in its general well-being—read promotion of the ability to think critically and responsibly, and the maintenance of safety, order, cleanliness, efficiency" (655). As students learn to read and write in the sanctioned academic register, they are conditioned slowly, absorbing "a vast subtext of related folkways, the whys and hows of good citizenship in their college world, and by extrapolation in the workday world for which their educations are designed to prepare them" (656). Bloom identifies advice in *The Elements of Style*, for example "Use figures of speech sparingly," as inculcating in students a middle-class sensibility, one that esteems plainness, simplicity, orderliness, and sincerity (662). She cautions teachers against punishing lower-class students for not being more middle class (655; see also Brodkey *Writing* 130). Working-class students, minorities, and non-native speakers of English may encounter barriers to literacy not only in the form of content and subject matter but also in the judgmental disciplining of teachers toward their non-middle-class sensibility and embodiments.

In the process of making students more literate in the ways of the university and the middle-class, this culture of schooling participates in symbolic and corporeal violence. J. Elspeth Stuckey maintains that "literacy is a system of oppression that works against entire societies as well as against certain groups from within given populations and against individual people" (64). Similarly, Richard E. Miller also underscores how educational institutions sanction violence against students, whereby most teachers serve as "functionaries," enacting the goals and beliefs of the institution (18). Miller recounts the ways in which teachers comply with the official description of education and seldom tolerate student resistance and outbursts. Rather, as Henry A. Giroux has pointed out eloquently, schooling is the site of social reproduction, ideological inculcation, and cultural power relations. Giroux concludes that working-class students and, by extension, minorities and international students need an awareness of the "themes that dominate their lives . . . [to] learn to respect their own language and traditions while at the same time learning how to master the knowledge codes and skills appropriated

by the dominant class” (106). Literacy learning is never an innocent or natural activity. Rather, it requires simultaneously a repudiation of home and native ways of knowing and being *and* an internalization of middle-class systems of oppression.

Neither an innate preference nor a marker of social superiority, the “taste” for a plain, unadorned style results from the circulation of culture in relationship with actual bodies. Language learning then involves not only what is expressed individually and personally, but also what is shared socially and culturally. It is crucial that teachers recognize how discourse conventions do create communal membership or alienate individuals, how language teaching is not merely about the accepted ways of communicating ideas, how teachers themselves perpetuate a “false consciousness” about the value of accepted modes of language use. By considering how such conventional turns of phrases circulate, we can recognize the subtle layering of social and cultural imperatives that permeate our ways of speaking and knowing, easing our students’ transition and healing a body-mind split.

Hokkien Idioms as Cultural Commonplace

As teachers, we must realize that the learning of a new language or discourse register involves uncovering invisible networks, framed by tacit institutional arrangements, systems of power, politics of control, and conventions of participation. Idioms offer a starting point for that discovery, especially if we make idioms the focus of investigation, implicitly warranting their presence in the academic classroom. Consider what an exploration of idioms, clichés, and aphorisms might reveal to our students about themselves, their cultural beliefs, and the changes they undergo to enter the academy. Below, I illustrate the tacit cultural frameworks, social values, and communal thought patterns imbued in Hokkien idioms.

In my native Chinese-Malaysian culture, Hokkien idioms are natural, accepted, and even encouraged discourse conventions that illustrate not only a speaker’s cultural knowledge and linguistic dexterity but also his or her rootedness in the community and culture. These idioms express traditional ethical values and social hierarchies in a form understood by everyone. These idioms, while tied to private bodily experiences, evolve into dicta that specify ways in which the individual must act in relationship to the larger social order. These common Hokkien aphorisms—like the idiom on procrastination—illustrate how the Malaysian-Chinese’s attitudes toward reality grow out of the body, particularly normal bodily functions, and how embodiment informs epistemology and socio-cultural behavior.

An oral dialect of Chinese spoken primarily in the north-western part of Malaysia, Hokkien vernacular is part folk-wisdom, part communication shorthand, deriving from and illustrating the way of life of an agrarian, peasant class. Although the Chinese tend to avoid direct discourse, these brutally honest colloquialisms permeate everyday conversation, referring to private body parts, bodily fluids, and clandestine actions. Over time, these idioms entered the larger Hokkien culture so that they are used widely by men and women, rich and poor, educated and illiterate. By employing these idioms, Hokkien speakers discourse frankly and sincerely; by using these shared ways of speaking and thinking, they soften any censure and encourage goodness by reaffirming a shared social identity, one

aimed at communal solidarity and belonging. In short, a dialectical relationship exists between an idiom's embodied foundation and its intricate network of socio-cultural beliefs.

The many social regularities in Hokkien culture are not taught through direct instruction but are assimilated through models, examples, and idioms. While reason is prized in Western civilization, the Chinese attitude is less sanguine: "reason is for questions of means; for your ends in life, listen to aphorism, example, parable, and poetry" (Graham 7). The product of "social mimesis," a person is legitimized by internalizing the indirectly articulated social dicta.

As most Hokkien speakers know, the bodily lower stratum is connected with all sorts of degradation, depravity, carnality, and vice. The waste that is excreted from the lower stratum is equated with the lower level thinking and behavior. A very dense person results when she or he is nourished by excrement or "cheak sai eh" (a person who eats feces). While M. M. Bakhtin might underscore the fecund and regenerative power of excrement in his description of the grotesque image of the body, in Hokkien idioms excrement corrupts, destroys, and defiles.

The source that expels feces represents the seat of transgression. Taking credit for someone else's accomplishments is not only discouraged but also criticized in the most derogatory terms possible: "giah lang eh kah-chui choe bin phoeh" (take someone else's backside as one's face). A person's face is the synecdoche for a person's honor, integrity, and achievement, a concept in which Hokkien speakers, like many other Chinese communities, are invested. "Face gain" involves an external social focus, emphasizing the need to attain respect and distinction before others. "Face loss" entails embarrassment and shame. Thus, to take credit for someone else's accomplishments is both a personal failure and a deviation from acceptable social responsibility. Emphasizing a harmonious social order in which each person fulfilled his or her obligations and responsibilities, the idiom rests its authority on bodily hierarchy—the low and high trading places literally and figuratively.

These Hokkien idioms identify behavioral lapses in terms of transgressing the body-part hierarchy. When the excrescences from the lower bodily stratum invade and corrupt the upper bodily stratum, as in the case "bakchiew hor siow/sai kor" (eyes gummed up by semen/feces), a person has lost his or her discerning faculties and vision. The nature of this blindness is not a personal but a social one. The choice of substance by which the eyes are rendered sightless is telling indeed: not only is sight mired in a socio-material world, but also its failure is considered profane and debased. As social subjects acquire ways of doing and being through language, they also discern deeply ingrained characteristic dispositions from these idioms that derive their authority from biology.

Hokkien idioms highlight an understanding of abstract social relations in terms of body-part concepts. These idioms and their use fulfill two functions. First, they allow speakers to judge social behavior indirectly. Second, they demonstrate how personal and social rules are never interrogated because of the essentialist, normative nature of biological functions and reactions. The material-semiotic domain of these idioms encompasses acceptable and taboo communal behavior in addition to rendering individual (private) bodies public. However, such embodied, pragmatic home knowledges may be lost when teachers insist that students are taught to disavow idioms—cultural commonplaces—and use fresh, creative turns of phrases in their writing.

Idiom Analysis as a Progymnasmata

One way that idioms with their mind-body interface might be incorporated more fully into composition teaching is through a reclamation of the progymnasmata, or classical Greek exercises. Used to hone students' compositional and cognitive skills, the progymnasmata include a commonplace, which requires that students amplify or elaborate on some commonly held belief (Crowley and Hawhee 335). In his composition textbook which translates the progymnasmata for contemporary writing contexts, Frank D'Angelo explains that legal rhetoric fueled commonplace exercises where speakers debated the good or evil of a deed, praising the virtues or blaming the vices in order to "exact a just punishment" (138-39). Commonplaces, or undisputed general statements, not unlike idioms, clichés, and aphorisms, express "a commonplace sentiment that most reasonable people would agree with" (151). Simply, commonplaces reveal cultural ideologies. Like commonplaces, idioms tap into our most basic ways of knowing about and functioning in the world—through our senses and bodies—revealing the tacit, embedded, embodied, socio-cultural injunctions by which we live.

To study idioms as a commonplace exercise, teachers "expose students to authentic forms of learning that reflect the embodied, dynamic, collective and ecological webs of knowing" asking: what does using an idiom do to, and for, an individual or community (Hocking et al. xxiv)? Students could collect idioms in their home culture or subcultures by conducting primary research, i.e., talking with parents, grandparents, friends, etc. Students might keep a "sayings" journal where they record the idioms, colloquialisms, and aphorisms used on a daily basis, ones that they speak or are spoken to them. By so doing, students construct a corpus of idioms, which they can then analyze rhetorically. This journal might also record the circumstances under which those idioms are used so that students can begin by considering the strategic and contextual nature of their language use. By sharing their own compendium of idioms, teachers might purposely point out how idioms underscore or repress our physical bodies and encourage or disrupt social expectations, performing actions and constructing realities. By analyzing these idioms, students develop the critical distance they need to move beyond the personal, to cultivate a conscious, intellectual stake in the language habits they bring to the university.

The study of our most informal, conventional language practices then offers three lessons. First, students develop a better appreciation of how language use cannot be divorced from an ecology of influences, including our embodied understanding of the world. Second, students acquire a concrete way to comprehend their own literacies, including how the literacies (and bodies) they bring may clash with the discourse conventions of the university. Third, students uncover the linguistic links between tangible, material processes and abstract, intellectual concepts. Students might discover how idioms help them communicate their realities to an audience; at the same time, idioms help organize those realities in socially sanctioned ways. In short, students cultivate an appreciation and validation of their home ways of knowing as well as an orientation to those ways of knowing—the academic analysis—that reflects their budding identities as novice academics. Such study positions them on the cusp, enabling them to maintain their home culture while acquiring a sense of academic belonging. ○

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What Happens When We Read: Picturing a Reader's Responsibilities

Laurence Musgrove

1. Visualizing Reading

*One cannot arrange a classic.
It is the reader's life that opens a book.
—Richard Rodriguez*

In “The Reception of Reader-Response Theory,” Patricia Harkin provides a short historical overview of reader-response theory and claims that it can play a central role in current composition pedagogies as the need for explicit reading instruction returns to the college writing classroom.¹ I agree that reader-response theory can be very useful in first-year composition courses that include or primarily focus on literary texts. I also believe it can play a productive role in high school and college literature courses.

For some time, I have been working to help my students learn the value of reader-response theory, or, as Harkin terms it, “a generalized account of what happens when human beings engage in a process they call ‘reading’” (411). More specifically, I want students to understand reader-response theory as an effort to prompt them to stand back and acknowledge what they bring to reading, what a text has to offer, what responses are possible, and what they can do to evaluate the quality of their responses. Because I am continually interested in what my students contribute to their own learning—their attitudes, their knowledge, their skills—and how these affect their chances for success, I have been particularly drawn to thinking about learning as a developing and active relationship between students and the objects of their study. This interest in the subjective nature and power of learning has made reader-response theory very appealing to me, and I have searched for ways to incorporate reflective practices into my teaching, not only in composition but in my literature classes as well.

Lately, I have tried to promote reflective learning in two ways. First, like many teachers, I have students create writing portfolios in order to help them picture themselves as learners-in-action, students responsible for and empowered by their learning. Not only do students collect their writing projects and reading responses here,

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but they also set reading and writing goals, discuss their achievements as the term progresses, and in the end reflect on the degree to which they have been able to reach their goals. Second, I have students attempt to visualize what happens when they read. I ask them to consider their histories as readers, their attitudes toward reading, their favorite things to read, the places and times they like to read, and the processes they employ. Next, I ask them to draw a picture of what happens when they read. Finally, I ask them to write a description of how their drawings depict what happens when they read. While I am still in the early stages of collecting and analyzing these pictures, I have learned that very few students draw or describe anything that resembles a process.² It is ironic that we regularly teach writing as a process and help students move through the various stages of planning, drafting, sharing, revising, editing, and publishing their work, but rarely do we offer students a procedural perspective on reading. It is also probably true that students rarely encounter a graphic depiction of what happens when we read.

Therefore, I would like to propose a visual representation of reading as a process for English teachers who want to provide their students with clear strategies for engaging and responding more fully, reflectively, and responsibly to literature whether the setting is the composition or literature classroom. To represent this process, I've designed the simple graphic (see Figure 1). The four shapes of this graphic represent the four elements of the reading process: the reader, the text, the response, and the review.

The reader is represented by an arrow because the reader is the only active participant in the process. The reader comes to the text and creates a response. The reader also brings along all kinds of skills, knowledge, and attitudes that affect the kind of response that will be created.

The text is represented by a triangle because the text stands alone waiting for a reader to initiate the relationship. While the text is an inanimate object, it still contains a world of experiences for the reader to discover and interpret. This "rhetorical" world will also reveal information about the author, the variety of topics raised by the story, poem, or drama, the author's formal choices when crafting the text, and the implied audience.

Because the response results from the relationship the reader has developed with the text, the response is located above and between the arrow and the triangle. It is

²Over the last three years and in two separate studies, I've collected almost 300 drawings by first semester college students that depict their reading habits. These students were enrolled in developmental writing classes, regular first-year writing, or Honors English, and their drawings were collected during the first two weeks of classes. Initially, I assumed that these drawings would reveal students' attitudes toward and assumptions about reading through a shared vocabulary of images. While this research is in its very early stages, there are a few initial and tentative conclusions that I am prepared to make. First of all, students did communicate their reading habits in a limited and common vocabulary. As might be expected, the most common image was that of a reader. The second most common image was a book with no title, and the third was a thought-bubble. Other common images included a bed, question marks, a landscape, and Zs in a thought-bubble to signify sleeping. Second, and more significant to my concerns here, only nineteen students, or about 10 percent, drew a process of reading. Again, this was a very limited study, but I believe it does contribute to Harkin's claim that a new pedagogy of reading is necessary.

See <http://english.sxu.edu/musgrove/PRP/ipa2004.ppt> for a brief overview of the purpose for, design of, and results from my second study. I hope to broaden this research by gathering a larger sample of drawings from first-year students.

ars provide teachers of English with a better understanding of what happens when readers engage texts, produce responses, and evaluate the quality of those responses. In very general terms, Rosenblatt, Probst, and Booth are all “reader-response” theorists, individual teachers and scholars interested in how readers create responses to literature, what responses reveal about readers, and how those responses might be improved. Moreover, they are interested in the ethical or “character-building” potential of reading and responding to literature. They believe that when readers improve their abilities to read and respond to texts responsibly, they improve their abilities to think responsibly about themselves and others. The purpose, then, of literary study is not only developing a further understanding of literature but also developing human understanding.

In the preface to the fifth edition of her landmark book *Literature as Exploration*, Louise Rosenblatt claims that the teaching of literature can make a significant contribution to the promotion and preservation of democracy. She argues that citizens of a democratic society “need the ability to imagine the human consequences of political and economic alternatives and to think rationally about emotionally charged issues” (xv). How does the teaching of literature contribute to imagination and rational thought? While Rosenblatt contends that much of literary education has been continually misguided with its focus on form and the search for right answers, she also offers an alternative approach that accounts for the active roles readers play in the literary experience:

The teacher of literature, then, seeks to help specific human beings discover the satisfaction of literature. Teaching becomes a matter of improving the individual’s capacity to evoke meaning from the text by leading him to reflect self-critically on this process. The starting point for growth must be each individual’s efforts to marshal his resources in relation to the printed page. The teacher’s task is to foster fruitful interactions—or, more precisely, transactions—between individual readers and individual literary texts. (26)

The graphic representation of reading presented above is meant to help students develop just this kind of metacognitive ability to reflect upon their transactions with literature, especially the “reader as arrow” figure designed to remind them of all they carry with them to reading, to acknowledge what Rosenblatt in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* calls their “underlying biases and obsessive attitudes” (151). Literary study then is as much about the exploration and revision of what developing readers bring to the reading process as it is about the literary work itself. The figure of the speech balloon response pointing back to the reader is also meant to emphasize that responses are largely shaped and colored by the knowledge, attitudes, and skills students bring to the reading transaction.

Rosenblatt’s critique of ineffectual teaching practices distinguishes two processes of reading: efferent and aesthetic. Efferent reading occurs when we read for practical purposes, searching for information we can use at a later time. This is the process that students use when highlighting a science text in preparation for an objective test or that we use when scanning the telephone book for a number to call. Aesthetic reading, on the other hand, demands an altogether different process. In *Literature as Exploration*, Rosenblatt writes, “To produce a poem or play, the reader must broaden the scope of attention to include the personal, af-

fective aura and associations surrounding the words evoked and must focus on—experience, live through—the moods, scenes, situations being created during the transaction” (xvii). It may be too commonplace to say that literary experience involves a reader’s personal engagement with characters’ thoughts, feelings, experiences, and conflicts, with the thrill of the rise and fall of language, with the escape into another reality, but it is also unfortunately a commonplace to say that literature teaching often fails to offer this mode of reading to students. Rather than promoting fruitful engagements, schools tend to dehumanize literary study by emphasizing an efferent and assessment-driven approach concerned with quantifying literary experience into correct answers: names, dates, and categories. The consequences to literacy and our understanding of others continue to plague us.

As an alternative, Rosenblatt outlines a transactional process of reading literature that accounts for how responses are created when readers and texts meet. In other words, instead of focusing on the formal qualities of the literary work or, just as harmful, on the first impressions of inexperienced readers, Rosenblatt maintains that teachers should help students learn how responses are dependent upon what readers bring and what the text evokes. “The same text,” she argues, “will have a very different meaning and value to us at different times or under different circumstances” (*Literature* 35). When students learn how their skills, knowledge, and attitudes allow or inhibit their responses, they have the opportunity to understand themselves as active readers in the creation of responses that reflect who they are. In this sense, reading is not about getting the correct interpretation; reading is about self-awareness. But it is also much more. When students learn reading as an opportunity to test themselves against the skills, knowledge, and attitudes portrayed in the novel, poem, or play, they also have the chance to become more aware of others; to grow new skills, new knowledge, and new attitudes; to change their minds and values in the company of others on the page and in the classroom (62-69; 72-73).

Understanding the nature of subjectivity, that our responses are created out of who we are, allows us to see that others read and respond according to the same logic; we deduce from what we bring with us: the baggage, light or heavy, of our lives. The teacher’s role, in Rosenblatt’s opinion, should be to foster students’ critical abilities to analyze rationally their first literary deductions, examining the evidence available in themselves and in the text, wary of snap judgments and emotionally charged reactions. Thus, teachers of literature must encourage students to understand their responsibilities to go beyond initial responses by reviewing the story, poem, or play: “An undistorted vision of the work of art requires a consciousness of one’s own preconceptions and prejudices concerning the situations presented in the work, in contrast to the basic attitudes toward life assumed in the re-created work” (*Literature* 109).³

³In “Approaching Texts in School,” Karen Gallas and Peter Smagorinsky argue that reader-response approaches may focus too much on what individual readers bring to texts and not enough on how socialization shapes the ways readers make meaning (58). I believe most reader-response theorists acknowledge culture as a significant influence on a reader’s response, but making interpretation a more publicly shared activity in the classroom can provide excellent opportunities not only for a cultural studies approach to literature but for students to reflect on their cultural assumptions as well.

The process of literary exploration then is a continual back and forth between response and analysis, reviewing our responses and examining the logic of their creation. This challenge, as Rosenblatt claims, will cue not only self-inquiry but an enhanced interest in literary craft as well as the kinds of cultural knowledge that might broaden our understanding and appreciation of the work (*Literature* 117). And this other movement from personal response to an increased knowledge of ourselves, literary technique, and the enlarged world of ideas and people around us expands our perspectives and rational capabilities while arming us to become better readers of future texts and future others. It contributes, Rosenblatt concludes, to the larger purpose of strengthening “the ability to escape from the limitations of time and place and environment, the capacity to envisage alternative ways of life and in moral and social choices, the sensitivity to thought and feeling and needs of other personalities” (276). Good readers of literature already know these outcomes and values. So do good teachers of literature. The visual representation of literary response and analysis offered here is designed to assist teachers and students in realizing these same ends by emphasizing graphically what students bring to reading (the arrow), what the text has to offer them (the triangle), how responses are created out of that relationship (the speech balloon), and what students can do to evaluate and improve the quality of their responses (the box enclosure).

An excellent summary of Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of teaching literature as well as practical advice on implementing reader-response theory in the classroom is contained in Robert Probst’s *Response and Analysis*. In the first section of his book, Probst reviews the basic elements of response-based teaching and provides specific ways teachers can encourage discussion and writing about literature (41-63). He also suggests ways students might discover relationships between assigned texts and common themes (65-81). In the second section, Probst focuses on the formal qualities of genre, the values of young adult literature, and the importance of teaching visual literacy. Extended lists of recommended adolescent and popular adult literature categorized by theme are also provided in this section (124-27, 135-37, 143-69). In the third and final section, Probst reflects on the history of teaching literature, the influence of the transactional model on curriculum development, the role of evaluation and testing in literature courses, and the influence of current literary theory (including subjective criticism, reception aesthetics, and structuralism) on the approaches he is advocating in *Response and Analysis*.

For the purposes of encouraging student response, one of Probst’s most useful contributions comes when he theorizes on the range of literary response. While he admits that the options for response are almost limitless—given what students bring to reading and what the multitude of texts have to offer—they tend to fall within five general strategies: personal, topical, interpretive, formal, and broader concerns (56-61).

The first and most common response strategy is a personal one. When readers respond in this way, they remark upon how the text makes them feel or what personal experience or person comes to mind. In these cases, a reader’s response reveals more about the reader than the poem, story, or drama. Still, personal responses are necessary and valuable first steps even though some may veer dramatically away from the text and focus only on what the reader knows and feels and thus disable any further engagement with and exploration of the text (56-

58). A poem like Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz," for instance, might cue reminders of the reader's childhood or a parent, and words in the poem like "whiskey" and "scrapped" might cue unpleasant feelings.

A second response strategy uncovers topics or issues introduced by the text. Because literature anthologies are often organized by theme, topical responses are another frequent mode of literary analysis. To claim that Roethke's poem is concerned with childhood or family is to make a remark about its topic (58). Still, this is a fairly low-level mode of response.

Interpretive strategies demand a fuller examination because they move beyond immediate reactions and generalizations to claims about some specific aspect of the text or its overall intention and craft. For example, if a reader wanted to claim that "My Papa's Waltz" should be interpreted as celebrating the relationship between a father and his child, that reader would have to offer evidence to support that argument. This evidence could come from a number of sources, such as the reader's experience, the poem itself, other readers, and other critical sources. "Marshalling such evidence," Probst claims, "is an extremely important skill that deserves a significant place in the literature classroom" (59).

Another common strategy for responding to literature is to analyze its formal qualities. Formal responses focus on the rhythmic, rhyming, figurative, physical, and repetitive nature of poems, stories, and plays. When readers examine narrative structures, poetic meter, and set design, they are engaged in strategies focusing on the formal qualities of literary experience. To analyze Roethke's poem formally requires attention to its analogies, rhyme, and waltzing meter. Formal analysis alone, however, is again limited in scope, especially when, as Probst remarks, "it is imposed as an exercise, not to answer questions raised by the text" (60).

In the final category of broader literary concerns, Probst includes response strategies, such as the study of biography and literary history, which move the reader beyond the text to related interests (60). The reader of "My Papa's Waltz" might wish to investigate Roethke's biography, read his other poems, examine his contemporaries in twentieth-century poetry, or study the lives of the working class during the Depression. Each of these paths leads the reader away from the original text toward secondary sources that may eventually lead the reader back, armed with a broader understanding and appreciation of the primary text.

Because inexperienced readers commonly believe that there is only one true and correct interpretation for every text, they may be surprised at the various methods of response available to them. By practicing these options one by one as well as in combination, they learn that they have choices—and a certain degree of freedom—when responding to literature. They should also learn that a generous analysis and interpretation depends upon a generous helping of each. As Probst puts it, "The range of responses is broad, and students are better off learning a whole scale than restricting themselves to one note" (61).

The value therefore of Probst's theory of response is not only in the delineation of these five strategies but also in the notion that readers have choices and that multiple responses to the same text are possible, none necessarily privileged over the others, yet together they are more comprehensive in their combined power of analysis and understanding. In the graphic representation of reading I am recommending, the speech balloon situated above and between the reader and the text stands not only for the response created out of the relationship between the reader and the text but also for the range of response possibilities available to the

reader. To help students understand that they have choices when they respond also accentuates the active role they play as readers and, thus, their responsibilities to choose well.⁴

Wayne Booth has focused much of his scholarship on the rhetorical nature of fiction. In short, Booth believes that literature is ultimately persuasive because it grows out of an author's desire to communicate to readers an aesthetic experience via literary language. Of particular interest to my purpose here is Booth's theoretical work—most evidently played out in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*—on the quality of relationships that exist between readers and texts, and among readers of the same text. Even though literature, according to Booth, is not explicitly didactic, authors make creative choices that nonetheless promote some beliefs, characters, literary forms, and readers over others. Booth also believes these choices are best understood as invitations to assent to the author's vision and value system:

Each narrative, fictional or historical, provides an alternative story set in a created "world" that is itself a fresh alternative to the "world" or "worlds" previously serving as boundaries of the reader's imagination. Each work of art or artifice, even the simplest wordless melody, determines to some degree *how at least this moment should be lived*. The quality of life in the moment of our "listening" is not what it would have been if we had not listened. We can even say that the proffered work shows us how our moments *should* be lived. If the maker of the art work did not believe that simply experiencing it constitutes a superior form of life, why was the work created and presented to us in the first place? (17, author's emphasis)

Given this view of literature's purpose, Booth argues for a mode of reader-response criticism concerned with providing readers with a method for evaluating the literary companionships authors extend to us (3-20).

While ethical criticism accepts the rhetorical and persuasive nature of literary art, it also accounts for the variety of reader response. In other words, the evaluation of the story, poem, or play is contingent, as Rosenblatt reminds us, on readers. Although there are no hard and fast rules or critical dogmas available that will make these judgments easy and true for all readers, literary evaluation

⁴When I outline possible response strategies for my students, I drop the category of "broader concerns" from Probst's list and add six more: biographical, historical, cultural, audience analysis, creative, and ethical. When we focus our interests on the life of the author, we respond biographically. When we are interested in the historical contexts of the work, we respond historically. Cultural responses occur when we consider how social contexts influence our judgments about the cultural world of the text. When we imagine the audiences for which the author might have been writing, we are engaged in audience analysis. In addition, when we study how different readers respond differently to the same text, we are practicing a form of audience analysis. A fifth common strategy is the creative response. When we use another author's language, style, characters, or forms to create our own story, poem, or play, we are responding creatively. Finally, when we imagine the value of the literary world to ourselves and other potential readers, we are creating ethical responses. (See my discussion of Booth's work below for more on the ethics of reading.) These response strategies are not exhaustive, but they do offer an introductory range of methods for developing readers.

cannot be left to indiscriminate and subjective musings either. As Booth phrases it, “the logic we depend on as we arrive at our particular appraisals is neither deduction from clear premises, even of the most complex kind, nor induction from a series of precisely defined and isolated instances (71).

In response to these extremes, Booth proposes a logic for ethical criticism and invents a new term to signify this collaborative act of literary response and analysis. “Coduction,” he proposes,

will be what we do whenever we say to the world (or prepare ourselves to say): “Of the works of this general kind that I have experienced, comparing my experience with other more or less qualified observers, this one seems to me among the better (or weaker) ones, or the best (or worst). Here are my reasons.” Every such statement implicitly calls for continuing conversation: “How does my coduction compare with yours?” (72-73)

Thus, ethical criticism is situational because it depends upon human interaction in particular times and places; consequently, the results of ethical criticism are provisional because the quality of the evaluative responses must always depend upon the quality of the respondents’ abilities to read, respond, analyze, and judge together. Therefore, the literature teacher’s purpose is not to dispense correct interpretations or even to show students where the correct interpretations might be found, but to improve students’ abilities to evaluate critically, cooperatively, and collaboratively the skills, knowledge, and attitudes literature offers. In this way, the teacher does not evaluate a student’s interpretation as being wrong or right; the teacher evaluates his or her students’ abilities to demonstrate conductive criticism with the knowledge that varying interpretations may co-exist.

More specifically, the logic of ethical criticism demands responsible conduct on the part of the reader toward the text and toward other readers. According to Booth, readers are initially responsible for giving themselves over generously to the author’s vision. This, of course, includes generous reading habits, such as full attention to the text and genuine interest in what other sources and readers can contribute to our understanding and appreciation of that vision. Passive and uncritical acceptance of that vision, however, would be irresponsible conduct. Booth believes that readers are further obligated to evaluate the degree to which the values envisioned “join” or “conflict” with their own (135). In other words, good reading demands we move to ethical concerns by asking, “Do the patterns of desire seemingly privileged by the work attempt to enlarge or belittle us?” Following the golden rule of treating others as we would have others treat us, Booth analogizes this preferred behavior of criticism to the virtuous acts of the best kind of friendship, wanting to embrace, understand, inspire, and improve us. In other words, when investigating the quality of a literary work, we should evaluate the sort of friendship it offers us, what sort of friendship it demands of us in return, and what sort of friendship we offer other readers in our talk together about these literary friendships. Booth maintains, “[t]he key question in the ethics of narration, then, so long as we pursue it under this personal metaphor, becomes: Is the pattern of life that this would-be friend offers one that friends might well pursue together?” (222).

Booth’s concern with the quality of literary experiences (those we encounter in reading and those we encounter when talking about what we are reading) re-

lates in two main ways to the graphic representation of reading I'm offering here. First and foremost, when students learn reading as the act of building a friendship with a text, they may better understand the responsibilities that come with that friendship. These responsibilities include reviewing how they came to their responses and expanding the company they keep as they broaden that relationship further. For example, when we challenge ourselves to test our responses against other critical resources, the evidence available in the text itself, and other readers' responses, we not only enlarge our capacity to imagine, understand, and appreciate what we are reading but also enlarge our capacity to include the perspectives of other readers. In this sense, reading literature is not an end in itself; it is the means to a broader understanding of others. In the graphic representation of reading responsibly, the "review" stage offers students further opportunities to understand their responsibilities by reflecting on how they've arrived at their responses and how they might broaden their responses. Returning to the five response strategies Probst details in his book, we can add an "ethical" response. Following Booth's call that we attend to the vision or pattern of life offered to us by literature, we respond ethically when we review our engagement with the literary work and imagine what value it might have for others. Reading and responding ethically occurs when we think of other readers we want to share a poem, story, or play with because we think they will find the work enjoyable and enlightening. We also respond ethically when we decide that a particular work will do another reader harm or "no good." In addition, an ethical response strategy should prompt us to consider the quality of the relationship we build with a text. When we accept with humility the limits of our knowledge and skill and reach out to others to help us explore the possibilities of a literary experience, we are acting ethically toward that work.

3. Responsible Reading

*When a practitioner becomes a researcher into his own practice,
he engages in a continuing process of self-education.*
—Donald Schön

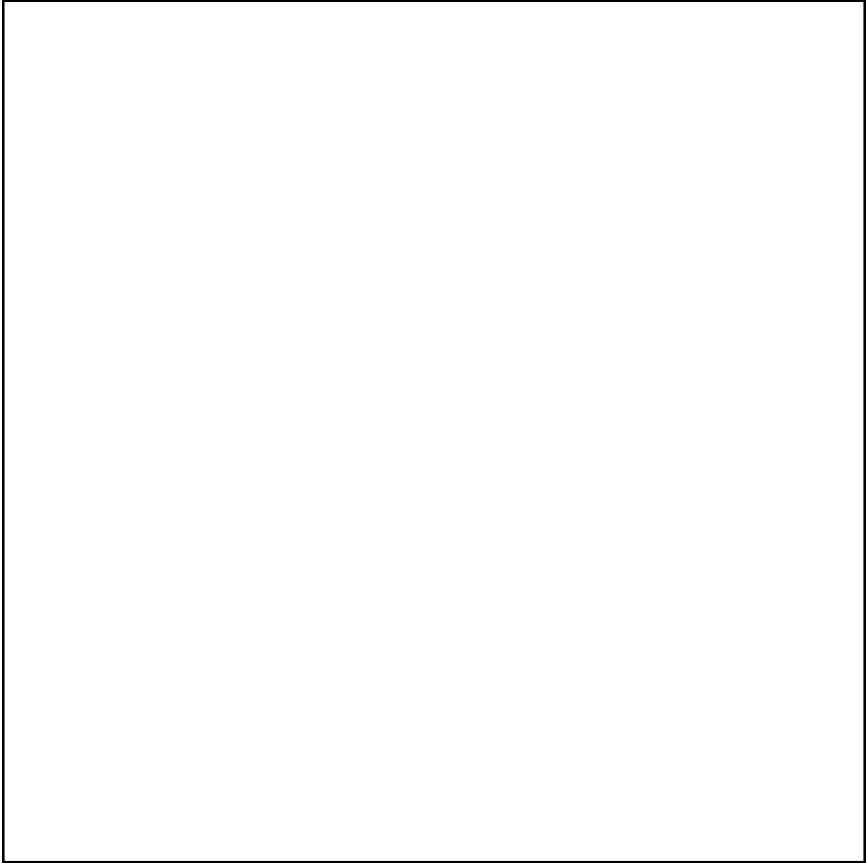
Taken together, Rosenblatt, Probst, and Booth characterize reading as a relationship-building activity that can be dramatically improved when students reflect upon and better understand the active roles they play, the world the text has to offer them, the response options available to them, and the responsibilities they have to review and improve their responses when reading literature. Learning to read virtuously must also include a setting in which students are prompted to move from private and isolated reading to public and cooperative discussion, seeing themselves in a community of generous readers who are enriched not only by literature but by each other as well.

In the final analysis, my desire is to offer teachers graphic support for teaching a process of reading literature that is explicitly reader-focused and that emphasizes the unique responsibilities students have as they begin to develop relationships with literature.⁵ It is just as important that they encourage students to

⁵Find below Figure 2, an expanded version of the graphic representation of reading as a process reflecting in more detail the ideas presented in this article.

see how the skills they develop and the responsibilities they learn also apply to their lives after their books are closed.

Figure 2: A Reader's Responsibilities Detailed



As a teacher of introductory writing and literature at the college level concerned with developing students' abilities to reflect critically about their own learning habits, I find Figure 2 helpful as way to represent reading as a process. I begin each semester by telling my students that there will be one question on the final exam. The question is "What does a reader's response reveal?" I then give them the answer: "The reader." I don't mean to overstate the power of the reader or to denigrate what a text contributes to the literary transaction. However, when new college students year after year tell me that the readings I've assigned are hard to understand or boring, when they continually blame texts for their own reading failures, I'm able to respond by quickly drawing a simple graphic on the board in order to help them see that their responses reveal more about them than the object they are describing and condemning. I can tell them that when they claim a text is hard to understand, they are really saying that they don't have the understanding they need for the text. Then I can ask them to think

about what they need to learn to be the reader the text desires. I can also tell them that they may want to reconsider claiming that a text is boring because of what it may reveal about them as readers.⁶ But when students take themselves and reading seriously and when they develop the ability to acknowledge and reflect upon their own subjectivity, they are better prepared to move forward, to become more mature readers of themselves and of the texts offered to them. They are ready to reflect, revise, and be held responsible. □

⁶Mariolina Rizzi Salvatori and Patricia Donahue offer an alternative method for responding to student boredom in their textbook *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty*, one of the most recent efforts to resurrect reader-response theory in the service of teaching writing and literature (37-38). In addition, their definition of "active reading" is similar to the process of reading I am promoting here. "Active reading," they maintain, "is a process of interpretation and reflection, whereby a reader constructs meaning, establishes significance, and reflects on the limits of his or her understanding. Active readers are often conscious of their moves and can describe them" (128).

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Mindfulness, Buddhism, and Rogerian Argument

Alexandria Peary

In many American universities, there is a course called Communication Skills. I am not certain what they teach, but I hope it includes the art of deep listening and loving speech. These should be practiced every day if you want to develop true communication skills.

—Thich Nhat Hanh,
Teachings on Love

On a given day in the semester in a rhetoric class, a bright yellow blob of a wind-up baby Easter chick passes from student to student. The class is extremely calm, and it would be hard to tell that the students are engaged in an argument on US military strikes on Iraq. A student “requests the chicken,” and, once the chicken is passed to him, he holds it in his palm and breathes deeply for fifteen seconds. Only after he has paid attention to his breathing does this student begin to speak, and, when he speaks, no one interrupts him or raises his or her hand. The student finishes, a few seconds of quiet pass, and then another student politely “requests the chicken.” The pattern continues; significantly, the argument as a whole is one of the group’s finest, replete with logical connections and usage of a range of rhetorical strategies.

The above-described class activity is both practice for an upcoming assignment in Rogerian argument and an embodiment of Carl Rogers’ principles of communication. Difficulties arising in undergraduate instruction of Rogerian argument largely result from the challenges of teaching empathy and conscious listening inherent to both Rogers’ therapy and the argument. To foster these Rogerian components, instructors can help students practice the Buddhist activities of deep listening and mindful speech. Throughout the argument structured with the wind-up chicken, the students are utilizing a version of Buddhist deep listening and mindful speech in order to become aware of their constantly evaluative, discursive inner dialogue about others’ ideas. While employing these mindfulness strategies, students simultaneously develop their rhetorical imagination: the ability to posit the outlook of their opposition—to enter imaginatively the being of another—a skill crucial to the rhetorical strategies of Rogerian argument. Lacking rhetorical imagination, students will be less able to access objective language in order to present the views of the opposition, identify the ethos of the opposition, or locate at least one point about which the opposition is correct/has “changed” the rhetor’s mind. Students must be able to visualize imaginatively in an attitude of acceptance that which is distinct from their current outlook in order to engage in the communication of Rogerian argument.

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I wish I had learned Rogerian argument and Rogers' ideas earlier in life, though frankly I wonder if at age nineteen I would have been prepared to empathize with an opposition. The Rogerian is far more than a classroom assignment. The personal application of Rogerian argument can become extensive, as the ideas of conscious listening positively impact teaching, interactions with colleagues and loved ones, and one's own inner dialogue. The teaching of Rogerian argument improves composition classroom pedagogy by helping the instructor create a non-threatening environment for the student to communicate (Hairston 51). Coincidentally, when I teach the Rogerian method, I am the most mindful—or, to apply Rogers' term, authentic—as an instructor. The impact of Rogerian argument has been as beneficial as that of meditation on my overall quality of life; no matter its challenges, perhaps even its unorthodoxy, the Rogerian can compel one to teach it. However, Rogerian communication holds some challenges for students. As this essay will argue, Buddhist deep listening and mindful speech can provide a useful mechanism for composition and rhetoric students, helping them perform Rogerian listening in order to engage in an empathic process while simultaneously developing their rhetorical imagination. Although Rogers has been linked to Eastern thought, those connections have not been fully explored (Van Kalmthout), and such an exploration is important for shaping a more therapeutic, humanistic approach to argument, something that Rogers would advocate (Teich 24).

Teaching Rogers and Rogerian Argument

Rogerian communication, which originated in Rogers' psychoanalytic practice, is built upon three attitudinal principles: congruence (or genuineness), unconditional positive regard, and empathic understanding (Teich 249-50). Perhaps the best source of Rogers' ideas about communication is his 1951 essay, "Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation," in which Rogers connects problems in mental health to problems in communication. According to Rogers, a client lacks a clear line of communication with both herself and with others. This line of communication can be restored through client-centered or nondirective therapy in which the therapist uses neutral description and "listening with understanding" in place of evaluation. Rogers' therapeutic principles of communication were transposed onto an argument structure in two textbooks: Young, Becker, and Pike's 1970 *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* and Maxine Hairston's 1974 *A Contemporary Rhetoric*. The Rogerian can be contrasted with the Aristotelian argument:

[T]he style of argument associated with Aristotle . . . is adversarial, seeking to refute other views, and . . . sees the listener as wrong, someone who now must be overwhelmed by evidence. In contrast to the confrontational Aristotelian style, which allegedly seeks to present an airtight case that compels belief, Rogerian argument . . . is non-confrontational, collegial, and friendly; . . . respects other views and allows for plural truths; and seeks to achieve some degree of assent rather than convince utterly. (Barnet and Bedau 417)

By staying conscious of their natural reactive evaluations of others' ideas and by desisting from interrupting, the students are establishing a climate of acceptance inherent in Rogerian communication.

According to Rogers, the human predilection for constant evaluation (of ourselves, others, our circumstances) causes blocked communication. While a client-centered or nondirective therapist creates an atmosphere of acceptance to allow the client the experience of being fully listened to, the typical everyday mode of communication is evaluation. It's not too great a claim to say that writing for teachers is in fact a type of blocked communication noticed by Rogers. In such a view, the central cause of students' blocked communication is the very same experience of incessant evaluation which blocks a patient seeking help from a mental health specialist. Writing apprehensive students avoid writing because such assignments represent a punishing experience, one "accompanied by the potential for evaluation of that writing" (Faigley, Daly, and Witte 37). As Rogers stated, the tendency toward blocked communication occurs with "defensive distortions" or "the insecurities, the defensive exaggerations, the lies, the 'false fronts' which characterize almost every failure in communication" (*Communication* 423). Consequentially, the situation of receiving comments and a grade on one's writing precludes Rogers' climate of positive acceptance. Secondly, as Peter Elbow noted, a teacher is not a natural reader but rather "one of the trickiest audiences of all" in part because the teacher, unlike other types of readers, is bound to reading the entire document and because the student is explaining material to an audience who presumably already knows the material, thus thwarting the natural impulse to communicate to someone (216-19).

The Liquid Plumber to blocked communication is empathy, in part because empathy prevents that constant evaluation. Rogers frequently uses "understanding" as a stand-in for empathy: "*to see the expressed idea and attitude from the other person's point of view, to sense how it feels to him, to achieve his frame of reference in regard to the thing he is talking about*" (qtd. in Barnet and Bedau 420, Rogers' italics). The net effect of empathic communication is change in the individual, which Rogers describes in "Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation" as "releasing potent forces of change" (302). Empathy is "one of the cornerstones of Carl Rogers' work and life" (Teich 249), but it is difficult to help students practice empathy, "listening with understanding," in Rogers' terminology, for two reasons. First, students doing a required writing assignment are largely in a defensive mode prior to approaching the empathy requirements of the Rogerian. After all, they are writing for a teacher, a highly unnatural communicative situation, as Elbow and others have suggested. Students-writing-for-teachers results in a lack of genuineness in the student-teacher communication, a genuineness or congruence inherent in the Rogerian mode. Empathy, unlike sympathy or pity, involves a degree of self-exposure which will be less possible for an individual in a situation of self-defense. Second, empathy does not seem inherent to our present educational culture. For example, in my classes, I have watched the students laugh with delight when a main character in a film was struck by a bus. Thus, much is already stacked against the successful teaching of Rogerian argument since its requirement of empathy is both something under-known and impossible to know (because it means that the student fears evaluation and becomes defensive). At the same time, the relevancy—and even imperative—of empathic thinking is all too apparent: both to complete the

Rogerian assignment and to develop intellectually and interpersonally. As a result, it is necessary to guide students to develop the empathic ability for argument.

Other disciplines employ imagination to develop an empathic outlook on another individual or society. For example, sociologists talk of a sociological imagination which involves the drawing of connections by an individual between her personal biography and the time period in which she lives (Mills). During instruction, the student attempts to "get beyond himself" through the sociological imagination; the sociology instructor tries to help the student increase her critical thinking capacity and see how she affects and is affected by others. A second application of empathic and imaginative thinking, called realistic empathy or situational attribution, occurs in peace psychology. Realistic empathy is a means for accurately assessing the necessity of military intervention and ultimately for the development of any global peace (White, "Why" 122). Realistic empathy requires that a nation develop an accurate view of itself, an accurate view of its nation-opponent, and an accurate reading of that nation-opponent's perceptions of both itself and the first nation. Thus, military failures occur as a result of overestimating the esteem given to one's own country by other countries while simultaneously underestimating another nation-opponent's willingness to defend itself after an invasion. It is also important to use realistic empathy in order to understand another group's motives for attacking a third group (White, "When").

While imagination particularly (as pertains to invention) has played a role in rhetoric since the beginnings of the Western rhetorical tradition, a different type of rhetorical imagination is necessary for Rogerian argument. In "Refiguring Fantasy: Imagination and Its Decline in U.S. Rhetorical Studies," Joshua Gunn demonstrates how the role of imagination in the earlier rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian was limited to a sort of cosmetics, adding a mimetic, imagistic, or figurative flourish to the logic of an argument (45). Invention began to include the imagination during the Renaissance, and reason was then demoted to the less significant role of arrangement. In the twentieth century, rhetorical imagination was again reconfigured. It became "the imaginary," a sort of collective unconscious that acts as a repository for persuasive elements which are both verbal and nonverbal (47-49). This view of imagination in rhetoric emphasized metaphor, generalized creativity, fantasies, and "intersubjectively shared 'social knowledge'" (47). The imaginary was subject to the critique that it could not provide any real information on audience motivation which could then be applied in argument. The imaginary could not provide motivation because of the Freudian view that material derived from the imagination is inherently unreliable and deceptive. The materials of dreams and fantasies, according to Freud, were not direct translations of the collective unconscious but rather warped representations (50).

However, the rhetorical imagination in the case of the Rogerian argument does provide insight into possible motivations and perspectives of the other party, which the rhetor can use to formulate his or her strategy. This type of rhetorical imagination is in essence a different breed. Rather than focusing on poetic devices such as metaphor or imagery from collective fantasies, this rhetorical imagination emphasizes interpersonal and intrapersonal dialogic interaction. It intensely emphasizes the interpersonal because it is situated within the act of empathizing,

unlike historic applications of imagination in rhetoric. However, unlike overarching empathy, the rhetorical imagination is consciously deployed and done so in persuasive situations. It is empathy with a mission. Similar to sociological imagination and realistic empathy, the Rogerian-based rhetorical imagination requires that the rhetor be first aware of his or her own circumscribed stance; in the case of the rhetorical imagination, however, this awareness occurs through paying attention to one's inner dialogue. If in its most basic form imagination is the act of positing that which is not actually present, whether it be an object, a person, or an event, we can agree that the act of empathy, of understanding someone's views, involves positing the imaginary act of stepping into that person's being. The empathizing actual self is, according to some views, momentarily laid aside. Empathy is distinct from sympathy because with sympathy the other's emotion or experience is understandable because they are similar to those known by the sympathizer. Empathy requires greater imaginative effort as true empathy involves even relating to emotion and experience which are completely foreign to the empathizer.

Changing one's point-of-view, whether it be temporary (obtaining empathic perspective on another) or more durable (absorbing and adopting another's views), inherently involves being imaginative. Moreover, the connection between empathy and the creative arts is evident in the nineteenth-century origins of empathy. The original context for empathy was aesthetic, situated in an observer's experience of losing self-awareness while looking at a work of art (Teich 241). It seems reasonable, therefore, that exercises involving visual arts and creative writing could help students develop the imaginative capabilities inherent in empathy and, as a result, help complete Rogerian argument.

To that end, in the past I've employed several creative exercises in the Rogerian unit. To help students understand the limits and potential of point-of-view, I utilize concepts from Cubism from the visual arts (although a verbal version, for instance, a prose poem from Stein's *Tender Buttons*, could be substituted). In his Cubist works, Picasso is credited for "the creation of a new system of indicating three-dimensional relationships that would not longer be dependent on the convention of illusionist, one point perspective" (Fry 14). Setting a coffee can on one of the seminar tables at the front of the room, I ask students to describe their view of the can from their current seat. A student at the back of the room has one view of the can, its label, its shadow, whereas a student with a differently positioned seat has another. As a group, we then discuss what a single text combining everyone's different descriptions based on their point-of-view would look like. Then a Cubist-style "portrait" is done of a volunteer, who poses in the center of the room. Through a series of prompts, students write phrases describing the volunteer's appearance (from the student's seat), unseen parts of the volunteer's appearance (i.e., what does the back of his or her head look like), empathic guesses at the thoughts and feelings of the volunteer, plus a description of the volunteer's activity ten minutes after the class has ended. In this exercise, students employ creative writing in order to learn a more flexible physical and then psychological point-of-view.

Other components which are typically restricted to creative writing classes could benefit the development of empathy in rhetoric. Students may naturally gravitate toward the creation of fictional characters when doing the Rogerian because of the intensely imaginative nature of the empathic work required by

Rogerian communication. Nathaniel Teich describes how one student switched genre, writing a literary narrative to dramatize the abortion debate for her Rogerian paper (278). Students can be shown persona poems to discuss what techniques make the first person portraits credible. Another possible set-up for developing a different person's point-of-view is to have students actually create a fictional character (possibly even one who embodies the "opposition" of their forthcoming argument paper). Students should understand that the writing exercises, while important to the whole Rogerian unit, are to be done in the rough, like a sketch in which one does not worry about grammar or seek polished creative writing, which would stray from the purpose of the rhetoric course. However, these creative exercises do not surpass the efficacy of teaching mindfulness in conjunction with Rogerian argument.

Buddhism and Rogerian Argument

*By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.
—the Buddha on Loving-kindness*

In the Buddhist sense, both judgment and evaluation involve the human weakness for sorting experience into categories under the motivation of keeping what is pleasant close to us and casting aside what is unpleasant or harmful. Thus, we idly attempt to control experience such that it comes out in our favor. According to the second principle realized by Buddha upon his enlightenment under the bodhi tree, everything passes, and thus through our attachments to "good" experience we are caught up in the endless cycle of suffering called *samsara*. Pema Chodron, a contemporary American Buddhist nun in the Tibetan tradition, explains there is "a common misunderstanding among all the human beings who have ever been born on the earth that the best way to live is to try to avoid pain and just try to get comfortable" (3). Chodron advocates trying to accept instead "how our world ticks, how the whole thing just *is*" (3). To suggest that we shouldn't try to make occurrences come out in our favor may strike people as ludicrous; it's contrary to basic human self-interest. Therefore, we like our rooms a certain temperature, enjoy good meals, and bask in the gratitude and respect given to us by others. Moreover, we take concrete—but futile—measures to ensure these pleasantries.

Even more significant is the way in which our mind endlessly narrates and tries to direct external circumstances. This endless narration—also called "monkey mind" or discursive thinking—largely occurs as inward, non-vocalized evaluations. Every split second, our mind issues an evaluative response either to what's actually out there or to what we anticipate. *I like that color on my coffee cup; that car passing over the loose manhole cover is annoying; that word I just thought up is really dull*, and so forth. When listening to someone else, the inner evaluative dialogue continues, as has also been suggested by Rogers in "What Understanding and Acceptance Mean to Me":

Our first reaction to most of the statements which we hear from other people is an immediate evaluation, or judgment, rather than an understanding of it. When a pupil speaks up in class expressing some feeling or attitude or belief, our tendency is, almost immediately, to feel “That’s good”; “That’s right”; or “That’s bad”; “That’s incorrect.” Very rarely do we permit ourselves to understand precisely what the meaning of his statement is to him. (11)

In “Communication: Its Blocking and Its Facilitation,” he offers an example from the time of the writing of the essay: “if we had a Russian communist speaker here tonight, or Senator Joe McCarthy, how many of us would dare to try to see the world from each of these points of view? The great majority of us could not listen; we would find ourselves compelled to evaluate, because listening would seem too dangerous” (421). Frequently, those inner evaluations impact our interactions and communications with others. Interrupting another person is the most obvious manifestation of that evaluation. Rogers’ diagnosis of our constant evaluation when communicating is uncannily akin to what is described by Buddhist practitioners.

Most significant for our purposes is that Rogers made listening a conscious process by which a therapist suspends judgment of others. In the Fourth Noble Truth, the Buddha delineates eight ways to overcome this endless suffering or *samsara*: Right Understanding, Right Mindedness, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Living, Right Effort, Right Attentiveness, and Right Concentration. Modern monasteries and *sanghas* (meditation groups) practice different activities in order to perform the Noble Eightfold Path, including deep listening and loving speech, the basis of the exercises which I used to teach Rogerian argument. Under the Fourth Truth, Buddhist practitioners attempt deep listening and speech, which involves careful choice of language, avoidance of gossip, chatter, or falsehood, and avoidance of interruption (all the while staying conscious of one’s breathing). During dharma discussions, it is common for practitioners to wait a few mindful breaths after another person has finished speaking before starting to talk. What is avoided is the tendency to interrupt or respond, to ignore the communication occurring in the present moment.

The purpose of all of these activities is to stay conscious of our thoughts, including being aware of how we are evaluating everything. Another word for this type of consciousness is *mindfulness*. The Chinese character for mindfulness is composed of the signs for “mind” and “now” (Hanh, *Path* 151). In essence, a mindful person is aware of the present moment and aware of his or her thoughts in the present moment. A mindful disciple is uniquely qualified for the Rogerian, as “he dwells in contemplation of the mind, either with regard to his own person, or to other persons, or both. He beholds how the mind arises; beholds how it passes away; beholds the arising and passing away of the mind” (Goddard 51). Moreover, mindfulness has been translated from Pali as “activity” as well as “bare attention” (Wood 35). These word origins reinforce the effort involved in staying conscious of thoughts, which is not a passive procedure.

Mindfulness recognizes a difference between the thinker and her thoughts. Mindfulness can be practiced through a variety of everyday actions—eating, talking, listening, walking—and not just on the meditation cushion, but what unites

all mindful activities is a turning inward to watch one's breathing. When Rogers asked therapists to be conscious of a tendency toward diagnosis or evaluation, he is essentially advocating mindfulness, which is far more difficult than it appears, since the human condition is largely one of unmindfulness. In application to an undergraduate assignment with Rogerian argument, I first guide students through some basic meditation steps in order to help them be mindful of their breathing. Students sit in comfortable postures in the chairs and watch their breathing. I ask them to close their eyes—not standard practice in Buddhist meditation—in order to facilitate their concentration. We discuss yogic breathing, or deep-belly breathing, versus anxious, upper-chest breathing. Students are instructed to continue mindfulness of their breath throughout the loving-kindness practice and then the Rogerian (with wind-up chicken) argument.

Two Buddhist practices are particularly conducive to the development of empathy and unblocked communication, both of which I've practiced with my undergraduate students in a required first year rhetoric course. The main purpose of the first activity—mindful speech à la wind-up chicken—is to have students observe their inner reactive tendencies and become less blocked to the ideas of others. In *On Dialogue*, David Bohm describes a self-monitoring in dialogue which is like what occurs in mindfulness practice:

If one is alert and attentive, he can see for example that whenever certain questions arise, there are fleeting sensations of fear, which push him away from consideration of these questions, and of pleasure, which attract his thoughts and cause them to be occupied with other questions. So one is able to keep away from whatever it is that he thinks may disturb him. And as a result, he can be subtly defending his own ideas, when he supposes that he is really listening to what other people have to say. (4)

The second practice, loving-kindness meditation, is the most obvious in its use of imagination to develop empathy, and, as such, loving-kindness meditation is essentially basic training in rhetorical imagination.

Loving-kindness varies, but a standard version involves five mental prompts which are spoken by a meditation leader who says a prompt and allows three or four minutes to pass before uttering the next. First, one turns to oneself and, breathing in, silently says, "May I be happy, healthy, and calm" (or some variant thereof). Breathing out, one then says, "happy, healthy, calm." Attention is paid to mindful breathing throughout the whole process. Then, one turns to a beloved and, breathing in, silently says, "May so-and-so be happy, healthy, and calm." Breathing out, one repeats the same abbreviated phrase as before, but now in reference to the loved one. People who meditate are frequently advised to visualize carrying the person gifts or news which would make him or her particularly happy. One continues the sequence thinking of a neutral (someone in one's everyday life who is a stranger, for instance, the person at the gas station on the way to work), followed by an enemy or troublesome person. Then one thinks of a group of people, for instance, the people in one's city or state. Some people who meditate continue expanding the scope of loving-kindness until it encompasses all of the world, all previous and forthcoming generations. At the final stage, one

silently elevates the whole (self, loved one, neutral, enemy, group) to the highest level of reached loving-kindness. If one felt the most compassion for the loved one, one attempts to bring the enemy, for example, to the same glowing level.

Pedagogical Advantages of Mindfulness and the Rogerian

While loving-kindness is not topic-related per se, the Buddhist techniques of deep listening and mindful speech contained in loving-kindness meditation and in the “wind-up chicken Rogerian” foster several components of Rogerian argument while developing the rhetorical imagination: listening skills, audience interaction, and awareness of the limitations of one’s perspective.

These mindfulness practices greatly enhance listening abilities needed for Rogerian communication. Julia T. Wood, in “Buddhist Influences on Teaching and Scholarship,” describes “mindfulness as an ethical requirement of good listening” (36). In *sanghas*, I am amazed by the richness of interpersonal communication when speech is done with mindful listening. The simple act of withholding my desire to speak in order to pay attention fully to another person’s speaking in the present moment gives me far more satisfaction than if I were to speak my mind. As Rogers suggested, we evaluate while we listen; however, another form of evaluation besides verbally contributing our two cents is nodding, which should be self-monitored because of its basis in evaluation. In addition, I am more likely to absorb other’s ideas and rhetorical strategies, and this can lead me to change my views or add dimension to my argument. A student involved in one of Rogers’ listening-intensive courses also commented upon the way in which conscious listening helps appreciation of what others can offer:

I have shaken off my rigidity in relating to other people in the class. Now, instead of a categorical response, I can listen, and I *hear*. . . . Suddenly, I’m more realistically aware of the paucity of my formal knowledge. . . . I now feel a real intellectual hunger. I think it’s because I have now experienced the two-foldedness of communication. It’s expression, of course; but it’s also listening. I listened. And the experience has forced me to revise my feelings about the omniscience of my wisdom. (qtd. in Rogers, “What” 16)

A community based on listening can be established through both Rogerian communication and mindfulness. That the listening group is an interdependent community is due to the Buddhist principle of “interdependent co-arising,” whereby one’s separateness is said to be an illusion. As such, mindfulness practices such as deep listening are “congenial with dialogic traditions, which insist that points of view, relationships, and selves are not static. Rather they are fluid processes that are continuously open to being (re)formed, largely through interaction between people” (Wood 34).

On first glance, transplanting Rogers’ therapeutic communication style to a classroom argument may appear impossible; it may appear too difficult for students to write as Rogers doctored because writing an argument, unlike seeing a client, seemingly involves monologue. Rogers never organized a “Rogerian argument” per se. Although this distinction persists between Rogerian therapy and

Rogerian argument used in composition classrooms, Rogers did encourage interdisciplinary adoption of his therapeutic principles by the field of education ("Significant Learning"). In attempting to address the problems in teaching the Rogerian, Doug Brent suggested that all student papers are dialogic in the sense that they respond to countless authors (464).

Mindfulness practice represents more than audience theory because it is a classroom activity which constructs two types of audience: the first audience with the self (intra-personal dialogue) and the second audience with others (interpersonal dialogue). Using mindfulness with the Rogerian amplifies the student experience of the dialogic by allowing the students to notice their constant inner dialogue in response to an opposition or the world. In essence, the student is a listener to himself or herself, key for a Rogerian therapist. Students likewise benefit from the promise that their opinions will be deeply heard by the group in unconditional positive regard. In essence, the deep listening and mindful speech activity positions the student simultaneously in the role of therapist/listener and client/speaker in Rogers' therapeutic scenario.

The recognition of evaluative thinking and the empathic process can serve as a heuristic. Evaluative thinking is not inherently troublesome; indeed, evaluative thinking plays a role in basic survival and the recognition of pain factors in our environment. Evaluation is a powerful signal. Buddhist practice would discourage the "evaluation of evaluation"; in other words, a meditator is instructed to observe his thoughts as they arise without adding judgment to that observation. If the individual thinks "bad me for just now entertaining that evaluative thought about how uncomfortable my chair is," she is engaging in the false dualistic notion that proper and improper or good and bad exist. Rather, it is the normal human procedure of not being aware of that influence of evaluative thinking which limits our communication and even our persuasiveness. It's easy to dismiss thinking as "only thinking," but in reality, thought is highly active and influential, directly causing all of the human-made objects and institutions in our surroundings (Bohm 9-10).

Perhaps the most important result of using mindfulness practices in conjunction with the Rogerian argument is the fostering of rhetorical imagination. Students become *euphantasiotos*: "people blessed with imagination" (Gunn 45). Through its accepting focus on the opposition and its imperative for personal change, Rogerian argument provides an excellent context for the learning of rhetorical imagination. The mindfulness practices in turn provide students with first-hand experience and a repeatable, simple mechanism which can be used to access rhetorical imagination, even in the interpersonal rhetorical situations of daily life. In the context of argument, however, the application of rhetorical imagination is not constrained to Rogerian argument but could, for instance, be employed to develop more accurate rebuttal or audience awareness for any type of argument.

While Rogers may very well have been inclined to disagree with the following point, empathy can be used as a tool. Rogerian empathy has been connected with the rhetorical device of ethos or with the way the student writer presents himself or herself to the audience (Teich 254). A writing instructor may need to drop traditional pedagogies of critique in favor of tactically employing empathy in order to teach social class effectively (Lindquist). Empathy in this scenario can act as a teaching resource for a particular outcome; it is a "conscious and

strategic emotional labor on the part of the teachers” (Lindquist 195). Meditation too can bolster learning, as even the briefest of lessons in meditation helps establish the awareness of the limitations of one’s point-of-view.

Students may feel uncomfortable or resistant to the Buddhist mindfulness practices in a rhetoric class. The choice of a stuffed animal—and a baby one at that—as the device to hold during mindful speech and deep listening is in part an attempt to diffuse seriousness. I am also sensitive to religious differences in the classroom and tell the students that they are free to step outside the class if they feel uncomfortable meditating. To date, no student has accepted this offer. Another reason for student resistance may be the sheer unusualness of the mindfulness activities. This discomfort can be alleviated by simply encouraging students to make the attempt. After all, Buddhist practitioners struggle with maintaining mindfulness no matter how many years they have sat on the cushion.

The skills imparted by mindfulness bring a significant measure of success in writing Rogerian argument. In their Rogerian assignment, students are advised to use the same mindful practices when developing their objective presentation of the opposition’s view and the point about which the opposition is correct: to be aware of their own judgments and to be able to see clear of them. The section of Rogerian argument in which students need to portray objectively the opposition’s views is less cursory than in Rogerian units without the mindfulness practices. Moreover, students are less daunted by the ultimate task of Rogerian argument: that moment in which they must truly change their mind on at least one point. In a moving conclusion written in 1952, Rogers summarized, “There is even a hint that the most striking characteristic of personality may be, not its stability, but its capacity for change” (“‘Client-Centered’ Psychotherapy” 74). When we are mindful, we are given the power to imaginatively change our point-of-view, and in that way, to control our experience such that it comes out in our favor, in our favor, because we are capable of change. ☺

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Poetry and the Art of Meditation: Going behind the Symbols

Stan Scott

Can poetry guide readers to spiritual experience? If so, what kinds of texts transmit such experience, and what form does this experience take? Many teachers in the world's spiritual traditions emphasize that what we call *spirituality* is not just a feeling or an abstract state of mind, but *an actual experience*. The English word *spirit*, from the Latin root *spirare*, to breathe, is defined as "the living principle or animating force within living beings" (*American Heritage Dictionary*). As a student of both poetry and spiritual teachings in Eastern and Western traditions, I see a strong vein of gold in poetry, expressing the quality of experience implied by the adjective *spiritual*. To find this animating force of spiritual experience in poetry, we may need to discover or invent new forms of inquiry that lead us "below the floorboards," so to speak, behind conventional theoretical or academic approaches to texts. Reader-response theory can get us started toward such discoveries by showing us how to read in a way that goes beyond cognitive activity and by showing how the power of the written word in poetry leads one into the *realization of an experience* as outlined in the text. If texts can actually lead to experiences that are more than cognitive or vicarious, as reader-response theorists have argued, how do we know which texts do lead to spiritual experience? To find such texts, I would say, we start by recognizing spiritual values in literature.

As we read, we search the text for testimony, and search our own heartfelt responses for intuitive knowledge, of the animating force within living beings. Then we attune ourselves to that kind of testimony and knowledge. This attuning means that we approach the poem in a way that allows it to awaken in us not just an aesthetic or cognitive response but a response that goes into a deeper dimension of the self, or consciousness, a dimension that historically has been called *Spirit*. This kind of response can come to a sincere reader, as we will see in this paper, by taking the implications of reader-response theory further and experimenting with methods of reading that involve contemplation. One of these is the Benedictine practice of *lectio divina* or "sacred reading"; another is the Eastern practice of "passage meditation."

Spirit doesn't easily give up its secrets to intellectual analysis. Though sometimes buried in the subconscious part of the mind, Spirit is not irrational. Though hidden, it *can* be directly known. Such knowledge is the subject of the writings of mystics and saints. Though sometimes found in the content of poetry, it does not come simply from applying theory. We gain knowledge of Spirit by coming

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into relation to it. If the text comes from a realized experience of Spirit, the text can be a bridge that brings readers into such a relation. As education theorist Parker Palmer has argued, discovering this elusive thing called *spirituality* within ourselves is like encountering a wild animal in the forest. The bear may be inherently powerful, capable of overwhelming us, but it is also likely to be shy and to hide in deep forest from human contact. If we learn to be still and wait for it with full attention, eventually it shows itself. Similarly, the key to finding *Spirit*, in a text as in oneself, is developing the power of attention and learning to *be still*.

When approached systematically, being inwardly still is called *meditation*. Classically defined as “*the control of thought-waves in the mind*” (Patanjali), meditation is not usually a journey into occult realms. It is “a simple practice that focuses on the development of attention” (Miller 51). Serious study is a necessary means to understanding literature. But the act of study may become part of a practice that yields results more important than conventional understanding as it enables us to develop greater powers of attention. As philosopher Simone Weil explains in her extraordinary book *Waiting for God*, a Christian or spiritual approach to school studies involves the realization that “prayer consists of attention”:

It is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God. . . . School exercises only develop a lower [narrowly focused] kind of attention. Nevertheless, they are extremely effective in increasing the power of attention that will be available at the time of prayer. . . . Never in any case whatever is a genuine effort of the attention wasted. It always has its effect on the spiritual plane and in consequence on the lower one of the intelligence, for all spiritual light lightens the mind. (105-06)

The concepts of prayer and meditation are different ways of expressing the idea of a practice that leads to the core experience of Spirit. That practice involves developing an ability to quiet the mind and direct attention to the dimension of depth (Spirit or Soul) within individual consciousness.

Clearly, poetry makes unusual demands upon our attention. By surrendering to these demands, we develop a capacity for complete attention, or presence with the text. We come to *realize* (discover the reality of) an experience that our personal relation with the text makes possible. When we read a text that places a value on spiritual experience and involves spiritual perception, the act of reading gives birth to spiritual experience in us. Look, for example, at lines from Psalm 46 in the Hebrew testament (King James Version):

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore will not we fear,
though the earth be removed,
and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.
.....
Be still and know that I am God.

By inviting stillness in the mind, the lines move us into a kind of experience that spiritual teachers call meditative or contemplative. As I am using the term,

meditation is an activity that quiets and focuses the mind's chaotic energies. It enables us to find a "center" within consciousness where peace is known. The Psalmist offers a teaching about the meditative art, an art that is sometimes called "centering." He instructs his readers to "be still," calling us to an act of quieting the psychic energies and bringing them to a single point, as a magnifying glass brings the sun's rays to a focal point that can ignite paper. The teaching contained in the Psalm is instruction in being still. From such a state, we see with increasing clearness how to distinguish what is authentic from what is phony or meaningless in ourselves or our surroundings. Though often obscured or damaged by anxieties and cravings, whether personal or imposed on us by our culture, the act of centering that occurs in reading the text sets us on a course of removing fear and so restoring our vital relations to Spirit. If we follow the leading signaled by the instruction to be still, we start on a path of eliminating mental turbulence and delusion, a path that restores sanity and objectivity to our way of seeing reality. We begin to see the world from a standpoint that transcends "normal" perspectives.

The transcendental state that we call *spiritual* is evoked in us by a shift in the literary code called "point of view." In the Psalm the author begins writing from an objective point of view that describes God in the third person as someone who offers "refuge" and "help" in trouble. He then shifts to a first person perspective, the "I" that announces "I am God." As a literary code, point of view enables the reader to have a powerful kind of experience called *identification*. As we read, we perceive from the point of view presented in the text, and at a certain point we are no longer reading *about* a character but seeing *through that character's eyes*, or point of view. When the Psalm shifts from third to first person, it encourages us to shift from *making observations* about "God" to *identifying* with the God-perspective. By so doing, it not only tells us *about* such a perspective, but it also evokes a mood of stillness essential to realizing that perspective in our own experience.

Looking at Psalm 46 in this way illustrates the point that, in reading poetry meditatively, our minds may make a switch from knowing the text "objectively," as separate from the self, to a personalist form of knowing that, in the words of Palmer, "calls for our own conversion" (39). "To learn," writes Palmer, "is to face transformation. To learn the truth is to enter into relationships [in this case with a scriptural text] requiring us to respond as well as initiate, to give as well as take. . . . Objectivist education is a strategy for avoiding our own conversion" (40). The "conversion" brought about by reading poetry meditatively makes new epistemological claims upon us, causing us to awaken within ourselves a more dynamic way of knowing, with fuller participation in the experience behind the words of the text. To find poems that come from meditative or spiritual experience involves some discernment and may require moving outside the literary canon. But active reading of meditative poetry can make such awakenings possible, altering not only the contents of our knowledge but also the knower and transforming the self by bringing it into more authentic self-knowledge.

To make the shift of attitude needed for reading texts in this way, there is a practice known among Benedictine monks as *lectio divina*, or sacred reading, which can be especially helpful. This method can show us ways to go behind the words to the root experience in poems and to actualize their spiritual teachings. This method of reading involves holding the attention lovingly and silently on a

passage of scripture or another text for long periods. In this way moments of encounter that Martin Buber calls “actual presentness” may occur (12). We become actually present, not simply with the physical artifact called a text but with its inner or spiritual teaching. In his attempt to redefine education as “spiritual formation,” Palmer explains: “Where schools give students hundreds of pages of text and urge them to learn ‘speed reading’, the monks dwell on a page or a passage or a line for hours and days at a time.” Because it is done “at a contemplative pace,” the method of *lectio divina* “allows reading to open, not fill, our learning space” (76). Such “meditative reading of brief texts is not only to create a space for learning but to bring the reader into obedient dialogue with the person behind the words” (101). Similarly, in advocating a meditative practice called “centering prayer,” contemporary monk Thomas Keating argues that sacred reading “involves the kind of dynamic that happens in making friends with anyone. . . . At first you feel awkward and strange in one another’s company, but as you get better acquainted, and especially as you feel yourself going out to the goodness you perceive in each other, . . . you are at ease to rest in one another’s presence with just a happy sense of well-being” (45). In this way *lectio divina* works as “a methodless way of meditation. It does not depend on some particular technique, but on the natural evolution of friendship. . . . It is a personal exchange” between oneself and the text (46). Like other authentic meditative practices, sacred reading opens consciousness to wider fields of experience enabling a personal contact to happen in our “meetings” with the poetic text. The text then becomes a channel for a teaching that itself evokes spiritual experience and spiritual development of the reader’s consciousness.

Like an ancient scripture, T.S. Eliot’s great modernist poem *Four Quartets* (1942) can provide a powerful experiment in sacred reading. Look for example at three seminal passages:

After the kingfisher’s wing
Has answered light to light, and is silent, the light is still
At the still point of the turning world. (175)
.....
at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement
.....
Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. (173)

Is the image of the dance a signifier for an intangible harmonic order underlying existence? Eliot’s use of paradox (“neither arrest nor movement”) helps the reader to loosen consciousness from its conventional moorings and to look deeper into the nature of things. If “there is only the dance,” how do we attain experience of it or participate in it? The answer, found in the majestic symbol of “the still point of the turning world,” is not simply an abstract reference to a point in geometric space but is more specifically an invitation to identify with a concrete point of view. That point of view is experienced in Eastern as well as Western spiritual traditions by a practice called single-pointed attention and is beautifully defined in many books by Sri Eknath Easwaran. For Easwaran the practice involves sitting, usually in silence for extended periods of time, with the mind

focused on an inspired passage, until we come to rest in its presence. Practicing such contemplative meditation allows us to relinquish gradually anxieties and external compulsions as we come into personal relation to what philosopher Martin Heidegger calls “the truth of being” expressed in (or between) the lines of poetry. The feeling of that truth is what is meant by “the still point” in Eliot’s lines. The realization of such truth comes about as a teaching or spiritual transmission from the root experience of the poet by means of the text to the reader. If we are ready for the teaching, Eliot’s lines offer coded instruction in how to find the still point in the midst of the turmoil of everyday life (“turning world”) and show us how to participate in the “dance,” signifying grace, within the circumstances of that very world.

In “Ash Wednesday” (1930), a poem that signaled his own conversion to a spiritual worldview, Eliot conveys the experience of single-pointed attention in more explicitly Christian terms. In archetypal images Eliot invokes this experience:

And the light shone in darkness and
Against the Word the unstilled world still whirled
About the centre of the silent Word. (96)

The practice of *lectio divina* would ask us to read and reread such lines, holding them lovingly for an extended period in consciousness, with the aim of making friends with the words and their author, reading slowly enough to let each word and its meaning sink like a stone into the pool of the subconscious. In this way we expose ourselves to what Eliot called “the music of poetry,” expressed here in its alliteration (especially the repetition of musical consonant sounds *s* and *l*), rhythms (iambic pentameter in two of the lines), and other codes such as the reference to the “Word,” an allusion to the Greek word *logos*. For the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus (sixth century BCE), as in the prologue to the gospel of John, *logos* is a name for a cosmic principle that creates order out of chaos and holds all the phenomena of the universe in what the Greeks called “cosmos” (harmony). In the gospel it is also a symbol for Christ. But, because we can both speak the “word” and comprehend the meaning of the “Word” (*logos*), the term symbolizes a center of power inherent in our own consciousness, enabling us to perceive and experience that order. When we learn to approach the lines through an act of sacred reading, we practice “centering,” encountering the “silent Word” as the animating force that stands “against” the “unstilled world” of human conflicts. By learning to read in this way, letting the words be transmuted into experience, we involve ourselves in spiritual formation. We engage in a deliberate practice leading to grace, compassion, and the wider fields of awareness and action that characterize spiritual experience.

Poetry as Spiritual Inquiry

In probably his most fully realized work of art “Sunday Morning” (1915), another modernist American poet, Wallace Stevens, presents the character of a woman evolving an inner awareness of spiritual experience in contrast to conventional religion. The poem uses the literary code of personal point of view to make us see from the perspective of its central character. As in many other literary texts, images of silence are used here as signifiers of meditative experience.

So, as we overhear the woman's interior monologue, sensing with her "the holy hush of ancient sacrifice" and traveling with her in reflective reverie to "silent Palestine," we are invited to share in this meditative experience:

The day is like water, without sound,
 Stilled for the passing of her feet
 Over the seas, to silent Palestine,
 Dominion of the blood and sepulchre.
 Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
 What is divinity if it can come
 Only in silent shadows and in dreams?

By presenting the woman's questions, the text also questions *us* as readers, prodding us into further inquiry and dialogue with her:

Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
 In pungent fruit and bright, green wings, or else
 In any balm or beauty of the earth,
 Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?

The answer given in the text is that

Divinity must live within herself:
 Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;

 All pleasures and all pains, remembering
 The boughs of summer and the winter branch.
 These are the measures destined for her soul. (CP 67)

Can we read the poem in ways that bring not just *knowledge about* it, but *realization* of the "measures" that lead us to *our own* inner development? The text confronts us with the questions—what is divinity? what is soul?—within the naturalistic assumptions of the poem. Can we read this text as a way to find new dimensions of awareness in the contexts of our own experience? We recognize familiar phenomena in figurative phrases like "Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow," "the boughs of summer and the winter branch." Such phrases are forms of what critic Stanley Fish calls "rhetorical presentation." They tell us about familiar objects or feelings. But the structure of the text is not straightforward rhetorical presentation. It takes essentially a different form, one that Fish calls "dialectical presentation." By posing its questions, the text implicitly asks for a response. It challenges us at levels deeper than its more familiar rhetoric of feelings, objects, and sensations. Its dialectical structure offers ideas, questions, and propositions that challenge us to discover truths on our own. If we are interested enough to enter more fully into its spiritual domain, the poem questions conventional notions of religion or divinity that many readers have brought to it. By asking "What is divinity?", the poet takes us into a realm of spiritual inquiry. And with the answer that "Divinity must live within herself," he presents not a propositional truth but a conditional idea to be *realized* by us in our own experience as we engage with the dialectic of question and answer from the central character's point of view.

According to another reader-response theorist Wolfgang Iser, “In literary works, . . . the message is transmitted in two ways, in that the reader ‘receives’ it by composing it” (22). The idea of receiving by composing the message essentially reverses the conventional view that reading is a one-way transmission of knowledge from text to reader. In the reader-response model, reading is a dialogue in which the reader invents new ideas, or new perspectives, based on the experience of reading. According to Iser, “the aesthetic effect is robbed of [its] unique quality the moment one tries to define what is meant in terms of other meanings that one knows” (what Fish calls “rhetorical presentation”). If “one automatically seeks to relate [the text] to contexts that are familiar . . . the effect is extinguished, because the effect is *in the nature of an experience*” (22, my italics). If we see Stevens’ “pungent fruit and bright green wings” or “comforts of the sun” simply as familiar objects and feelings, we lose the most important effect the poem can have: to be a leading into a new experience. In the act of reading, “the meaning of a literary text is not a definable entity, [in Iser’s view] but, if anything, a dynamic happening” (22).

How can we experience the text as such a “dynamic happening”? According to Iser, “As the reader passes through the various perspectives offered by the text and relates the different views and patterns to one another he sets the work in motion, and so sets himself in motion, too” (21). In “Sunday Morning” you and I may be moved by the rhetoric of the text to follow the woman’s interior monologue and pass with her through changes of mood and attitude. As we *feel* the workings of its literary codes (its intensely personal point of view, rhythms, cultural signifiers such as “Palestine” and “divinity”), the text forms a catalyst, enabling us to “set the work in motion,” and so set ourselves personally in motion, to perceive new meanings. These meanings come into being through our personal dialogue with the stream of experience found in the text. If we are to grasp the idea that “divinity must live within herself,” we do so by getting to the core experience contained in the text and realizing it as experience within *ourselves*. We experience not just conventional empathy with a character and her plight but *identification* with the meditative and spiritual experience encoded in the text. By reading dialogically, we engage in a dynamic act, an act which entails *defamiliarizing* the images and literary codes, setting ourselves in motion toward a new experience of our own, in this case linking fruit, green wings, rain and snow, and the passions associated with them, to a realization that divinity lives within the self.

To Read is to (Re)create an Actual Experience

Most events pass us by in weak or degenerate states of attention and so are misappropriated. While the effect of mass culture is often to distract or divide attention, reading poetry can have exactly the opposite effect, by giving one a sense of what it means to have a fully realized experience. Reading poetry in this way is moving toward integration of one’s whole outlook, including critical as well as receptive powers of the mind. To approach reading as a practice of meditation invokes this range of mental powers in the reader and so has a way of breaking some of the hypnotic effects of the culture of mass media. So developing the ability to learn through meditative reading is a force for the transformation of consciousness. As a means of expanding the power of attention, reading is

not a passive experience but a creative act parallel to the writing of the text. Read less as an observer than as a participant, and the poem becomes a door that allows one to enter and relive the core experience that went into the creation of the text. If the text has come from meditative experience, reading is a way to re-enact the same qualities of mind, heart, and attention that produced the text in the first place. As an act of *re-creation*, reading demands something more than conventional analysis, interpretation, or the application of theory. That “something more” is to get the lived experience, present behind the symbols, that brought the text into being.

In his powerful late poem “Credences of Summer” (1946), Stevens calls to “us” as readers in commanding first-person plural references, reminiscent of scriptural commands:

Let’s see the very thing and nothing else.
 Let’s see it with the hottest fire of sight.
 Burn everything not part of it to ash.
 Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky
 Without evasion by a single metaphor
 And say this, this is the centre that I seek. (*CP* 373)

The lines give instruction in what has been called in Eastern philosophy “spiritual discrimination,” a kind of applied critical thought, that distinguishes between real experience and fabricated images of experience (Shankara). When the search for truth is a kind of burning—“the hottest fire of sight”— we can see “the very thing and nothing else” what is most real about the world and human identity behind the deceptions of mass culture or personal bias. The way to succeed in the search is to *decondition* perception. We “burn everything not part of it to ash.” Cleansing the mind of its baggage of conditioned responses allows us to “see” more of what is really there. Animated by a “fire,” not of the letter but of the spirit, this vision, unlike ordinary conditioned perception, burns every deception to ash. The text calls upon us to realize an actual experience of what in Eastern philosophy is called nondualistic perception in which there are no deceptive screens between the seer and the seen.

What Lies behind the Symbols?

In another great poem, “The Sail of Ulysses” (1954), written in his later years, Stevens presents the character of Ulysses from Greek legend as “*Symbol of the seeker*” in interior monologue. Ulysses reflects that each person’s life is

an approach to the vigilance
 In which the litter of truths becomes a whole. (*Palm* 390)

Through “vigilance” (i.e., attention), we realize the reality of “A life beyond this present knowing” (390):

The ancient symbols will be nothing then.
 We shall have gone behind the symbols
 To that which they symbolized, away
 From the rumors of the speech-full domes,
 To the chatter that is then the true legend,
 Like glitter ascended into fire. (391)

For Ulysses, as for us, the ancient symbols, whether in religion or politics, have hardened into social constructions. It is only by acts of vigilance (read “attention”) that we “go behind the symbols.” In contrast to the claims of fundamentalists (whether Christian, secular humanist, Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim) for the infallibility of (their own) scriptures or teachings, Stevens takes something like a postmodernist stand: for Ulysses “There is no map of paradise.” In this world, “the genealogy/Of gods” has been “destroyed” or, as we might say, deconstructed. As in Taoist or Zen practice, destroying the genealogy of gods is for Stevens a way of emptying the mind, clearing it of presuppositions. From the clearing we come, by vigilance, to experience a “life beyond this present knowing.” We find our “misgivings dazzlingly/Resolved in dazzling discovery” (390). We leave the realm of “rumors” and uncover the “true legend” that unfolds authentic existence. The clearing unfolds ultimate reality: “The outlines of being and its expressings, the syllables of its law” (*CP* 423–24), as Stevens puts it in “Large Red Man Reading.”

Seeing the world through Ulysses’ point of view, we feel with him the longing for paradise as well as the absence of a map to find it. So we may be impelled to read in a way that takes *us* “behind the symbols.” What do we find by doing so? “That which they symbolized” can only mean an actual experience, something real and tangible. The reader’s new realized experience involves participating in a nonconventional way of knowing discovered by the poet. Like an ancient sage, Stevens includes his readers as participants in his discovery with the first-person plural pronoun: “We shall have gone behind the symbols.” By the literary chemistry of identification, we come with Ulysses to new knowledge as well as a new way of knowing. In Eastern philosophy this way of knowing is called nondualism where the screens between the knower and the known are eliminated. Ulysses comes to understand how it is that “knowing/And being are one” (390), and the text invites us into this understanding. The “ancient symbols,” e.g., of the gods and paradise, will then be as “nothing.” Like the meditative practitioner who awakens to truth through silent meditation, we will have attained the actual experience they symbolized, an integration of being and knowing. We may not come into knowledge of a conventional paradise or divinity, but by vigilance we may find something more meaningful, a form of experience in which *what is* (being) is directly known “beyond this present knowing.”

Reading to Go behind the Symbols

To read poetry meditatively is to follow its leadings into spaces that may lie beyond our own present knowing. In other words, reading sacred texts or poems like those of Stevens and Eliot we have been exploring may evoke what Iser calls a “dynamic happening” that restructures the matrix of knowing. As we learn to go behind the symbols, we go into a kind of initiation, discovering qualities of experience known at first only to the poet but which are now transmitted, through the chemistry of reading, as spiritual teaching by the text. If we choose to read texts that contain coded instructions in the art of meditation, we are choosing to participate in a dynamic happening that the text makes possible. Cognitive learning often demands great intelligence. It is still the gold standard in schools and universities and may be indispensable to academic studies and to critical thought. But it tends to hold the text at a distance from the reader. And all too often school

studies may end up deepening the breach between the student and the text, between the student and real knowledge, unless we approach studies from a more personal attitude, like that of a Parker Palmer or a Simone Weil, as an opportunity to expand our personal powers of attention and discernment.

The practice of *lectio divina* treats certain texts as avenues into the domain of meditative and spiritual experience. If a teacher has practiced some version of *lectio divina*, perhaps bolstered by insights from reader-response theory or other sources like those we have discussed, and develops skill and confidence in entering the meditative spaces of poetry, the practice can be introduced effectively to undergraduates or other students. From my own experience, I believe the method shows great promise for enhancing students' ability to make meaning from texts and to take more joy in their studies. From this method, all readers may learn to practice a new kind of literacy, reading both "the word and the world" with greater critical discrimination (see Freire and Macedo) and going behind the manipulative constructions of mass culture to see things more clearly as they are. By practicing this method of study, students become more reflective citizens, more adept at discerning differences between the deceptive and the authentic elements of the human scene and acting with greater responsibility toward what is authentic in themselves and others. ☐

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Connecting

Section Editor's Message

Dear Readers,

This year, I entitle our collection of narratives “Relevance”—and begin with this: “I just feel irrelevant to their lives,” writes Louise Morgan about her high school students. “I feel so white, removed, and wrong for these kids. . . . As important as I think our [class work] is, . . . IS IT?” My reaction to this email lament, sent to me at the end of her particularly difficult day of teaching, is that her question concerning relevance is right on! Despite the hopelessness of kids mired in horrific home situations, inadequately staffed and funded schools, indifferent or unknowledgeable legislators—despite whether we teach in a school like Louise’s or in a school for the privileged—a beautiful focus of our teaching can be, must be, the relevancy of what happens in our classrooms to our students’ beyond-school lives. The narratives for this issue of “Connecting” each tell a tale concerning this issue.

First, Louise Morgan’s story “Street Science: An English Teacher’s Introduction to Street Life” tells us how she navigates her difficult teaching days and what allows her to center on what the people facing her need from her.

Amy Wink entitles her piece with a quote from Albert Einstein: “In the Middle of Difficulty Lies Opportunity.” Hers is a story where, at least this once, her students understand deeply the “necessary union of theory with practice.”

Marcia Nell sends her colleagues everywhere a call to action. We must not stay behind the closed doors of our elementary classrooms. In actuality, the federal government has already opened them and entered in. She calls us to “educate our new partners” so they will know that their misguided reforms are *not* presently grounded in research based on what teachers know about children and on pedagogy that works. It is up to teachers to speak out.

Gergana Vitanova gives us a firsthand account of “Negotiating an Identity in Graduate School as a Second Language Speaker,” fascinating in its real-world relevance.

Finally, in “A Cat in the Sun: Reflections on Teaching,” Judy Huddleston gently admonishes us to encourage more “connected ways of knowing.”

So the question remains, what do our students take with them out of our classrooms that really matters in their lives? Before anything else can happen, they need to be able to survive, and, if we need to start there, we need to start there. There is where they are. There is what is relevant in their lives. Then, once we have addressed their “there,” maybe they will, as a favor to us all, let us help them to live with greater depth and greater courage.

To us!

Street Science: An English Teacher's Introduction to Street Life

Louise Morgan

After a number of years as an adjunct professor teaching college courses in English, theatre, and speech, I embarked on a course of study to obtain certification in secondary English. To fund this venture, I took a position in a failing inner city vo-tech school. It has to be a desperate situation when an emergency certificate places an English teacher in a *learning support science classroom*.

It took months before my students accepted me as their teacher. They questioned my hands-on style. "Why don't we use the book?" They doubted my alternative approaches. "Why are we juggling?"

And, of course, I doubted myself all the while. It wasn't until I created a unit on the science of sound that I found common ground. I immersed myself in the language my students know best: the rhythm of the street, the music of the hip-hop generation. This led to the creation of another unit where hearts and minds from different cultures communicate: theatre.

We began with a field trip to Harrisburg's Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts. The students studied the physics of dance, the basics of chemical reactions, and the way an opera singer produces sound. And they watched the center's repertory company do a play on clouds called *Are You Cirrus?* The hope was that my students would see the connection between art and science. At the very least, I was hoping they would see the potential for fun and creativity if we wrote our own science play.

I decided the project was really too big for me to handle alone, so I enlisted the help of the learning support English and Math teachers. Now our project was interdisciplinary as well! I wrote a proposal for a budget of \$1,000. The local community theatre became our consultants. We took a number of field trips there for lessons on every aspect of theatre. What would be our science subject for the play? Somehow *Are You Cirrus?* did not seem relevant for our kids of "the ghetto."

I found inspiration from an activity we did earlier in the year. As I was getting to know my students, I often incorporated "improvs" into our days. This was a chance for me to take a break from science and reside in the comfort of my true knowledge base. I taught them how to create dialogue, plot, and setting on the spot. They continually amazed and dazzled me with their honest portrayals of their lives.

It was the desire they had to mirror and reflect on their lives that produced the title and subject of our play. *Street Science* is the story about a young boy who learns that knowing scientific facts can keep him safe and help him make the right decisions.

To write the script, we alternated between doing science lessons and research projects on tobacco, drugs, and teen pregnancy and doing improvisations and

Louise Morgan, M.M.C., teaches in an inner city school, writes plays, and takes college classes. She teaches Find the Art in Earth during the summer months and hikes the Appalachian Trail. She currently performs Theatre for Personal Transformation—New Life Scripts.

writing workshops. I listened to them create dialogue using their own language and slang, phrases like “You wawlin’” and “get the bogies” and “whas up cuz?” The language that they lived was the language of this play. I never could have written it. Many times, I wrote down what they said verbatim.

We booked our show *Street Science* at five elementary schools. We struggled each day to keep it all together while we practiced for our shows. Low attendance, skipping class, and constant disciplinary actions like in- and out-of-school suspensions plagued our efforts.

Who were these kids? John was a true artist and of course our set designer. He had come to school high on drugs and was constantly getting detentions for being tardy or misbehaving. Still, when he was in my class, he created. He had painted the scenery of his life on wooden Louon boards—the corner store, the school, a graffiti wall, and the stoop.

Leroy got his most recent detention for throwing a pair of scissors at Tyrell. His wide Jamaican smile belied the stormy emotions he often hid or suppressed. He was learning to pronounce the words “neurotransmitter” and “dopamine” because he was the lead of the play and his character must teach another character about the effects of drugs on the brain. It was doubtful Leroy would have been able to hold still long enough to memorize those words for a test, but for this play he bounced a basketball (in character) while he pounded out sense and meaning.

As I write this, I begin to tear up thinking of Leroy. He had the whole play memorized! Much of the time, I feel I have little or no effect on the lives of these kids. I have always believed in the power of words, literature, and art to transform, but I wonder if it can ever be enough for them. It can’t. Writing a play and turning a classroom into a theatre company will please some, but will not entice every one of my students to attend school. Many still don’t come.

This “island” in the inner city challenges everything I know of beauty and everything I understand about education. You ask, “How does an English teacher survive in a science learning support classroom?” Any time I sense beauty, inspiration, or love, I follow that inclination. Is this any way to design a curriculum? I’m not making recommendations, but here is one true thing I know: in this environment, the heart leads, and the head follows. ☐

“In the Middle of Difficulty Lies Opportunity”—Albert Einstein

Amy Wink

In my writing class I ask my students to write about a community problem and determine what action they, individually, can take to effect change. In es-

Amy Wink currently lives in Austin, Texas. A graduate of Southwestern University, she earned her MA and PhD from Texas A&M University-College Station in 1996. Her book, She Left Nothing In Particular: The Autobiographical Legacy of 19th Century Women’s Diaries (U of Tennessee Press, 2001) explores the significance of private writing as an act of daily creativity.

sence, what can an individual do on a personal level to solve a large, sometimes overwhelming, problem? They do very well describing and pointing out problems, writing ardently about things that need change. They flounder when describing what they can do, falling heavily into cynicism and ennui. It's not that they don't want to create change; it's that they do not recognize how or perhaps even that an individual continually creates and re-creates the world in which he or she lives. This year, I may tell them this story.

In the summer when James Byrd was dragged to death behind a pick-up truck outside of Jasper, Texas, many of us in the region were fixed in our horror. The heat was unbearable as well, rising to near 120 on many days, as if Hell had been invited in and decided to stay on awhile. I was teaching an eight o'clock class to heat-exhausted undergraduates. One day, a colleague noticed one of her basic writing students, an African-American woman, nodding off in class. When she asked her if she were ill, her student replied that she was very tired because she had been walking to the university from her home . . . 30 miles away. Her story unfolded. She had been refused Medicaid benefits for her epileptic son because, when she'd gone to court in her clothes from Goodwill, the judge thought she dressed too well to need the money for medication. Because she didn't have enough money to keep her car, and she knew that getting her education was the only path out of her life in poverty, she walked. Because she wanted to be in school, she walked, starting well before dawn so she could make it for her first class at 8:00. She walked in the dark, in the piney woods of Deep East Texas, which stretched on to the east, where her cousin James had recently been killed.

Profoundly troubled, my friend started to find assistance for her student, whose needs were so many. If nothing else, we will get her a ride, I said. I asked my class if anyone came from the same direction. My quietest student, her Irish ancestry clear in her red hair and porcelain skin, volunteered, her eyes widening when I told her why she was needed. We arranged for our students to meet, and they began their daily commute together. When I met my colleague's student that day, she could not speak, but, to *this* day, I can still feel her hand grasping mine.

I had done a tiny thing, but the impact was great. Her world changed. My student later wrote how much she learned by talking with her new friend as they drove to campus, and I asked her if she ever thought about what she might be teaching with her own being. My friend and I continued to find help, and, while we could not change everything—the history of racism and sexism compounding the difficulties of her personal life, the poverty she struggled to escape—we did help. And we found more help. No, this small connection did not end racism, did not cure her son of epilepsy, did not free her from poverty. If we had thought only of solving these, we might never have solved the most immediate one. She needed a ride to school. We found her one.

I hope this is a story my students understand. I hope they learn to see solutions as quickly as they see problems. I hope that they see how they might practice in their lives the small changes that affect the larger world. I hope they understand the necessary union of theory with practice. I hope they consider how their ordinary lives can exemplify larger ideals. I hope they understand that generosity blesses the giver and the gifted. I hope that they see in the middle of difficulty many opportunities awaiting discovery. ☺

The New Partnership

Marcia Nell

Dear Educators,

In today's political and educational climate, the federal government has become an active, vocal partner in classrooms across the United States. This active stance calls for external accountability systems to validate that children are learning the predetermined standards it sets forth. This external accountability system relies on standardized tests for substantiating children's learning. Our new partner, the federal government, seems to have all the answers to the problems that exist in education today, which educators have allegedly not solved and even ignored. According to Richard Allington, our partner has begun a "campaign to convince everyone that not only is there a reading crisis, but that those in the educational profession have routinely ignored 'scientific evidence' detailing the nature and form of effective reading instruction" (4).

Given this campaign, it is imperative that we professional educators are able to articulate our professional and personal knowledge about learning, children, and pedagogy. I suggest that, given the new policies, our new partner is lacking the professional knowledge gained only through interaction in a real classroom with real children on a daily basis. Educators place great value on the tried and true daily encounters with children. Educators insist that new teachers have plenty of experience in the classroom before releasing them to be in charge of their own classrooms. Our new partner relies on information generated from sources of its own choice, and these sources do not seem to use experience in a real classroom to help guide decisions about policy. In fact, the new policies tend to indicate a distrust for classroom experience as a source of knowledge.

According to John P. Guthrie, a policy is described as a "defined or intended principle of operation" (27). A policy is a goal. This goal carries forward a way of thought or action that places the policy maker in the position of allocating their resources and commitment toward the specified goal. According to Jacqueline Edmondson, "policies are the articulation of one's hope for the way something should be, and they are revealed through various texts, practices, and discourses" and are an extension of what the policy maker believes the "ideal society" should look like (13). Policy is written so that the ideal society will become a reality. In our new partner's present policy, the ideal will become reality when children get high enough scores on standardized tests.

Yet the ideal society imagined by our federal government is very much different from the reality of what educators find in their classrooms. They too agree that it would be wonderful if the world's problems could be solved if all children just learned to read. It would be wonderful if children would live in homes that promote health, security, safety, warmth, and love—if only the children would score at the proficient level in mathematics. It would be magnificent if the par-

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ents of all these children were able to make a living and be able to provide for their families the same kinds of material goods afforded to other children. It would be outstanding if all these things could come to pass if only the *children* could take care of us all by scoring higher on their standardized tests.

The term “radical democracy” is defined as a “political ideology [that] places emphasis on redistribution of resources and recognition of groups and individuals, including those who have traditionally been disenfranchized by U.S. politics and society” (Fraser qtd. in Edmondson 12). Radical democracy begins with the people; it is a grassroots effort to bring about changes for groups of people who under previous circumstances were silenced. It is an ideology that gives a loud collaborative voice to these groups of people. According to Patrick Shannon, “Radical democrats seek to identify and establish the social conditions that produce democratic citizenship” (102).

Maybe you classify yourself as a radical democrat; maybe you don’t. Maybe the only category that matters here is advocate of children and children’s learning. The truth is that we *are* partners in this new classroom relationship.

Given this partnership, here is my call to you. Educators, open your doors, speak your truth, and educate our new partner. As educators, we surely do believe in the process of education. We also believe in the sanctity of the classroom, as that place where the sacred act of learning takes place. Since our new partners insist upon entering our classrooms, we must ask them to submit to the same kinds of rigor as teachers. They too must base their policies on research grounded in personal knowledge about learning, children, and pedagogy. We must insist that they prove that they are “highly qualified,” or they will need to leave quietly. ☐

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Negotiating an Identity in Graduate School as a Second Language Speaker

Gergana Vitanova

Initially, I came to the U.S. for family rather than academic reasons just

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after I completed my B.A. in Bulgarian Linguistics and Literature. I brought with me a portfolio of over 20 published poems, which I soon learned meant nothing in my new environment. Some people I met hadn't even heard of Bulgaria. I also brought a life-long appreciation for literacy.

Literacy is highly valued in my home community. Most children, for example, find themselves surrounded by print at a very early age. I remember being subscribed to a children's magazine and leafing through numerous, well-illustrated children's books before I was able to read. It is not surprising when you enter a Bulgarian home to see carefully arranged bookcases, heavy with books by both Bulgarian and foreign authors occupying a central position in the household. I learned to read long before I went to school. I remember taking turns reading with my grandmother. I quickly became an avid reader and a confident user of my literacy skills.

All of this confidence was lost when I arrived in the United States. Although I had studied some English in high school and college, I realized that this unsystematic knowledge wasn't enough to allow me to function as a literate person in my new society. Thus, from a well-read and published college graduate, I transformed into a silent immigrant.

For two years, I studied English, mainly on my own, surrounded by numerous grammar books and dictionaries. As I read novels in English, I kept a notepad by my side, entering each new vocabulary item, its definition, and an example of a sentence in which it could be used. Copious grammar notes accompanied words and phrases. During these two years, I also decided that I wanted to continue my studies in linguistics and applied for the masters program in an English department.

Success in graduate school is intimately related to writing. My first course in this country in a master's program in English was Versification. It was, according to rumor, one of the most challenging courses the department offered. I assume that because of my experience in poetry and formal linguistics knowledge, I excelled. I would count syllables and stresses, identify iambic and pyrrhic feet with precision. Just when I was becoming hopeful about my academic future in America, I got my first term paper written in English back. At the end, having summarized my achievements, the professor pointed out that if I were to succeed in graduate school, I had to improve my writing significantly. He suggested that I enroll in Advanced Composition for seniors. Most of my papers in Advanced Comp came back with comments very much like the following:

Gergana,

You have many wonderful ideas here. Your work is to keep working on the presentation, to present your ideas as smoothly as possible.

From the end of this course till the present, I have had a difficult but also exciting journey.

To summarize how I was initiated into an academic discourse community during these first years, I would say that I learned mainly by engaging with texts actively. Consciously noticing what sentence patterns other academic writers preferred, what discursive markers they employed, I acquired my writing voice as a second language writer in these first years of graduate school. Thus, reading

became an interactive, socialization practice. This practice continued when I entered my Ph.D. program in TESOL, but of course it became much more complex as the focus changed.

Gradually, I began to enjoy being able to take part in the discourse of my new academic community. Any appropriation of these discourses, however, was underlain by participation in dialogic practices with others. Thus, I would like to outline a few types of dialogue/interactions that I engaged in during the negotiation of academic identity in a second language in the different stages of graduate school. Dialogue, according to Bakhtin is a complex meaning-making activity that doesn't have to take place necessarily face-to-face with another human being. In this sense, one dialogue I already mentioned was the interaction with other writers of academic texts and with the academic texts themselves.

Dialogue with mentors (particularly during the process of writing a dissertation) has been very important during the last years of my Ph.D. program. I was lucky to have a dedicated advisor, Deborah Hicks, who read not only drafts of my chapters but also my first conference proposals. The feedback I needed at this stage was not on grammar or style any longer but, rather, on presenting an argument more cogently. She and other mentors during these critical years have also provided feedback on how to apply for an academic job and polish a vita. Presenting with my mentors at conferences has been one of my best learning experiences.

Another type of dialogue that shaped my current professional identity was, to my own surprise, the one with my own ESL students. I started teaching a variety of ESL courses as a graduate student, most focusing on reading and writing skills. Initially, I was afraid that my students would reject me as a non-native speaker of English, and I approached the classroom with apprehension. However, I found that I could serve as a model for those students who actually appreciated my experience as a second language writer. They often commented on my "good vocabulary" and wanted to know how they could enhance theirs. Since then, teaching has become an essential conduit for participating in academic discourses and a vital layer of my professional subjectivity.

A particularly important type of dialogue has been the one in which I engaged with the participants in my dissertation. All qualitative research, according to Clark Moustakas, is autobiographical. My longitudinal project, which studied how eight East European immigrants establish their agencies in a new language, became a site of reflexivity and construction of my own subjectivity. The participants were not mere respondents, answering my carefully prepared questions and passively allowing me to observe them. In fact, they would often ignore my interview guides and fire questions of their own: "How do Americans treat *you*?" Listening to their voices and analyzing their experiences has allowed me in many ways to make meaning of my own.

As a Ph.D. student I also published book reviews and articles. Communicating with the editors of the journals as well as receiving and negotiating the feedback by colleagues in the field (in some cases, anonymous reviewers) has also contributed to establishing a sense of professional identity. Functioning as a column editor for a newsletter, soliciting articles, and guiding authors through their revisions served a similar purpose.

Today, I enjoy taking part in the discourse of my academic community. Modern cultural theorists believe that, when we conceptualize culture, we should

move beyond the level of nation-states and ethnicity. Instead, identity groups are formed on the basis of multiple factors, including gender and occupation. In a significant way, gaining access to this professionally defined discourse has allowed me to acquire an identity that transcends national, geographic, and linguistic borders. ☐

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A Cat in the Sun: Reflections on Teaching

Judy Huddleston

In addition to teaching English 101 this quarter, I led a memoir workshop through Writers in the Community at the Woman's Hearth, a transitional space created by Catholic sisters in downtown Spokane for women marginalized by poverty, abuse, addiction, and mental illness. In a recent workshop, a woman wrote and read a simple piece about seeing a cat lying in the sun. She saw the cat in front of a "noisy, smelly, dirty" apartment on a "bad street" downtown. Her words were unsparing, sharp as shards of broken bottles: stench, filth, garbage-filled, reeking of urine. Yet she conveyed the hope and hopelessness of the "disenfranchised" without using any kind of "long word," without reference to anything like objective correlative.

She spoke of observing a "pointy-faced" cat stretched over the warm pavement, just basking in the golden sunlight. And the woman marveled at it: the exquisite peace of that cat in that moment, in that deplorable environment. Though belonging to no one and living in an impoverished neighborhood, the cat was fat, obviously well fed. Realizing people from the subhuman apartment building had to be feeding it, she concluded someone cared for, even *loved*, the cat, that in fact "it belonged." She was heartened that a being could be content despite external conditions, loved despite being alone, and could belong despite being homeless.

I was moved to tears, humbled by the honest simplicity and raw power of this woman's words. Her truth came from and went straight to the heart, capturing life and humanity in one paragraph scrawled on a lined notepad. The words seemed the essence of all that mattered; they also reminded me of my own less than Zen-like consciousness.

Twenty minutes earlier, I'd had tears in my eyes over an entirely different matter: a parking space. Unable to parallel park deftly enough, I backed out and was intimidated by an impatient man in a huge truck. He insisted on allowing me

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back into the crowded traffic of the one-way street, so I had to re-negotiate the confusing, vaguely threatening streets and perhaps lose my coveted space. Which I didn't. I merely depleted my energy generating silent tears in a rush of frenzied heat and anxiety while circling the city block. I was about as far as one could get from the cat in the sun. Back to back, my two stories may highlight my subjective emotional response to life as the often clichéd female hyper-reactivity. Yet there is a deeper truth as well.

How easily, how unceasingly, we forget the point of expression. As teachers, we all too quickly reduce writing to academic discourse. How can we help get the meaning of the cat in the sun back into the classroom, into both the students and the teachers? Without it, what is the point? To drive around another block? Prove another thesis? Have we forgotten why we're driving, where we're going, what we'll do when we get there? What do we want students to learn and why? What do we need to teach and why? What kind of life do they envision—what are we preparing them for? Why does writing matter? Is there a bridge between the writing needed for academic discourse and the writing, thinking, and feeling needed for a meaningful life?

How do we provide it?

These issues concern me personally, as a writer myself and as someone who will continue teaching both English 101 and creative writing. A huge chasm separates an Eastern Washington University classroom and the Women's Hearth. While we should not believe writing courses are therapy classes, neither should we ignore student writers' problems and lives. Pedagogies using empathic observation and participation, what psychologist Erik K. Erikson originally termed "disciplined subjectivity," can serve as ways to form a more connected knowing. I believe it is up to us as teachers and students to create an honest, heartfelt discourse about what "really matters" within a context of respect, even reverence, for education and the power of knowledge disseminated through the written word to transform both our inner and outer lives. ☺

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Visser, Frank. *Ken Wilber: Thought as Passion*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2003.

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So, who is Ken Wilber? According to Wilber, “I have often described myself as a northern European thinker with a southern European lifestyle who practices Eastern religion—or something like that” (xi). His biographer, Frank Visser, describes him as an “American autodidact . . . who has managed to evolve into a leading theorist in the field of psychology” (1) without holding any degree in psychology. When I asked several colleagues in the psychology department at my home institution if they ever heard of him, they replied, “Ken who?” When I posed the same question to some of my meditator friends, several recognized the name, but none had actually read his books. Falling into the second camp, I saw this book as an opportunity to acquaint myself with his work without reading his daunting canon. (Between 1977 and 2002, Wilber published twenty books.) Visser does an admirable job navigating the reader through Wilber’s theories. And Wilber has a lot of them. So much so that I thought a more apt subtitle might be “Thought as Compulsion.” By the end of the book, the reader may feel that Ken Wilber has never let a thought go unpublished.

Wilber made his mark early, at the age of twenty-three, when he published *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (1977). This book sparked some interest in the area of transpersonal psychology, “a school of religious psychology set up at the end of the sixties which endeavors to study the field of mystical spirituality in a scientifically sound way” (1). Visser’s Chapter One begins with a brief review of Wilber’s childhood and education. Graduating with dual baccalaureate majors in chemistry and biology, he devised a self-study program in Eastern philosophy, Western psychology, metaphysics, and religion. What spurred this program? Quite simply, unhappiness. Wilber writes, “The point is that I had to ‘read everything’ because I was trying mentally and emotionally to put together in a comprehensive framework that which I felt was necessary for my own salvation” (qtd. in Visser 23). In *Spectrum*, Wilber emplaces various schools of psychotherapy and spirituality into, well, a spectrum. Shortly after its publication, the book was critically hailed by transpersonal psychologists. The remainder of the chapter traces Wilber’s evolution from a transpersonal psychologist to a system philosopher, which Visser defines as “a thinker who seeks to establish the essential coherence of things, to gain an overview of the whole of reality in all its diverse facets” (36).

Chapter Two presents a useful summary of the intellectual underpinnings of Wilber’s thought, starting with a review of different schools of thought, such as behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and humanistic and cognitive psychology. Next, Visser introduces us to Wilber’s first model (dubbed by Visser as “Wilber 1”) with its five forms of consciousness. The first, *persona*, is a “mask we present to the outside world” (53). To deal with problems arising from this state of consciousness, Wilber recommends simple counseling and supportive therapies. Next, Wilber identifies ego as the second level of consciousness. Here, he introduces the Jungian concept of the “shadow,” that is, those aspects of ourselves which we wish to conceal from others and, possibly, from ourselves (53). When dealing with dilemmas arising from this state, he recom-

mends psychoanalysis and transactional analysis. Moving along the spectrum, Wilber adopts the mythological term *centaur* (author's italics) to describe the next level of awareness: a unity of the mental and physical (53). For attaining this state, Wilber prescribes humanistic approaches such as gestalt and Rogerian therapies. At this point along the spectrum, Wilber enters the transpersonal level of consciousness, which is composed of two subrealms—witness and Spirit. In the former, “one’s awareness transcends mind, body, ego, *centaur*, and merely witnesses the fluctuations of those lower realms. . . . But beyond that level of transcendence, there is a radical and ultimate state, where one no longer witnesses reality, one *becomes* reality” (54, author’s italics). This latter state Wilber names Mind or Spirit. In addressing these states, extant schools of psychology fail us. Rather, one must look to Buddhism, Hinduism, or esoteric schools of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam for insight. While this chapter sketches the rudiments of Wilber’s first model of consciousness, it should be noted that contained in the various stages are more sublevels or “bands.” (In a later version, Wilber elongates his spectrum into seventeen stages; in the version *after that*, he trims it down to ten stages.)

Chapter Three addresses Wilber’s own discontent with his first model of consciousness. Visser writes, “[R]ather than seeing the transition from baby to adult as a fall out of Paradise, we need to see it as a difficult *emergence* out of a state of unconsciousness—a way forward” (71). Thus, Wilber identifies three main phases of consciousness: the prepersonal, where “the child comes to associate itself increasingly with its body as the boundary between the self and the outside world becomes ever more sharply defined”(83); the personal, where the “individual has lost virtually all contact with his body and functions primarily as a mental self or, in other words, as an ego” (85); and, the transpersonal, which involves the “gradual dissolution of subject-object duality”(88). In sum, this chapter provides an excellent explication of Wilber’s “ladder model” and sets the stage for what Visser identifies as “Wilber 3.” (Actually, Visser identifies five phases, but it became difficult for this reader to delineate the rest. Given his penchant for publishing, there are probably several more Wilbers yet to come.)

In the following chapter, Visser details Wilber’s attempts at applying his models to a variety of fields other than psychology. Among the more interesting topics included is Wilber’s critique of Fritjof Capra (author of *The Tao of Physics*), who argues that physics and mysticism essentially confirm each other’s view of reality. While Wilber acknowledges that there are certain similarities between their worldviews, ultimately the differences are too profound. He concludes that trying to support a spiritual viewpoint with data from the physical sciences is “to misunderstand the nature and function of each” (132). In *A Sociable God: A Brief Introduction to a Transpersonal Sociology* (1982), Wilber holds forth on the sociology of religion. Again, applying his models, Wilber explains why traditional religions have waned in credibility. Essentially, the once faithful have “outgrown this kind of religiosity and now seek those forms of religion that match the stage of religious development that they as individuals have reached” (135). From his standpoint, such secularization actually reflects the will of God. More to the point, God or Spirit-Geist wants “us to grow up and to trade in infantile forms of religion for real, postrational forms of mysticism” (134). One must admire the intellectual chutzpah of Wilber. Armed with his dual bachelor degrees in chemistry and biology, he sallies forth into the diverse terrains of physics, sociology, and the mind of God.

Alas, by the early 1990s, Wilber experiences something of a fall from grace. Visser notes, “[V]irtually all of the concepts he had in his works . . . were now re-

garded as highly suspect and had been declared taboo, even in transpersonal circles” (179). Rather than re-examine his own theories of rationality and spirituality, he regards his ostracism as a result of the anti-intellectualism and anti-spirituality of the times. His response? Not one, but three books known as *The Kosmos Trilogy*. Apparently, Wilber has a lot to say—the first book alone is 800 pages. Visser closes the chapter with a discussion of Wilber’s modestly titled *A Theory of Everything* (1996). Here, Wilber applies his “integral psychology” not to everything, but, rather, to political science. Among his more novel suggestions is drawing up an integral Constitution “which not only ensures that all people are treated equally, but also acknowledges the possibility of the growth of consciousness” (236).

What is one to make of this “autodidact”? What is one to do with his canon? Certainly, the field of composition studies is one site where Wilber’s melding of life’s journeys with abstract theorizing could provide an eclectic and challenging model of “personal-academic” writing. His speculations on the nature of consciousness could enter into a compelling dialogue with students’ thinking of selves in texts, although teachers of writing may be critical of his all-too-frequent totalizing assumptions.

In the final chapter, Visser does a heroic job trying to contextualize Wilber’s critics—not an easy task, since Wilber has quite a few in many different fields. Clearly, Wilber is a provocative thinker. In the view of *this* reader, he should think more and publish less. Since I do not feel competent in recommending a list of alternative readings in physics or political science, I would suggest that those interested in gaining insight into issues of the spirit (which first launched Wilber on his literary odyssey) read Evelyn Underwood’s *Mysticism* (1911). A rich and evocative text, it is still in print, which, I suspect, in the coming years will *not* be the case with most of Wilber’s works. ☐

A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion and Composition Studies.
Ed. Dale Jacobs and Laura R. Micciche. Portsmouth, NH:
Heinemann, 2003.

Gabriele Rico, San Jose State University

There is time
to tell you
the only story I know
A youth sets out,
a man or woman returns;
the rest is simply incident
or weather.
And yet what storms
I could describe
swirling
in every thumbprint.

Linda Pastan, *A Fraction of Darkness*

It is high time we address Pastan’s “swirling” emotions in the unique “thumbprints” of each of our students in composition studies. For far too long

teachers have tried to keep separate the proverbial work of the “head” and the work of the “heart.” Recent books, such as Antonio Damasio’s *The Feeling of What Happens* and Daniel Goleman’s *Emotional Intelligence*, have demonstrated that *both* logic and emotion are governed by the brain. Both are necessary for real learning and play key roles in writing.

Dale Jacobs and Laura R. Micciche have collected thirteen essays tackling different aspects of the emotional spectrum in teaching composition. The essays are divided into three sections: “Theorizing Emotion” focuses on the validity of emotion in the composition classroom, including the neurobiology of emotion; “Classroom Emotions” focuses on what pushes the buttons of teachers of composition, such as surface-level errors in the writing of ethnically-diverse students, and how to harness the emotional dimension of writing instead of sweeping it under the carpet; and “Academic Workplace Emotions” concentrates on ethics, anger, satisfaction, collaboration, conflicts, and convergences.

What do we mean by “educating the emotions” or “emotional literacy”? Having studied the workings of the human brain for years, I know the limbic system, located directly beneath the neo-cortical brain’s “thinking cap,” is the seat of the emotions. Simply put, the limbic brain is the yea/nay-sayer to learning. If the limbic brain says “no” to incoming information, it cannot be learned, no matter how often we “cover” the material or how many “corrections” we make or how many “handouts” we duplicate for students. Genuine writing cannot take place without the limbic brain’s “yea-saying” involvement. Moreover, this limbic brain juts forward into the pre-frontal cortex, the executive part of the brain which acts as the motivator, planner, empathizer, visionary, and actor on ideas and images—in short, the “mover” of *A Way to Move*. Not until we begin to articulate the centrality of the emotions in writing, the often unverbizable, murky, ambiguous, uncertain aspects of “feeling” in academia, will emotions no longer be relegated to a no-man’s land or to “therapy.” “Move,” from the Latin *motere*, is not only the root of “motion” but the root of “e-motion.” “Move” asks us to become emotionally in-volved in order to e-volve. Ironically, awareness of the emotions, though largely suppressed in formal educational settings, is as old as Aristotle.

Ellen Quandahl’s essay places Aristotle as the “indisputable predecessor for . . . working with rather than against emotion in rhetorical education,” arguing that the very fabric of the *Rhetoric* shows us how citizens can flourish through persuasion instead of aggression, engaging “heart,” implying the “disposition to act and feel” (15). Gretchen Flesher Moon’s essay on pathos also draws on Aristotle’s understanding, acceptance, and promotion of emotional appeals. She writes, “We have for centuries pitted reason against emotion, logos against pathos, nomos against physis . . . [D]espite Aristotle’s admonitions, we have scant experience even in naming the emotions. In fact, these opposites are complementary, not binary” (37). Indeed, the point of this slim volume is to reconcile the polarities of logos and pathos. Tom Kerr and Mary Ann Cain separately acknowledge the on-going neglect of the emotions in composition studies. Kerr avers that “the gulf between what is regarded as personal and thus linked to one’s emotion, and what is political, and thus somehow beyond individual lives . . . is still wide . . .” (33). Susan Kirtley writes, “[in teaching] I feel compelled to hide what I have been taught is a weakness: my emotions” (58). However, citing Plato who writes that the emotions are “a source of movement” (63), Kirtley insists that “eros can then be seen as a continual movement forward, a perpetual striving that

emerges in emotion and leads to wisdom" (63).

Donna Strickland and Ilene Crawford focus on student errors and academia's "deeply entrenched emotional response to error" (78). Wendy Ryden's essay reaffirms the squeamishness with which academia has dealt with emotional intelligence: "Emotions are marked for the personal sphere and are not valid areas of public knowledge to be tampered with in the classroom" (86). Citing her own reluctance to confront these binaries, Ryden admits to responding to pathos with logos, "forc[ing] students and myself to frame emotional responses in terms of rational debate" (90).

Piper Murray addresses "hateful teaching" (93) when teachers encounter "bad students." She recounts a story from Richard H. Haswell and Min-Zhan Lu's *Comp Tales* about a senior professor whose "bad" students get returned a "zip-lock plastic baggie containing the shredded contents of their paper" (92), thus "torturing developing writers with acts of shame and humiliation."

Janet Bean, in exploring resistance in narratives of working class students, argues that "we need to discard binaries that oppose feelings and reason" and that we should "question our own reluctance to acknowledge emotion as intellectual work" (112).

Alice Gillam writes of the emotionally-draining struggle of Writing Program Administrators to gain legitimate standing in the face of dismissive institutions (123). She recounts, after her Faculty Senate eliminated writing proficiency requirements, that a colleague at a meeting which they both attended, said, "I hope you will think this is funny . . . when I mentioned your name, he said, 'Oh, I heard she died.'"

William W. Wright focuses on emotions triggered by job loss (anger, embarrassment, distress, discomfort) but also discusses the other end of the emotional continuum ("pleasure, wholeness, soul") (132). Citing Aristotle that "Pleasure is a movement, a movement by which the soul as a whole is consciously brought into its normal state of being," Wright insists that "rhetoric has had to find a place for pathos . . . which has been in service to logos" (132).

Similarly, Brad Peters is interested in radical anger and conflict management. Peters recalls for me linguist John Lamendella's research indicating that language is under the control of two separate systems, "one for normal speech and the other for speech under stress or in situations of strong emotion" (qtd. in Rico 113): in fact, bilinguals like me often revert to their mother tongue under strong emotion, possibly because this first language has the deepest ties to limbic expression.

Mara Holt, Leon Anderson, and Albert Rouzie address the rigors of "emotion work" despite the bleak reality that the WPA is "invisible": "Daily emotion work is crucial to accomplishing the goals of literacy widely espoused in higher education" (151). They recognize that nurturing and outlaw emotional expression are valuable, in a free society; for them an emotional vocabulary is essential to emotional literacy.

Lynn Worsham concludes: "It will be a shame if the new interest in emotion as a category of critical thought does not move us into a new orbit of . . . possibility" (163). Philosopher Susanne Langer in *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* states that the source of language initially lay in making inward feelings manifest in sound. I wrote in *Pain and Possibility* that "we can . . . think of language as a flashlight illuminating the jagged, irregular, swirling patterns of the incho-

ate” (112). Consider the emotional roots of language in human consciousness: life is matter and motion, nouns and verbs, an emotional grammar of multiple colorations of feeling. William Stafford in “Any Time” builds on the metaphor of a life-saving parachute, speaking for the heart of *A Way to Move*:

I have woven
a parachute out of everything broken, my scars
are my shield; and I jump, daylight or dark,
into any country, where as I descend I turn
native and stumble into terribly human speech
and wince recognition. (qtd. in Rico 112)

Language, particularly written, cannot help but be a potent organizing principle of our students’ emotional expression. I repeat: we cannot ignore the emotional power of *in*-volving them both emotionally *and* logically in order to help them *e*-volve as thoughtful, articulate writers. The writers in *A Way to Move* address head-on the mostly inarticulated dimension of composition studies. Bravo! ☺

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My college roommate never got her senior thesis proposal approved, but she went ahead and wrote the thesis without institutional blessing. The English Department’s thesis committee decided that Susan’s project—a narrative-based exploration of college students’ struggles with eating disorders—was not sufficiently grounded in “capital R” Research even though Susan had provided a tentative bibliography. The committee suggested that Susan resubmit the proposal after reframing the project as “creative fiction,” but she refused. After all, the project that she had in mind was not a novel or a series of poems but a presentation of research through the telling of individual students’ stories. In the end, Susan wrote the thesis that she wanted to write, but—despite her faculty advisor’s passionate defense of the final product—Susan could not graduate with honors, as most of the “approved” thesis writers did.

The events described above took place almost a decade ago, but the basic debate underlying Susan's struggle to gain institutional acceptance continues today. The role of narrative in college classrooms and student writing remains a controversial question that manifests itself in a variety of ways. Should students—even graduate students—be encouraged to explore their personal lives in their writing? Should they be permitted to use personal examples and anecdotes to support their claims about culture and society? Should they write about their friends and families? Should they use “I” in their writing at all? In *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making*, Gian Pagnucci explores all of these questions and answers each one with an unabashedly enthusiastic “yes.” Indeed, the book's arguments in favor of narrative's central place in writing and thinking are strengthened by Pagnucci's own narrative approach. The author skillfully integrates commentary on contemporary composition theory and classroom practice with stories about his students, teachers, friends, and family. For example, he shows how his childhood love of reading and collecting comic books inspired his pedagogical philosophy, illustrates the connections between his teaching experiences at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and his commitment to helping students write about their lives, and demonstrates the many ways in which his Italian heritage profoundly shaped his ongoing interest in language and memory. Overall, Pagnucci presents a strong case for narrative, not only as a powerful communication tool but also as a crucially important thought process: narrative is one way in which people make sense of the complex world around them.

What is the “narrative life” promised in the book's title? In a sense, the concept is quite simple; Pagnucci writes, “Stories are how we think. How we talk. They form our governments, our religions, our culture. . . . Stories are what make us human” (7). A person “living the narrative life” embraces and celebrates the role of stories in his or her everyday activities and beliefs. Given this description, a reader might wonder why anyone would resist or reject the narrative life, but, shortly after the lines quoted above, Pagnucci recounts the story of a graduate student, Brandon, whose narrative-based dissertation project on literacy trends in Pennsylvania is frowned upon by most of his advisers. At a committee meeting, Pagnucci defends Brandon while the other faculty members deliver sharp criticisms: “You need to ground the study in the relevant literature. . . . I'm worried you're going to take away from [your participants'] voices with all this stuff about yourself” (13). Pagnucci alone understands the worth of Brandon's project and argues that the writing style of most academic books, journals, and dissertations is deeply problematic: “Academia celebrates not clarity but obfuscation. We don't say what we mean. . . . In academia we prize abstraction and critical reflection. The piercing clarity of a story is too simplified for the hallowed halls of academia” (17). For Pagnucci (and Brandon), autobiographical stories foster insights and understandings too often squelched by standard, and standardized, “five paragraph essay” prose structures.

Living the Narrative Life neatly encapsulates Pagnucci's solution to the standardization and abstraction of academic work: a narrative approach to writing and scholarship. Each of the six themed sections of the book includes a short story, a poem, and an essay that blend theoretical discussion with short narrative anecdotes. These three genres illustrate three different approaches to writing and thinking about the following issues: “The Perils of the Narrative Life,” “Narrative Ideology,” “Telling Your Own Story,” “Telling Family Stories,” “Telling Work Legends,” and “Telling Stories with Students.” The book also includes “inter-

ludes”: chapters comprised of quotations and conversation fragments that explore narrative theory. All of these components are engaging and witty, with arguments directed not only at professional teachers of writing but also at graduate students, who, after all, frequently work as teaching assistants for undergraduate composition courses.

Pedagogy is a central concern of *Living the Narrative Life*. The later sections of the book describe various methods that instructors can use to include narrative in university writing classes. Pagnucci contrasts his work to seminal research by David Bartholomae and Linda Flower when he insists that narrative should not be solely relegated to brainstorming exercises meant to get student writers started before they move on to more abstract and argumentative academic writing. Bartholomae and Flower are mentioned only briefly in *Living the Narrative Life*; I leave it to readers to decide whether Pagnucci’s assessment of these writers’ ideas is entirely accurate. Several of the activities and assignments that Pagnucci describes could be incorporated into almost any kind of writing course. He teaches research methodology by asking his composition students to investigate their family trees, and he advocates “co-writing” for creative projects; one of the book’s longest narratives describes his work with Dustin, a home-schooled teenager with whom Pagnucci collaborates on a science fiction story. While co-writing is probably best left to one-on-one time with students rather than classroom time, Dustin’s example allows Pagnucci to elaborate on one of his most important themes, letting students decide for themselves what they’d like to write: “When I quit pushing Dustin away from the literacy stories he valued and tried instead to find my own meaning in the stories he was drawn to, Dustin finally responded to my teaching” (144). Readers who teach “Writing in the Disciplines” courses may be surprised and intrigued by one of Pagnucci’s technical writing course assignments: a collaborative journal in which students exchange suggestions about each other’s research projects.

A tendency toward overstatement occasionally undermines the strength of Pagnucci’s arguments. Given narrative writers’ struggles to be taken seriously as academic scholars, Pagnucci’s passionate defense of narrative is understandable. Though he does acknowledge some scholars who applaud narrative approaches, the author may still be giving short shrift to recent trends in academic writing, trends that simultaneously make room for narrative and challenge traditional conventions of what constitutes “publishable” or “serious” prose. For example, a 1996 *JAC* article by Daniel Mahala and Jody Swilky convincingly argues for a turn toward personal storytelling within academic discourses; they note that such writers as Patricia Williams, Trinh Minh-Ha, and Jane Tompkins use narrative forms to “present themselves as historically situated subjects exploring how their knowledge has been shaped by lived experience” (364).

Also, Pagnucci writes that “[w]hat is placed on the highest pedestal of all [in academia] are not stories but rather theory, densely written works of abstract concepts” (21). This statement sets up a false dichotomy because “theory,” however formalized in structure, reveals an elaborate “story” of our thinking; in its manifold variety, theory is an emergent narrative with appropriate abstract and particular parts. Similarly, to say, as Pagnucci does, that the narrative life is “the only life really worth living” (2) may alienate readers who simply prefer to write (and think) in different, and perhaps more abstract, ways. Not every writer is comfortable with narrative, particularly autobiographical narrative.

Arguments about composition course content—especially the fraught question of helping students to enter an academic or professional discourse community by teaching them discipline-specific writing conventions—may never be resolved in a way that satisfies all involved parties. Though most instructors would probably agree that completely dismissing certain types of writing is an unproductive approach that might discourage students (like my college roommate) from working to their fullest potential, Pagnucci persuasively argues that such dismissals of narrative remain disturbingly routine. Pagnucci's invitation to "live the narrative life" is not only a refreshing, enjoyable read, but also an important intervention into contemporary debates about writing skills, practices, theories, and pedagogies. ☐

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Here's a personal story for you: I spent a couple of weeks with Candace Spigelman—at least in the context of her cogent, enormously thoughtful examination of personal writing in academic discourse. I felt invigorated, as if I had found a new mentor in teaching writing, someone who managed to call into question my unexamined assumptions and inspired me to dig as deeply as she did at the same time. And she even lived in my state! And then came the shock: she is no longer with us. Spigelman, a rhetoric professor at the Pennsylvania State University, Berks campus, died unexpectedly in December 2004 at age 57. Many of her colleagues, former students, and peers in the discipline have eulogized her in many places and forms, always mingling their praise for her principles, groundbreaking publications, sensitive pedagogical practice, and upbeat professionalism with their fond memories. As she points out in her recent book, *Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse*, Aristotle even calls for brief stories to support the claims of epideictic rhetoric. But this isn't why Spigelman's colleagues employ them in remembering her. They do so because that is how their impressions of her were constructed: they are telling themselves and others stories about Spigelman to make the case for her attributes, for the transformative nature of their relationships with her. In a very real way, they are actualizing the arguments she is making in the text under review here, and I think she would appreciate how her friends unconsciously emphasize her position with *encomia* supported by personal experiences.

Personally Speaking is an offering of Southern Illinois University Press's Studies in Writing and Rhetoric series. In this work, Spigelman's project is to

carve out both theoretical and pragmatic instructional space for integrating the “personal” in traditional academic writing. To create opportunities for this integration, she interrogates the standard objections to the inclusion of personal writing in the composition classroom and subsequently makes a powerful argument for the special contributions personal writing can make within the construction of academic arguments. In both cases, she succeeds brilliantly in creating new space for the serious consideration of hybrid or “blurred” forms of writing.

Spigelman defines “personal writing” as writing in which writers “make sense of their lives by organizing their experiences into first-person stories” (3). Early in the book, she foregrounds her discussions with an exploration of the “narrative turn” in many disciplines, often in the form of ethnographic research and narratives. I was especially taken with her exploration of the use of personal writing in the academic essays of well-known compositionists (Linda Brodkey, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Karen Surman Paley, and others) and with her wry observation that, while writing teachers often make use of the personal as evidence in their own writing, they are reluctant to make the same rhetorical tool available to their students.

Her hope—her call to action—is for the modification of academic discourse through inclusion of personal writing. Such a blending of personal writing “in and as academic argument” results in what she calls “personal academic argument.” Spigelman describes this integration as a hybrid or “blurred genre” of writing that will help writers overcome the “public” vs. “private” dichotomy that often constrains academic writers as they come to terms with what is meaningful and worth sharing. She examines how the thinking of feminist rhetorical and pedagogical theorists lends support to the inclusion of the personal—as the politics of location—in all arenas of communication.

Spigelman does not take up directly a question that persisted in my thinking as I read, and that is, “Why do students seem to gravitate toward personal stories first?” She does answer it indirectly, I think, explaining that personal writing gives students authority over their topics and the meanings they are working through in their writing. They begin with the familiar and take the opportunity to bring their own intra-textual knowledge to writing, a more certain bridge to traditional academic writing than the unreflective “borrowing” of the objective voice and unfamiliar genres of academic prose. Spigelman reminds us that the inclusion of the personal often invites audience engagement and identification. As readers and writers, we are always more attuned to “faces” than we are to “facts.”

Integrating the personal into academic discourse then provides a kind of mediating structure or space, as Vygotsky might explain it, between the kinds of thinking students have internalized and the kinds of academic habits of mind they are reaching for. Spigelman argues further that the inclusion of personal writing provides a kind of “surplus,” a change in thinking about both personal and academic topics. This surplus, the recognition of insights that the writer “cannot fully reconcile” and perhaps would not have gained access to, makes possible more complex and sometimes contradictory perspectives. She states, “when we use personal experience as evidence in scholarly writing, we simultaneously frame our subject narratively and deductively, and thus offer our readers (at least) two kinds of understanding or conceptualization” (91). Spigelman describes her work with several first-year writers, especially a student named Michelle, to integrate first-person stories to deepen and complicate their “first takes” on the analytic

topics Spigelman had assigned. In these discussions, Spigelman emphasizes the use of the personal as a rhetorical tool, asking to what purposes personal writing is employed in the construction of the text.

Spigelman is similarly thorough in addressing frankly and without prejudice the ubiquitous objections to the use of personal writing. She acknowledges the concerns and risks many teachers try to avoid by proscribing first-person stories outright. She anticipates and answers the critics' caveats in regard to personal writing: the difficulties of personal "disclosure" in academic writing, the disconnect between the goals of "academic discourse" and the motives of personal writing. She is at her most definitive, however, when she considers the concerns of many postmodern critics that the use of personal writing leaves uninterrogated naive understandings of a kind of unitary "identity" whose observations are irreproachable, unimpeachable, and "true."

She responds to these concerns with a fascinating counterpoint, defining experience itself as a "construct." We commonly conflate experience with "expertise," and this is the mistake we make. We must instead acknowledge that the experiences we write about or tell are a kind of fiction; they are always narrated. Spigelman quotes Judith Summerfield, who explains: "There is no return to the event, except 'virtually.' The event is overtaken, always mediated by language" (63). We translate experience into mini-narratives and stories that we tell ourselves about the events we experience. Thus, "experiences" are always shot with ambiguity because they are at least at one remove from the actual event and may have been reconstructed many times. Thus, using these mini-narratives in academic writing should not be viewed as naively unified and irreproachable, but as fulfilling rhetorical purposes that may "signify the complexities and contradictions of experiential representations of self and others" (81). When we employ personal stories, we "select strategically the most appropriate versions and representations to complete our rhetorical purpose, while acknowledging as postmodern thinkers our inability to access a stable, singular psychic core" (45).

Spigelman acknowledges forthrightly that employing personal writing can be "challenging and risky" in the writing classroom, but she leaves no doubt of its potential for writers and readers. After living with Spigelman's book for weeks now, I see that this text provides a substantial theoretical foundation for many contemporary trends in composition that urge writers to experiment with "alternative discourses" and "mixed forms" to create new rhetorical spaces. Spigelman and alternative discourse writers share a sense of the emphatic importance of personal and experiential voices as grounds for more traditional argumentative claims, and Spigelman's book helps to solidify their position theoretically and pedagogically.

Other readers who could be invigorated by Spigelman's thinking are teachers who have shunned the use of personal writing. They will be likely to re-examine their objections in the context of Spigelman's candid considerations of the very real paradoxes initiated by the use of first-person stories in academic arguments. Teachers who have encouraged their students to experiment with personal experience as evidence in support of larger claims will take away a keener sense of what might be possible and a set of new pedagogical strategies to try. Many of these readers will feel somewhat bereft, as I do, that the rhetoric and composition studies community has lost Spigelman's voice, but, in a very real sense, we still have a remarkable mentor available to us in this and her other texts. ☹

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