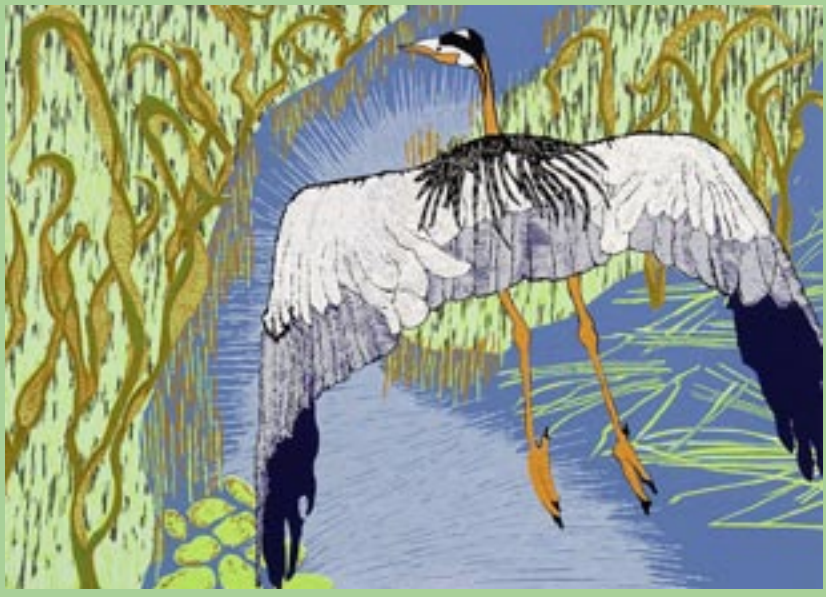
MEJ

Minnesota English Journal

The Minnesota Council of Teachers of English



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celebrating 45 years of professional conversation and continuing education

Edited by
William D. Dyer
John Banschbach
Minnesota State University, Mankato

From the Editors

A Call for Responses from the MCTE Membership

Starting with the next issue of *MEJ* (Fall 2007), the editors hope to feature a "Letters to the Editors" section, which could respond to a number of topics. A partial list could include:

- The content of articles represented in this issue
- Suggestions about issues in teaching that *MEJ*'s readership should be responding to and writing articles and letters about
- Positions on the state of the profession
- Positions on High School literature, composition, and language standards
- Concerns about censorship
- Concerns about whether a list of books that students should read before graduation should be "standard procedure" for teachers
- Issues surrounding the appropriateness or inappropriateness of teaching certain types of literature
- Issues related to teaching with technology
- Positions on how to teach grammar to students relying on "grammar and spell checks"

We hope you'll view this list as we do—a very incomplete set of possibilities. We invite you to send us a letter on a subject that moves you. Contribute to our discussion. We look forward to hearing from you.

Co-Editor, *MEJ*

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Editors' Letter

Wednesday, October 4, 2006

I've got something serious on my mind, and, although there may be some question about the appropriateness of sharing it in this venue, my mind and heart cannot say no. So, walk along with me a bit with this. My heart is full, and, in the end, there's a point that I'm heading for.

I'm on my way to a funeral today. Students are never supposed to die before their teachers—that's a granite-hewn rule as unbreakable as the one parents cling fiercely to about their sons and daughters. But, nonetheless, my former student Zac, his remains on the way to a funeral home today after a quick flight from Tokyo amid a blizzard of bureaucratic red tape, has perished. Alone. Senselessly. Period. With all but the dots of the "i's" and the crosses of the "t's" to be applied to his dissertation, he was all but finished with his Ph.D. work at FSU-Tallahassee and in Japan to present a paper on Samuel Beckett to a prestigious audience of scholars. But the presentation never happened. A world of opportunities about to burst into bloom for him. Depression blighted those buds. Gone.

Through all of the love, second-guessing, despair, and anger I know I'll share with those who'll gather to commemorate Zac's life, I'll be comforted by one thing: my memory of a relationship that lasted long after we stopped being student and

teacher to each other. In 1996, this long-haired Eddie Vetter look and sound-alike emerged from a crowded evening night class on "Shakespeare's Tragedies" with the intensity of his questions and his insightful written analyses. Amid the barely controlled chaos of twenty-eight talented people competing to be heard, Zac stood out—not because he was louder or more assertive than the rest, but because he simply was the one. I think all of us know that, during a long career, each of us will be blessed with the presence of a small handful of students who are extraordinary. Zac was that.

And, when I recognized what and who he was, I didn't screw up. When "Shakespeare's Tragedies" was over, I approached Zac with an offer I'd never made to an undergraduate—to be a teaching intern in a Humanities "Medieval and Renaissance Traditions" class the following semester. Zac was initially puzzled by my offer—he was a Music major, with no grounding in literature or other associated humanities disciplines. But he accepted, and the class went swimmingly. To me, a teaching internship has always meant sharing everything, from the selection and delivery and assessment of course materials to the development of the oral and writing tasks for participants —total team-teaching. And that's what we did. Zac thrived on that experience, and his student audience loved him.

But that was just the beginning. We co-presented in two sessions at a national Humanities conference in Jacksonville a year after that; we collaborated on Zac's first publication (in a national journal for the Humanities); Zac served as my teaching intern in my last "Summer Session in Ireland" in 1998; and then he began to distinguish himself as a graduate student in English at Minnesota State University-Mankato for the next few years. Wonderful exemplary teaching in composition and Gen. Ed. literature; a successfully completed program; a huge thesis on myth, archive, and folklore in Marquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* which it was my honor to direct, and the longest thesis defense in the history of our program, simply because there was so much to say about it.

And there was the other stuff he did. He served a couple of years for us as a fixed-term instructor. And, along with that, he

spear-headed two very successful "Time in Transition" conferences at MSU that drew key-note speakers and presenters from around the country and abroad. He did a lot of the important grant-writing and organizing while managing to present, as well, at those conferences. He was a dynamo, a foreshadowing of the kind of faculty member we knew he'd ultimately become. I joked with him about how I'd be able to pass him the baton of my job because I'd be retiring just about the time we both expected he'd be getting done at FSU. Fat chance. I'm pretty sure now that we wouldn't have been able to compete for his highly-regarded services.

Eight years of Zac. What a gift. Mutually fruitful in its reciprocity. A mirror of the mentoring relationship when it works well. As Derek Jeter asserts in a TV ad promoting Major League Baseball, "I live for this."

Well, all of this is great, and devastatingly sad, but so what? What could it possibly have to do with you and with the contents of this latest number of *MEJ*? Everything, I think. My carryings-on about Zac relate directly to what you and I strive to do every day—connect with our audience, attempt to discover what our students know, what they need to know, and how they need the stuff that we're engaging them in delivered. It's all about audience. My most abysmal failures in the classroom have always occurred—regardless of how impeccably prepared I was—when I've neglected to consider whether what I'm about to present will serve and be understood by my students. My greatest successes seem to happen—even when I'm badly prepared—when I've discovered a way for students to participate directly and actively in the enterprise. When I get out of their way, invite them (in the best way possible) to put me out of business. That can't happen if we're not listening to our audience, using little assessment strategies to gauge the relative effectiveness of what we're asking them to do and then adjusting to that audience accordingly.

Our classrooms may never be filled with Zacs. We may never be able to point to each one of them as illumining small pieces of our small careers. But every one of them is important. Our teaching cannot be even marginally successful unless we attend to what they do and do not say, what they need and do not need.

And, I'm proud to say, this number of *MEJ* is the best I've been affiliated with for that reason. Each of the essays you'll read in the following pages—whether it be about teaching literature, composition, language, or redefining our relationship to our profession—is all about audience. The diversity of those audiences is one of our greatest challenges, and you'll find a couple of essays that represent that challenge eloquently. Michael Lomonico, the key-note speaker at MCTE's spring conference in Rochester and director of the Folger Library's efforts to pollinate new, dynamic, participatory strategies for teaching Shakespeare to young people, has graced our journal with a short pedagogical piece. An elegantly-written essay on the uses of historical and cultural materials as a starting point for helping students to open up Irish works like MacLaverty's *Cal* was submitted by Beth McCullough and has been designated this year's winner of "*MEJ* Best Essay" and a $350 prize (the joy of this resides in the fact that this award could have gone to one of several excellent submissions). And, finally, this issue has included for the first time a section entitled "The Idea Exchange" that contains tips, assignment ideas, classroom management strategies, and suggestions for promoting better writing and classroom discussion submitted by your teaching peers. We're very much hoping that you'll continue to contribute your own suggestions about what works for you in your classroom, specifically for your student audience.

And audience is what we're about. Most of us would be out on the streets doing some unpleasant heavy lifting without that audience. We choose not to listen to the voices or silences in our classroom at our peril, and theirs. I'm certain that, in my two and a half-hour ride down to Winona today with a close friend of Zac's, we'll agonize together about whether there was anything we could have done or said, opportunities for staying connected with him that we missed, messages behind a telephonic voice that we failed to encrypt, e-mail notes left unreturned. We'll never know now. But I can treasure our relationship, one founded upon recognizing what one important member of one of my classroom audiences needed and carrying that forward into some significant rewards for both of us well beyond that classroom.

And he carried that attentiveness forward beautifully into his relationship with his own students. There's consolation in that.

Enjoy the issue.

William D. Dyer

Idea Exchange

This section represents a venue for sharing the work of our teaching peers. More to the point, what follows are suggestions for solving specific teaching problems. There is more than a small chance that some of these practical tips might be useful for those of us who teach. Should you wish more information on one or more of these tips, contact the author at the e-mail address attached to the tip.

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"One of my most successful units is a poetry unit. During the poetry unit, the students each memorize a poem and work on a close reading of the poem. By the end of the unit the students present their poems to the class and explicate them. The unintended effect of this exercise is that, when students recite their memorized poems, they do it slowly, carefully, with the poem on the overhead behind them. The other students follow along watching, listening, and the poem has a dramatic effect on them because of the deliberateness of the delivery."—

Christine Brunkhorst
St. Thomas Academy
9th and 10th grade English

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"When teaching the short story in creative writing,

I hand out cards to students. Each card has either a description of a character, or a description of a setting, or a description of a conflict. Students then talk to each other and form themselves into groups including two characters, one conflict, and one setting. Then students turn those ingredients into a quick sketch for a story, and we share. We can then talk about the nature of short story, its structure and its elements."—

Kelly Smalstig
Henry Sibley High School
10th through 12th grades: World Literature and Creative Writing
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"After reading/studying *The Merchant of Venice*, we hold three debates. The class is divided into six groups and they spend about two hours preparing for their debate. Here are some proposed "debate" topics:

- Shylock is a villain in *The Merchant of Venice*
- The Christians show mercy in the play
- Justice is served by the end of the play

The structure of each debate follows this format:

- Affirm opening statements
- Negative opening statement
- Affirmative rebuttal
- Negative rebuttal
- Affirmative final statement
- Negative final statement"—

Heather Megarry
Ubah Medical Academy
Grades 9 through 12

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"Here is a journal prompt to use when teaching *The Diary of Anne Frank*:

> A dying Nazi soldier asks a Jewish prisoner in a concentration camp for forgiveness. What would you do if you were the Jewish prisoner?

Have students read selections from *Sunflower* between their first and second drafts of this writing prompt."—

Bonnie Sparling
bsparling@pinecity.k12.mnsu.edu

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"I was encouraged by Michael Lomonico's comments on performance in the classroom because I am attempting to integrate student performance in all genres by assigning parts of short stories, poems, novels, and other literary types for students to read. When the students enter my room, I have a list of the characters and three narrators on the chalkboard. Now the kids know the routine. "Can I be Nancy? I want to be the Grandma," laughs a burly twelve year-old boy. I randomly choose parts, and, if students don't want to read aloud, they may pass their part to another student. Those kids who choose not to read aloud must follow along in the text. The kids love it and so do I."—

Jennifer Hunt 7th grade English
Pine City Jr./Sr. High School
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"Here's a writing idea: ask students to write about what they want to be when they grow up on one side of a piece of paper. After they have finished, have them flip the paper over and write about what they would do with their lives if they had all the time in the world and no restrictions. Have a discussion afterward concerning whether the two pieces of writing each student has done say the same thing. Shouldn't they? The discussion could go in lots of directions, but the focus here is goals and thinking clearly about what to do with one's life."—

Anne Warrington
Pine Island High School
10th grade College in the Schools: Fundamentals of Speaking; Introduction to Literature
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"Humanities students do a mini-photography unit which culminates in a final project where they walk around town (Pine Island is small) taking pictures. They then choose the one or two photographs that really capture the essence of Pine Island. This is a great project to do to remind the students who are going off to college where they've come from."—

Michelle Prigge
Pine Island High School
English 9
Humanities (11th and 12th grades)
Basic College Composition (12 grade)

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"Creating collages: students bring in items for a collage and explain how each item relates to whatever book we're reading. They like seeing the collage build as the book progresses. On the exam, I have them choose several items from the collage and relate them to the story we've read."—

Jennifer Henry
Upsala Area Schools
7th through 12th grade English
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"After going over all the story elements (plot, theme, character, setting, etc.), have students watch *White Squall*. Then have students create a newspaper about the movie showing all of the literary elements within it."—

Jory Magel
Pine City High School
jmagel@pinecity.k12.mn.us

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"Here's a classroom management tip: Have each student write his/her name on a popsicle stick. Use the sticks throughout the year to randomly call on students, to divide them into groups, etc. This tactic keeps the students alert and prevents the

teacher from always calling on the same students."—

Laura Meyer
l.meyer@biglake.k12.mn.us

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"Here's a final essay topic for a Senior English class: "If I would have known then what I know now…." Then publish a few of the papers in next fall's newspaper for tips for underclassmen."—

Gerri Nielsen
11th and 12th grade English, Composition, Myths and Legends
Fillmore Central High School Harmony, MN 55939
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"When students are reading a Shakespeare play, let them voluntarily jump into parts as the parts come up. If no one jumps in right away, wait until someone does. I do this with my ninth graders and have found that students have a positive attitude about this approach. I can guess that they have a heightened sense of responsibility for the reading, the experience, the interpretation, and their learning."—

Wes Jorde
Saint Thomas Academy
9th grade (rhetorical skills)12th grade (World Literature,Composition)
wjorde@cadets.com

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"Here's three tips for reading and responding to literature:

- Use journal prompts to stimulate class discussion
- Incorporate students' life experience into writing in response to literature
- Dedicate one class period per week to independent reading."—

Frank Blankley
Grades 9 through 12

St. Thomas Academy
fblankley@cadets.com

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"A tip for a writing or speaking assignment: Have students write or speak about a scar they have on their body and the interesting or fun or embarrassing story behind it."—

Tom Weber
1500 E. Crystal Lake Road
Burnsville, MN 55306
St. Thomas Academy

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"As a culminating activity after a ninth grade research project on a non-fiction book (on themes of tests, challenges, extreme adventure), students will be asked to give an oral presentation acting as the character in the book (persona)."—

Solfrid Ladstein
St. Thomas Academy
9th grade English, 11th grade Honors English
sladstein@cadets.com

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"Start class with a reflection that parallels what you and your students are studying: for example, a poem by Yusef Kumunyaha about Vietnam or a '60's song when studying Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*."—

Donna Isaac
St. Thomas Academy
Junior American Literature; Composition Writing Lab Director
dissaac@cadets.com

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"Consider asking students in your poetry workshop to demonstrate the following principles of poetry ACTIVELY—"On your feet; act them out!"—

- Poetry is sound
- Poetry is rhythm

• Poetry is image

Kathleen R. Sevig
10th through 12th grade English
Shakespeare, World Literature, Creative Writing, Honors English 11

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"An idea for improving students' writing and language skills: Have students free-write every day and develop a composition weekly using self-selected or pre-selected vocabulary words. The content for these papers is unlimited; the focus on the criteria for what will be graded will change for each assignment. The benefits of this assignment are multiple:

• Students get creative
• Students' voice becomes stronger
• Shorter papers become easier to grade
• Students' word choice becomes more precise
• Students get lots of writing practice
• No long lectures are required to clarify students' responsibilities"

Lori Risbrudt
Ashby School District 261
9th through 12th grade Literature and Composition
College English Comp 102 and 103 lrisbrudt@ashby.k12.mn.us

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"I give class time for all major pieces of writing. After topic selection and related activities, students write a draft. Then they do a second draft which they enter into a computer. They are urged to improve their first draft in any way they see fit. I tell them to ask any question they might have and I talk to them about their writing concern. They print out the second (word-processed) draft and take a pen or pencil to it to make it better again. The more evidence they put on the page that they are interacting with, the more points they get. Again, they can ask me for help or my opinion on what they've written. Then I read this draft and react to it, pointing out what I think each

writer can benefit from doing. Then they proceed to the next draft."—

Richard Class
JWP High School/Senior High

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"A procedure for doing a two-student collaborative research project:

- Two students choose one novel
- They read it
- They research critical sources
- They take careful notes
- They form a thesis that views the work through two critical lenses
- They write a research paper arguing which of the two lenses is "more revealing." They must determine what the lenses reveal.
- They present the paper to the class using creativity and class involvement."—

Bob Strandquist
Eagan High School
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Note: The Idea Exchange is now a regular feature of *The Minnesota English Journal*. Most teachers are astonishingly busy. Sitting down to write a long paper is out of the question for people with five or more preps per day. Thus, we want our readers to "think small" for a few minutes. Jot down on an e-mail message (or an enclosure in an e-mail message in "Word") to the *MEJ* editor a teaching tip, an idea about teaching a piece of literature that has worked for you with a particular audience, a writing prompt you've used to generate discussion, a strategy for developing discussion on a piece of literature, a writing assignment (along with the context you've created for it), a research exercise, or an effective way of dealing with the writing process or revision or mechanics. Label your e-mail

"The Idea Exchange" and address it to straits@mnsu.edu.

Thanks in advance for contributing your ideas to this enterprise.

Bill Dyer

Co-Editor, *The Minnesota English Journal*

Why We Teach Literature (and How We Could Do It Better)

Michael LoMonico

Before I answer the question in the title of this article, I ask the reader to read this passage:

> You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly—Tom's Aunt Polly, she is—and Mary, and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before. [1]

And this passage:

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way-

> in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.[2]

And another:

> Call me Ishmael. Some years ago - never mind how long precisely - having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off - then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can. This is my substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship. There is nothing surprising in this. If they but knew it, almost all men in their degree, some time or other, cherish very nearly the same feelings towards the ocean with me. [3]

And:

> Two households, both alike in dignity,
> In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
> From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
> Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
> From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
> A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
> Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
> Do with their death bury their parents' strife.
> The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,

> And the continuance of their parents' rage,
> Which, but their children's end, nought could remove, Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
> The which if you with patient ears attend,
> What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.[4]

Two more:

> Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously.[5]

And finally:

> If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth.[6]

Pretty good opening lines and a pretty cheap way to begin an article for English teachers. Besides being simply "famous," these opening passages have something else going for them. They are all beautifully written, and with the exception of J. D. Salinger's parody of Dickens, they are all strikingly original.

The first part of my title is "Why we teach literature." So why do we teach literature? I think we can hear the answer in the voice of Huck Finn and Ishmael and David Copperfield and Holden Caulfield. It's the wonderful sound of those words, the gorgeous flow of those well-crafted sentences, and the marvelous way Twain and Dickens and Melville and Shakespeare and Salinger chose just the right words. And for some odd reason, we want our students to see the aesthetic beauty in those words and sentences. That's one of the major reasons that we teach literature.

I'd venture to say that most of us English teachers fell

in love with the art of literature well before we considered the themes, the characterizations, or the plots. But somewhere along the line, many of us put those aesthetics on the back burner in favor of the more "teachable" aspects of a literary work. And frankly, discussing the beauty of language with reluctant adolescents isn't always easy. But it can be done and it's really worth the effort .

After teaching high school English for 33 years, I now find myself teaching an English methods course for graduate and undergraduate pre-service English teachers at Stony Brook University in New York, as well as traveling around the country for The Folger Shakespeare Library demonstrating ways to teach Shakespeare to working teachers.

My methods course is the last course students take before venturing out into student teaching. But when they enter that class, they seem more concerned about discipline and standards and testing than teaching literature because in high-school they spent many hours absorbing what their English teachers said and did. So they think they know the methodology. Some proudly show me their tattered high-school notebooks (which they plan to use in their own classrooms), filled with major plot points from *Romeo and Juliet* or lists of themes from *Death of a Salesman*. They know that plenty of similar material is available: all those questions in the teacher editions of their textbooks, those ready-to-teach lesson plans at Web sites, and those infamous packets of study questions arranged chapter-by-chapter or scene-by-scene to make sure that students know every detail about a novel or play.

And speaking of those study packets, I remember when a colleague of mine was using them to teach *Hamlet* to his AP class and asked me for help with some answers. "You know *Hamlet* pretty well," he said. "I can't figure out the answers to several of these questions." I looked at the questions quickly, but they were clearly too difficult for me as well. I asked him why, if we, who had both taught that play a number of times, couldn't answer the questions, he expected his students to answer them. And then I pointed out to him that his students were mostly using Cliff Notes to find the answers.

So with their own high-school experiences and all

that material at the ready, my students are not very concerned about day-to-day teaching methodology and assigning work. Their preconceived notion of how and why English is taught is the real hurdle I must overcome. For most of them, focusing on the language of the texts is new and scary. But after many years of focusing on characters, plots, and theme in my own teaching, I found that a text-based approach helps students appreciate literature much more than any other method. And the best way to apply that approach is through performance.

It wasn't classroom discussions of plots, themes, and characters that made us want to become English teachers. It was probably a passionate, innovative, caring teacher who made a difference in our lives. Often those role models took great risks in their teaching. Maybe they stood on their desks or held classes under a tree during the spring or really made us think, perhaps for the first time in our school careers. I make it clear that engaging, innovative methods will make it easier to get kids to love literature and turn them into lifelong readers and playgoers. I explain and demonstrate that performance can help students connect with language and literature in ways that can never happen with traditional teaching.

What's wrong with teaching plot, character, and theme? Nothing, really, as long as teachers work with students to look closely at the text and the writer's style and word choice. After all, the audience for those writers certainly wasn't your sixth period class. What worries me is that sometimes, in teaching all the elements of a literary work and the author's life, we end up teaching **about** the novel instead of teaching the novel itself.

As English teachers, our role is to change students' perceptions about the value of literature. We want them to love literature as much as we do. My future teachers won't do that by just getting their students to create vocabulary lists from *The Scarlet Letter*, or to identify the major characters in *Lord of the Flies* and create a VEN diagram with them, or to keep a journal listing the major themes of *The Great Gatsby* or answer lots of plot-related questions about *Macbeth*. If that were enough, we could skip reading completely (something that

many students already do) and just pass out plot summaries, character sketches, and lists of themes. I tell my students, if they only want their classes to answer plot, character, and theme questions, they should assign Cliff Notes. Think about that.

If they want their students to actually read assigned books, they have to go beyond that and have students look closely at the author's actual words. They have to allow students to discover the idiosyncratic way in which Melville arranges his words and the precision of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. They have to ask students why the original opening lines of *Romeo and Juliet*, "Two households, both alike in dignity / In fair Verona where we lay our scene," sound infinitely better than the Shakespeare Made Easy version, "The play is set in beautiful Verona in Italy." They have to create classroom activities and assignments that get students to that point of discovery.

In our class, we search for dialogue passages from *Huckleberry Finn* and the short stories of Kate Chopin and act them out. We become the nasty New England gossips in *The Scarlet Letter* and rail against Hester Prynne. We practically sing out Whitman's "Song of Myself" and then write and recite our own version. We stage a stirring round-robin reading of "The Declaration of Independence" in which the sound of each student's voice resonates and imitates the variety of people who make up this country.

Besides annoying our colleagues in the surrounding classrooms, these active engagements with literature make the works come to life in a way that never happens when teachers concentrate on plot, character, and theme. After participating in these activities, my gang of future teachers sees the value of what we are doing. Most of them come to me as lovers of literature; after saying the words out loud and hearing them said in new and marvelous ways, they can better articulate why they love literature. They understand that their students will become excited, too, and will want to read more.

The use of technology—film, video, audio, computer applications, and Web-based activities—is a tougher sell. We begin with active ways to incorporate film and video. We view five versions of the witches' scene from *Macbeth*. Working in

groups, they note variations: textual (cut and rearranged lines), aural (sound and music), visual (costumes, sets, and props), and cinematic (types of shots, lighting, etc.). We convert a descriptive passage from Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* into a shooting script and take a lyrical film clip such as the opening 10 minutes from *Midnight Cowboy*, and convert it into prose. We analyze how the PBS film of "Cora Unashamed" sanitizes the language of the original Langston Hughes short story. In doing these activities—rather than just talking about the works—students see how important it is to be engaged with media.

I find that computer applications and Internet projects elicit the most fear and resistance in my students. Many are technophobes and proudly announce that they have gotten through four years of college without using a computer. Even those who use computers daily fail to see the value of integrating them into English curriculum. So rather than teach technology, I create assignments that get them to engage with the technology. This semester, my students have been creating videos, blogs, wikis, and podcasts on a regular basis. They each took a Shakespeare sonnet and illuminated it with hyperlinks. They collaborated on a class wiki.

These are all tools that they will bring into their own classes. So by the time they leave my class, they seem excited about getting their students excited.

The second part of my title is: "How we can do it better." For this part I'm going to concentrate on teaching Shakespeare, but nearly everything I'm going to write can be applied to all literature.

I always begin my workshops with a simple question: "Who taught you how to teach Shakespeare?" The responses are quite interesting. Experienced teachers usually laugh. Novices usually get nervous, thinking that they somehow missed that class in college or in graduate school. I rarely get a good answer.

I have been involved with the Folger Shakespeare Library for the past 20 years, first as a participant in the Teaching Shakespeare Institute, then as a master teacher, and currently as the Senior Consultant on National Education. In 1986,

Peggy O'Brien, then the head of education at the Folger, told me that she wanted to change the way Shakespeare was taught in this country. I was duly impressed with her goal. Much has happened in the world of Shakespeare education since then. Through the work of those summer Institutes and others like them, the three volumes of *Shakespeare Set Free*, Rex Gibson's Cambridge School Shakespeare editions and other noteworthy books, and some excellent outreach programs by regional theaters, much has changed. Teachers no longer have to look desperately to their own high school days for inspiration and methodology. Colleges and universities are starting (slowly) to talk about Shakespeare pedagogy in their English methods courses.

So what is currently happening in Shakespeare classrooms? Teachers are getting kids out of their seats to perform scenes. Students are editing scenes and creating prompt books to see how a scene can work on the stage. Groups of students are getting together to create videos of scenes. Teachers are abandoning those lists of endless study questions when they teach a play.

I have worked with so many teachers around the country during the past 20 years, but alas, I still run across so many who haven't heard of any of the above and are groping through the plays, looking for whatever help they can get.

I've managed to summarize my philosophy of teaching Shakespeare to ten simple, yet salient points. These ideas are not that original or groundbreaking; they have been gleaned from my colleagues at the Folger and from all the teachers I have met along the way.

1. It is more important to get kids to like Shakespeare than to get them to understand every word.

Most students approach Shakespeare with a great deal of fear and intimidation. They've heard from parents, older siblings, and friends that it's tough going, and they feel that they probably won't get it. The role of high school teachers is to convince them that they **CAN** get it. Students all over the country are having a wonderful time with Shakespeare because their teachers have discovered ways to demystify it. And those teachers realize that a total comprehension of every nuance of the play is not necessary.

We can wait until our students take advanced college or graduate courses in Shakespeare before we try to teach them the plays with that degree of depth. This may seem self-evident, but in my travels I've seen many well-intentioned teachers who feel differently. I recall an AP teacher who told me her method for teaching *Hamlet*. "I spend an entire week telling my students everything they need to know about the play. I tell them all the historical and biblical allusions, all the imagery, all the themes, and all the theories, so that when they start to read the play, they'll know everything." Being polite, I said something nice, but to myself I thought about all those scholars at the Folger Shakespeare Library who spend a lifetime trying to know everything about *Hamlet* and the rest of the plays.

I also remember my daughter's high school teacher who felt obliged to lecture his class on all the mythological references before teaching *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. There's nothing wrong with teaching mythology, but a high school student doesn't need to know it to appreciate that play.

Both of these teachers meant well, but rather than jumping right in, they've given the wrong message to their students: If you don't know all this stuff, you cannot possibly understand the play.

2. The best way to get kids to like Shakespeare is by getting them to perform Shakespeare.

All over the country, teachers have discovered how effective performance is to unlock literature. When a student works on a piece of text to figure out how best to say the lines and what sort of movement and tone are needed to convey the lines, he or she owns the lines. And then, if the student sees a professional actor perform those lines, the student feels invested in that production.

The Folger Library has spawned hundreds of Shakespeare festivals around the country where both elementary and high school students select and edit a scene, memorize their lines, and act it out for other students. These are not competitions, but rather celebrations of Shakespeare's words and his plays.

3. Performing Shakespeare does not mean having students sit at their desks reading out loud, or having students stand in front of the room reading

out loud, or the teacher acting out scenes for the class.

Performing Shakespeare does not mean that the teacher divvies up the parts (to the best readers, of course) and has the students sit at their desks (or stand in front of the room) and read from the text book. In this scenario, the rest of the class is completely disengaged and sits quietly hoping that they won't get a part. The teacher usually begins each scene by summarizing what is about to happen and then concludes each scene with a summary of what just happened.

Performing Shakespeare also does not mean a variation of the above with the teacher taking the juiciest part for herself. I did this myself for a good part of my career, but my advice to those teachers who still do it is, "Stop doing it." It gives students the wrong message, namely that this stuff is too hard for them. Only a professional like the teacher can read Macbeth's lines.

My own children had an experience with a teacher who was probably a frustrated actor. My son loved the class because his role was passive and he didn't have to act. He liked being entertained. My daughter hated it because she had experienced student performances with her middle school teacher and felt frustrated. She and her friends even asked the teacher to let them act out the scenes, but he refused.

Again, the teacher here may have had good intentions: he wanted the students to hear Hamlet's speeches the "right" way, he was afraid the passage was too difficult for his students to read aloud, he is in a hurry to get through the play. But the message to the class is that they are incapable of doing it themselves.

Performing Shakespeare means students are on their feet working through the text and trying to figure out how a scene works. Or students are doing a choral reading of a soliloquy. Or students are acting out a scene without words. Or any other way that puts a student and Shakespeare's text together.

4. Acting out a scene from a Shakespeare play is a form of close reading on your feet.

Of course there are some administrators, colleagues,

or parents who might see all this performance as a fun activity and view these activities as nothing more than frills. A colleague was teaching her class once and had the desks pushed back and had groups of student working on a scene. The energy was palpable and the engagement level of the entire class was off the charts. Then the principal entered the room to observe her teaching. "Excuse me, Miss Schmidt," he said. "I'll come back on a day when you are teaching."

Performance tends to be noisy and, according to some of your colleagues, disruptive. But what really happens is that the students must view the text closely to see how those words move the action along. Or the students work with the text to decide on how to block the scene. Or they edit a scene and decide what lines can be eliminated and what lines are essential. In all of these situations and so many more, the students are face-to-face with the text. They are making informed decisions about the meaning of the words and seeing how those words interact with each other. That's close reading.

5. Sometimes it is better to just do part of the play rather than the whole play.

One seeming drawback of using performance in the classroom is that it is time consuming. Spending an entire period staging a scene might seem to be a luxury that a teacher can't afford. Teachers often feel that in order to teach an entire play actively, something will get short shrift. The truth is that leaving scenes out might not be a bad thing. What teacher hasn't seen a class painfully read every word of Malcolm and Macduff's endless conversation in *Macbeth* 4.3? Or slogged through Acts 4 and 5 of *Julius Caesar*? *Hamlet,* Shakespeare's longest play, is over 4,000 lines.

For some reason, we teachers tend to revere Shakespeare and feel we are cheating our charges if we leave anything out. What I generally do is do a quick summary of the scene I am skipping and then move on to the better ones.

6. The best way to use video may not always be

showing the tape from the beginning to the end.

Sometimes, however, it is a good idea. When I taught a Shakespeare elective, I would spend the first three days showing Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado about Nothing*. The students would come in, the lights would go out, and the tape would start rolling. After the film was over, I asked, "Any questions?" The students were so pleased that they had understood the play that much of their anxiety was gone. "This Shakespeare stuff isn't so hard," one senior said.

But in general it's not always the best idea. For many teachers, showing the film after reading the play is sort of a reward for tolerating the text. They treat it as a separate entity--certainly not the real play, but a pleasant diversion. The students really aren't expected to do anything while watching it, so for many of them it signals naptime.

Many teachers have discovered the rewards of showing several versions of the same scene. Students see that directors and actors make different choices, that the text is malleable, that placing a play in a modern setting isn't so bad, and that there is more than one interpretation of a character. I've used this method with the addition of expert groups. Students are assigned to observe the sound, the cinematography, the design, the acting, or the screenplay. After viewing each version, the roles are rotated. With this role-playing, students have specific jobs while watching. The discussions that follow are always observant and insightful.

7. There are wonderful plays to teach other than the big four.

And we all know what the Big Four are: *Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Julius Caesar,* and *Hamlet*. These plays have consistently been listed as the four most often taught plays in American high schools. Certainly these are great plays, but if you ask most teachers why they teach them, they will invariably say, "We have to. They are required." To my knowledge, no state education department requires that these specific plays be taught. The reasons they are included are varied, but mostly it's because "we've always taught them."

Well, where are the histories or the comedies? A colleague of mine who was teaching the AP class once explained to me the reason we teach only tragedies. "The language of the tragedies is easier to teach," she said. "The language in the comedies is just too complicated." I explained to her that the reason it was easier for her to teach *Hamlet* for the 25th time was because she had done it 24 times already. In fact, the language and situations in the comedies are quite accessible. Most students can relate better to falling in and out of love and clowning around than they can to usurping kings and assassinations. I have found that it's fairly easy to convince an open-minded administrator to allow you to teach *Twelfth Night* or *Much Ado about Nothing* rather than *Julius Caesar. A Midsummer Night's Dream* is often listed as the play most often performed by high school drama departments, yet it is only slowly entering the English classroom.

8. A few tricks and gimmicks are not enough to make a Shakespeare learning experience significant.

In all the workshops I have presented, I always fear that some teachers won't understand the real theory of teaching through performance. Breaking up a Shakespeare unit filled with plot-centered study questions and audio recordings of old British performances with one or two activities isn't enough. Teaching actively is very risky stuff, and it really takes a full commitment—lots of on-your-feet exercises, choral readings, blocking and staging activities, and final performances. Using the 3-column insult sheet by itself appears to students as a diversion, not part of a larger purpose. Newer teachers have little problem making this commitment. It is so much more difficult for experienced teachers to let go. But speaking as an experienced teacher who had to let go of his old methodology, I can tell you that the rewards are worth it.

9. Studying Shakespeare's life doesn't really help students understand the plays.

Literature anthologies are filled with pages of background material on Shakespeare's life and times. You've all seen

those shiny pages filled with colored photos. I guess the theory is that if you've never seen a picture of Anne Hathaway's cottage or Shakespeare's birthplace, you couldn't possible understand his plays. Does anyone really think that knowing that one of Shakespeare's twins was named Hamnet will get today's adolescents excited about reading *Hamlet*? The focus on all teaching of Shakespeare must be on his language—something that textbooks often leave out. So, since it's there, teachers generally have students read over this material before jumping into the play. It's also easy to teach that stuff and even easier to test it.

10. Designing Globe Theatres out of popsicle sticks and sugar cubes, making Elizabethan newspapers, drawing Elizabethan costumes, studying Shakespeare's life, doing a scavenger hunt on the Internet, or doing a report on Elizabethan sanitary conditions has nothing to do with a student's appreciation of Shakespeare's language.

There may be some very good reasons for having students do Shakespeare-related projects. We've learned from Howard Gardner's work on Multiple Intelligences that our students learn in different ways. If having a student write music for a scene helps him to enjoy the play, that's fine. If a student wants to design a Web site to interpret a character, that's fine too. But most of these activities don't help one understand or appreciate Shakespeare's language. The only way that can happen is to look closely at the words, figure out what's going on in the scene, and say the words out loud. That's active teaching.

Jenny, one of my graduate students, was so upset during her student teaching because her cooperating teacher told her to spend a week in the computer lab having the class create Elizabethan newspapers. When Jenny tried to defend her position to work on scene performances instead, the teacher insisted, saying that open school was coming up soon and the newspapers "would look really good for the parents."

So what is a teacher to do who wants to adopt this phi-

losophy and make her class more active? I'd suggest by skipping the background introductions and plot-based questions in the textbooks. Then I'd suggest finding some of the recently published material on teaching Shakespeare through performance. There are plenty of excellent resources available (and as I tell my students, there are plenty of bad ones, too). A good place to start is the three volumes of *Shakespeare Set Free* that were created by real teachers at the Folger Library. Each volume contains scholarly essays, articles on performing, and detailed day-by-day unit plans for teaching the plays. The first volume covers *Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Romeo and Juliet*; the second features *Hamlet* and *Henry IV, part 1*; the third is devoted to *Othello* and *Twelfth Night*. In addition there are Rex Gibson's school editions of the plays published by Cambridge University Press, which contain wonderful text-based activities.

I'd also suggest contacting the Folger Shakespeare Library to arrange a professional development workshop in your school. We have many trained teachers who will give attendees some of the tools they'll need to engage their students with Shakespeare's marvelous words.

And while I'm talking about the aesthetics of those words, here are two of my favorite passages. Try reading both out loud to really appreciate their beauty. The first is by Titania:

> Set your heart at rest:
> The fairy land buys not the child of me.
> His mother was a votaress of my order:
> And, in the spiced Indian air, by night,
> Full often hath she gossip'd by my side,
> And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
> Marking the embarked traders on the flood,
> When we have laugh'd to see the sails conceive
> And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;
> Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait
> Following,—her womb then rich with my young squire,—
> Would imitate, and sail upon the land,
> To fetch me trifles, and return again,

As from a voyage, rich with merchandise.
But she, being mortal, of that boy did die;
And for her sake do I rear up her boy,
And for her sake I will not part with him.[7]

And in what some scholars believe was Shakespeare's own farewell speech, here are the words of Prospero:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.[8]

Try discussing those passages only in terms of character, plot, and theme without ever discussing their inherent value. Rather, discuss the words. It's worth the effort.

Notes

1. Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
2. Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*
3. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*
4. William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*
5. Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*
6. J.D. Salinger's *A Catcher in the Rye*
7. William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 2.1
8. William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* 4.1

Promoting Awareness and Empathy through World Literature

Elizabeth McCullough

Introduction

In his 1995 Nobel lecture, "Crediting Poetry," the Irish poet Seamus Heaney reflects upon the power of poetry "to touch the base of our sympathetic nature while taking in at the same time the unsympathetic reality of the world to which that nature is constantly exposed" (430). Heaney describes in his lecture the "unsympathetic reality" of political and sectarian violence, which had dominated life in Northern Ireland since the 1960s. Northern Ireland's violent history is one of many conflicts around the world that have flashed briefly on our televisions, across computer screens, and appeared on the margins of our newspapers.

Heaney acknowledges that when we "channel-surf over so much live coverage of contemporary savagery, [we are] highly informed but nevertheless in danger of growing immune, familiar to the point of over-familiarity" (429). "The documents of civilization have been written in blood and tears," Heaney declares. And, though much of the political or sectarian violence we witness occurs in far-away places like Iraq, Afghanistan, sub-Sahran-Africa, or Israel, the "blood and tears [are] no less real for being very remote" (423). According to Heaney, art—be it poetry, painting, music, or literature—"brings us to our senses" (429) by providing clear and unblinking images of life's hard truths, while also reminding us of the basic human "yearnings for sweetness and

trust" (428). For Heaney, art finds the sympathetic, the beauty, and the goodness amid the tragic, the violent, and the hopeless.

By exploring literature from some of the "wounded spots on the earth" (Heaney 423), students can combat the mind-numbing, sympathy-sapping deluge of violent conflicts documented in our media. Even a superficial survey of the world's conflict literature reveals experiences and feelings common to all people regardless of nationality, race, or religion. Fiction that portrays individuals caught in violent societies often marginalizes the "newsworthy" historical, political, and religious details in favor of more universal themes such as love, prejudice, loss, hunger, alienation, identity, or reconciliation.

Cal and Northern Ireland

This article examines a 1983 novel titled *Cal*, by Bernard MacLaverty. Cal tells the story of the Irish "Troubles" from the point of view of the eponymous character, who is trapped in the cycle of violence and retribution that brutalized Northern Ireland for decades and that has only recently subsided into a fragile peace. Cal's sense of alienation from his community, his religion, and even from himself is a dominant theme in MacLaverty's novel. Cal questions what he believes, where he belongs, and he struggles with an overwhelming-feeling of powerlessness and lack of self-determination.

Cal's private battle with himself, though set against a backdrop of sectarian violence, is a battle experienced by many adolescents during their transition from childhood to young adulthood. Identifying this common thread between their own coming of age and that of the characters in novels like Cal, may not only heighten student awareness of troubled spots around the world, but, better still, encourage empathy for those suffering under the threat of daily capricious bloodshed.

A Brief History of the Troubles

Ireland was a colony of the British Empire for more than eight hundred years. From the reign of Henry II, to Henry VIII and his daughter, Elizabeth I, Britain established a system of plantations that appropriated Irish land for English and Scot-

tish settlers and enforced a penal code that stripped the Irish of their language, their religion, and their schools. Ireland labored under extreme poverty, famine, and brutality until a civil war broke out with the Easter uprising in 1916. The Treaty of 1921 effectively ended Britain's domination of the entire island, but the partition that resulted from the treaty opened a new, complicated and ultimately bloody chapter in Irish history.

The treaty divided the island into two states—six counties in the northeast province known as Ulster, where most beneficiaries of British colonization lived, and the Republic of Ireland, or Free State. The Protestant majority in the North (about two-thirds of the population)—often called unionists or loyalists—wanted Northern Ireland to remain a self-governing member of the British Empire. Yet, the British government at Westminster, long seeking an answer to the thorny "Irish Question," eased itself out of direct control in Northern Ireland. The British withdrawal heightened the unionists' need for security and desire to retain power over the Catholic minority in the North, most of whom were in favor of reuniting the divided Ireland. (They are often called nationalists or republicans.)

The unionist mandate led to a sectarian system of political, economic, and social discrimination that rendered the Catholic population powerless, impoverished, and dangerously demoralized. The Northern Irish government, known as Stormont, employed political gerrymandering, corrupt housing laws, and segregated public education that so deflated Catholics that "protests beyond the strictly rhetorical were uncommon: there simply seemed little or no point, so that, for example, attempted IRA [Irish Republican Army] campaigns ignominiously petered out" (McKittrick & McVea 232).

Seamus Heaney describes Northern Ireland's descent into sectarian conflict after a somewhat hopeful civil rights campaign during the late 1960s. Stormont's inability to quash the escalating violence in the province forced the British government to move troops into Northern Ireland in 1969. Unfortunately, the neighborhoods in cities like Belfast had already been gravely altered by sectarian violence. McKittrick and McVea describe

Belfast as "permanently and physically scarred by ugly barricades across many of its mean streets...as the years passed and violence continued...larger and more substantial permanent brick and metal structures [were] erected by the authorities. These 'peacelines' were to last into the twenty-first century" (56).

The military presence in their streets excited the young nationalists' sense of persecution and injustice and their verbal abuse and physical attacks with rocks, bricks, and Molotov cocktails placed the equally young British troops under extreme stress. One of the worst incidents occurred in Derry, on what is known as Bloody Sunday, 1972. A peaceful civil rights and anti-internment march erupted into violent confrontation, when agitated paratroopers opened fire on the demonstrators with live ammunition, killing fourteen, many young men under the age of twenty. A prominent Derry priest declared: "'In later years many young people I visited in prison told me quite explicitly that they would never have become involved in the IRA but for what they witnessed, and heard of happening, on Bloody Sunday'" (McKittrick & McVea 77). Bloody Sunday, like Easter 1916, became part of the Irish nationalist mythology and is an invaluable recruiting tool for paramilitary organizations.

The unionist mythology thrives on the long-standing presence of radical political figures such as the Reverend Ian Paisley, whose self-professed hatred of Catholicism aggravates sectarian divisions (www.ianpaisley.org), and the strength of groups like the Orange Order, which unites the diverse Protestant and unionist societies, bolstering their considerable political power. The Orange Order has successfully maintained a contentious tradition of seasonal marches through the neighborhoods of Northern Ireland commemorating the 1690 victory of the Protestant William of Orange over the Catholic King James II at the battle of the Boyne. The marches are dominated by the persistent, violent beat of large drums, making King "Billy's" victory as resonant in present-day Ireland as it was three hundred years ago.

Nationalist and unionist mythologies and bitterness fueled the conflict through the 1980s and into the nineties until peace talks led to a temporary ceasefire in 1994 and then a peace accord, the

Good Friday Agreement, in 1998. Violence and political maneuvering still disrupt life in Northern Ireland; though the lethal violence has diminished, the politics often teeter toward dissolution.

Trapped in the Troubles

Heaney cites a 1976 roadside massacre at Kingsmills, County Armagh, as emblematic of the Irish Troubles. As twelve workers rode home on a minibus, they were stopped by armed men, ordered out of the vehicle, and lined up on the side of the road. The assailants told every Catholic in line to step forward. All the workers but one were Protestant. Certain that he was about to be shot by loyalist paramilitaries, the single, shocked Catholic began to move. At that moment one of his comrades reached out and squeezed his hand, as if to say, "...no, don't move, we'll not betray you...." The Catholic had already taken a step, however, and the gunmen shoved him out of the way and executed his Protestant coworkers. Heaney concludes, "The birth of the future we desire is surely in the contraction which that terrified Catholic felt on the roadside when another hand gripped his hand, not in the gunfire that followed..." (422).

The stress and fear of living in a violent society often contributes to a feeling of alienation in those caught up in the strife. Like the lone Catholic in the line of condemned workers, fear, mistrust, guilt, and centuries of blame can alienate the individual from loved ones, from the community or nation, from religion, and the self. Yet, as Heaney highlights in his Nobel lecture, while the random gunfire and blind hatred alienate individuals and paralyze the present, it is the contraction of a warm hand, an extension of compassion and expression of solidarity that is the future Northern Ireland desires (422).

Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal* depicts a young man who demonstrates the need that "consciousness experiences at times of extreme crisis, the need on the one hand for a truth telling that will be hard and retributive, and on the other hand, the need not to harden the mind to a point where it denies its own yearnings for sweetness and trust" (Heaney 428). Cal McCluskey encounters the tension Heaney describes between the hard truths and "unsympathetic reality of

the world" and the "base of our sympathetic nature" (430).

Though the nationalist ideal of Ireland and Irishness may not be achievable, nor the loyalist concept of an Ulster state within Great Britain, these conflicting ideologies produce very real consequences. Not the least of which is the effect that the sectarian bigotry and resultant violence have visited on Northern Ireland's citizens, especially the young. Cal, no doubt, represents many of the young men who make up the statistics compiled by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). In a 2005 report, the PSNI indicated a rise in republican and loyalist paramilitary punishment attacks, "with vigilante style beatings and shootings escalating since the ceasefires and the advent of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement" (McCready et al.). Ninety-eight percent of the victims of these assaults were male, mostly in their early 20s, though young men under 19 had been increasingly vulnerable to attack. The preponderance of victims was Catholic and poor, living in highly-segregated areas of Belfast. Though Cal fits the profile of the most vulnerable to attack in Northern Ireland, the power of his story resides in the novel's excruciatingly detailed picture of what the life of one of these statistics must be like.

Cal's Secret

Cal's life, at the age of nineteen, is marked by his alienation. He is estranged from his family, his friends, from religion, his community and, most painfully, from himself. Cal wishes to tell Heaney's truth "hard and retributive," yet he also longs for the sympathetic "squeeze of the hand." He has become caught up in his country's violent conflict to the point that he has acquired an oppressive secret and debilitating guilt. Cal believes that to tell the hard truth—his secret—will alienate him forever from any hope of a sympathetic connection with others. He is complicit in a murder and, however the extenuating circumstances may mitigate his guilt, his anguish over this act condemns and estranges him far more than any public censure ever could. Cal's story most likely begins in the mid to late 1970s, after Bloody Sunday, when the IRA bombing campaign in London was at its most deadly peak. The unionist community in Ulster

responded to republican attacks with equal opposing force and fear. Cal is "caught between the jaws" of these forces (83). He is motherless, living with his dad, Shamie, the only Catholics in a Protestant neighborhood, where Union Jacks fly and the curbs are painted British red, white, and blue. In exchange for the use of an illegal handgun to protect them from their increasingly hostile neighbors, Cal is recruited against his will to "drive for funds" for the IRA. His recruiter is a school mate, Crilly, who is the kind of bully IRA leaders use as enforcers of their will. The novel begins about one year after an event that changes the direction of Cal's life. One year earlier, Cal had driven Crilly to a farm and waited in the driveway as Crilly murdered an off-duty RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) reserve officer in his front doorway and seriously wounded the policeman's father. The dying officer's call to his wife—"Marcella!"—haunts Cal mercilessly.

Cal is on the dole and doesn't have the stomach for Shamie's work at the abattoir. He wiles away his time in his room listening to American blues or at the local library, where he discovers Marcella has gone back to work after the death of her husband. Cal becomes obsessed with Marcella and finds a way to insinuate himself into her life. Marcella, lonely and isolated on the farm with her in-laws, becomes attracted to the attentive, sensitive Cal. Cal is torn between wanting to share his secret with Marcella and knowing his secret will destroy them; he is torn between the threats of Crilly and the republican ideologue, Skeffington, and his revulsion for the violence that has poisoned his life and his hope. Ever the realist, MacLaverty's ending for Cal is the ending that countless young men have faced in Northern Ireland—captured by the authorities, facing certain torture, dying for relief and peace.

Alienation from His Community and Loved Ones

Cal's alienation is evident in his physical aspect. MacLaverty describes Cal as a young man who wishes to hide from the powerful forces that buffet him. His face is usually obscured by his curtain of hair, "screening him from the world"

(10), or covering the blush he feels helpless to prevent when he speaks with Marcella. He tics his head to one side, shaking his hair over his eyes, "like an attempt to rid himself of something, an overspill which resulted in spasmodic movement" (10). His self-loathing manifests itself in the pidgin French he makes up to curse himself. Phrases like "dirty vache" or "you big crotte de chien" stay "with him like indigestion" (10).

Cal's stomach throughout the novel is tight, aching, twisted in knots, indicative of his state of mind and his position in the world. In the first line of the novel, MacLaverty reveals Cal's stomach to be "rigid with the ache of want" (7). Whether he is hungry (though he has no appetite), nauseated by the abattoir—his only sure source of employment—or aching to tell Marcella the hard truth of what he has done, Cal repeats often that he has "no stomach" for what is expected of him. Cal's stomach often clenches as he walks the daily gauntlet through his loyalist neighborhood. The Union Jacks are flying when they should have been taken down after the annual Twelfth of July marching season (the Orange Order parades) and the painted curbstones seem to Cal to be directed at himself and Shamie. Other Catholic families have moved out long ago, but Shamie's sentiment remains, "No Loyalist bastard is going to force me out of my home. They can kill me first." Cal muses, "But it wasn't a single bastard that worried [him], it was an accumulation of them. The feeling of community that they managed to create annoyed him and the stronger their sense of community grew the more excluded and isolated the McCluskeys felt" (9).

Cal and Shamie must keep nocturnal watch on a regular basis. They receive a warning note one night that advises, "Get out you Fenyan scum or we'll burn you out. This is your 2nd warning. There will be no other. UVF [Ulster Volunteer Force (a paramilitary organization)]." As they have many times before, Cal and his dad fill the bathtub with water and lay a blanket beside it in case a fire bomb is thrown into their home. Their vigil is conducted in near silence, sensitive to the slightest noises. Shamie observes, "Isn't it a terrible thing... that those bastards have us whispering in our own house" (28).

Part of what attracts Cal and Marcella to each other is their shared sense of isolation from those around them. After Marcella's husband, Robert Morton, is murdered, she stays on with his parents and her daughter Lucy. Marcella is a Catholic woman of Italian descent (her maiden name is D'Agostino) living with her Irish Protestant in-laws, who seem to keep her on out of respect for their martyred only child, rather than real affection for his widow. Marcella confides to Cal that she often feels like Rapunzel from her daughter's nursery stories—trapped in her life of duty, alienated from her husband's family and community by temperament, creed, and religion. As they discuss the British presence in Northern Ireland, she tells Cal, "I thought I was detached from the whole thing. Being called D'Agostino kind of distances you from it. But when somebody kills your husband you're involved whether you like it or not" (118). Despite her very personal loss, Marcella can still see the Northern Irish conflict as an outsider, noting that Ireland is "like a child," concerned only for the past and present, with no thought for the future (118). She records in her diary her deep shame for Ireland when twenty people are killed in a bombing allegedly carried out by the IRA; and, she feels equal revulsion for the Orangemen's parade and men like the Morton's farm foreman, Cyril Dunlop. Sizing up the self-importance of the prideful Orangemen, Marcella cites their leader, Dunlop, "strutting like a rooster...He's a big man but a wee coat fits him" (127).

Cal's empathy for Marcella's situation demonstrates that, despite his lonely, alienated state—no mother, barely speaking to his father, living in a segregated neighborhood and, then, squatting in an abandoned cottage—Cal manages to be a part of what Heaney calls the sympathetic base of this world. The squeeze of the hand is evident when a distraught Shamie shakes Cal's hand after they are burned out of their house. Marcella instinctively reaches for Cal's hand, which thrills him deeply. Cal comforts his depressed father in a typical display of his solicitude for others. From his sometimes lame attempts at humor and often mature insights into Marcella's life with her in-laws, Cal is capable of great sympathy and sweetness.

Cal's profound alienation cannot be assuaged by fleeting moments of self-realization or brief scenes of love and empathy with Marcella. Her warm stares and the touch of her hand give Cal a passing thrill of pleasure, yet despite his intense desire for her, Cal fears that "as far as Marcella was concerned, he had gelded himself that dark winter's night" (138), the night of her husband's murder. He is "gelded" in that he cannot make love with Marcella without also reliving the murder, but also gelded in the sense that he is no longer able to form meaningful relationships with others. He is estranged from other people by virtue of his guilt, separated by his dissent from militant republican ideology, by his revulsion for violence, and by his highly developed sense of his own impotence.

Cal's estrangement is dramatized by MacLaverty in the library as Cal, with heavy irony, is described peering at Marcella between the shelves of the Irish history section; all but his eyes are hidden from her. As Cal imagines lying down in the warm library, among the books, waiting for Marcella's touch to rouse him, he turns to books on the shelves that shake him (and the reader) out of his romantic fantasy. The pages of Irish history show the all-too-human players in the drama of the Troubles: Sir Edward Carson, Reverend Paisley, and Padraic Pearse—the men whose actions in part have shaped Cal's world, and his role in it.

Cal's alienation from others is portrayed most convincingly through MacLaverty's references to the moon and the force that separates it from the earth. In 2003, MacLaverty wrote and directed a short film titled *Bye-Child*, based upon a Seamus Heaney poem of the same title. The poem describes a young child, confined to a shed in the backyard of his family's home. Heaney depicts the child, "little henhouse boy," putting his eye to a chink in the wall of his "kennel," seeing the glow of the kitchen light from his family's back window across the yard. The boy is "sharp-faced as new moons," "little moon man...luminous, weightless" (Heaney 73). In his interview with *Shooting People*, MacLaverty draws a parallel between the lone child in the shed, watching his family's world from his fixed point—from "lunar distances" (Heaney 73)—and Cal's belief in the impassable separation between

himself and others. Citing the poem as an inspiration, MacLaverty establishes Cal as a "moon man," describing Cal's experience (after he and Shamie are burned out) as a yet undiscovered squatter in the derelict cottage behind the Morton's farmhouse:

> He got the feeling that the house was the earth and the cottage the moon orbiting it. At night sometimes when the wind was in the right direction he could hear the distant rattle of dishes. He would keep a kind of vigil and see the lights come on in different rooms and wonder whether it was Marcella or not. Although she was light years away from him he felt the enormous pull of her. And yet, like the moon and the earth, he knew that, because of what he had done, they could never come together. (90-91)

MacLaverty references the moon and stars throughout the novel. Cal listens so hard in his silent room, waiting for the inevitable attack from his hostile neighbors, that he begins to hear static, imagining it is the echoes of the Big Bang, the birth of the universe; he knows that the loyalist attack would come in a "blinding flash and a bang before you could take your hands out of your pockets..." (29). His fear is heightened when he is at his most vulnerable, bowed over a basin rinsing soap from his face, lying in the dark just before sleep when his blanket becomes "hard and pitted like the surface of the moon..." (49). Exile is most keenly felt when Cal contemplates the distance between himself and Marcella, the permanent distance caused by his sin (91). As he sums up all of his sins against Marcella—spying on her, taking advantage of her family's hospitality to hide out from the IRA—Cal realizes, "If touching her thigh with the back of his hand in church was an extra inch between them then slaying her husband put him on the outer edge of the galaxy" (92).

Alienation from Religion

Cal's firm belief in his isolation, that he is somehow alien, as if he exists on another planet, is reinforced by religious dogma that tells him sin is "outlawing yourself from God...A man damned himself" (91). Cal reflects, "He hadn't been to confession for over a year and never would go again...the thing he had done

was now a background to his life, permanently there, like the hiss that echoed from the event which began the Universe" (39).

Cal knows he cannot look for forgiveness from God for what he has done. He fears that, unlike the mother in Marcella's legend of Maria Goretti, who took communion with her daughter's murderer, Marcella would not forgive his complicity in Robert's murder. Cal believes that he is damned; sacrificial suffering is his fate. Though Cal has "outlawed" himself and holds no hope of redemption, he still attends mass faithfully and thinks in the language of religious faith. When he is alone with his thoughts, he "eats again the ashes of what he had done" (15) and often reflects on monks and hermits and the hair shirts they wear that are "designed to cause suffering" (102).

Religion is a powerful force in Cal's society and in his own family. Much of Cal's self-loathing may stem from his inability to live up to his mother's example of absolute religious devotion and self-discipline. Gracie took communion daily and led her family in the rosary every evening. Her missal "bulged with memoriam cards, novenas and special prayers...The little colored strings for marking the place were worn past the point where they should have hung out at the bottom of the page" (33).

Cal wonders if his memory of his mother is so idealized because she died when he was eight years old, before adolescence changed his innocent view of the world and his parents. Cal knows that as he reached adulthood, he began to see Shamie as a fallible human being. Gracie died before his childish illusions about her could be shattered; therefore, Cal imagines her to be close to sainthood, an ideal to aspire to, but never to be reached. As he ponders his inability to affect the course of events in his life, he concludes that if he had his mother's discipline, he would not feel such a failure. "Gracie ruled her own life with a hand of iron," making material and spiritual sacrifices for God and her family. Her "answer to everything" was "to turn pain and sorrow into a gift for God" (105).

Religion is no comfort to Cal. Instead, the religious dogmatism around him has instilled great fear and confusion. His early exposure to Catholic teaching in school is depicted early

in the novel, when Cal is in his third year. After pornographic photographs are discovered, one of the teachers, Father Durkin, announces to Cal's class that a great transgression has taken place: "If I could lay my hands on the gulpin who is poisoning the minds of the pupils of this school I'd flay him to within an inch of his life. There is such a thing as righteous anger" (18-19). Father Durkin delivers the broad hint (directed at the budding bully, Crilly) that the school's staff "would be looking the other way if anything happened" to the "worm" that was distributing the photos (19). Crilly enlists Cal's help as he hunts down the culprit and administers a severe, priest-sanctioned beating.

MacLaverty accomplishes two things with these passages. He draws a parallel between the self-righteous, unforgiving, retributive Church of Cal's formative years and the self-righteous fanaticism of political militancy practiced by the IRA and the UVF. Father Durkin perpetuates the violence in Northern Irish society; he began the work on the child Crilly that Skeffington exploits in Crilly's young adulthood. Durkin encourages and uses Crilly's abusive tendencies to control his students; Skeffington fosters Crilly's cruelty to control boys like Cal who want out of the shadow of the IRA. MacLaverty writes, "It was Crilly who was largely responsible for Cal's stomach having felt like a washboard over the past year" (20). Moreover, it is possible that MacLaverty is condemning the Church's contribution to the culture of unforgiving, retributive violence in Northern Ireland by repeating Durkin's vocabulary—expressing his desire to flay a transgressing boy to "within an inch of his life"—in the last line of the novel, when Cal is finally grateful that he will be beaten to within an inch of his life.

Alienation from His Country

Cal's alienation from the religiosity of republicanism is as complete as his estrangement from traditional religion. MacLaverty presents Finbar Skeffington as the archetypal IRA zealot, who wishes in all sincerity that the British would "let the Paras loose in Derry again" (67), justifying further IRA violence. Cal's personal distaste for Skeffington reflects his broader dissent from nationalist mythology. Skeffington's evocation of Pearse's call to

arms, the poem "Mother," does not rouse in Cal the guilt he may feel for not living up to Gracie's supposed nationalist sympathies (66). All Cal knows is that Finbar is leaving out "the shit and the guts and the tears" of the Troubles (67), and Cal wants no part of it.

Cal does pay lip service to republican values; he professes the desire to see the British army leave Ireland and for the North and South to be united. When he crosses the border, Cal feels as if he is in the real Ireland, "out from under the weight and darkness of Protestant Ulster" (39). He engages in brief debate with Dunlop, asking, "What's so terrible about a united Ireland anyway? One island, one country." Dunlop retorts, "And be ruled from Rome? A state told what to do by priests and nuns. Sheer voodoo, Cal. Mumbo-jumbo. Ulstermen would rather die than live under the yoke of Roman Catholicism. Not an inch. It's a good saying" (111). Cal knows there is nothing more he can say. His conversation with Dunlop, like the political machinations of the Troubles, always ends in stalemate. Therefore, Cal disengages from the conversation, from the conflict, disavowing any identity he might claim in the dream of a united Ireland. One scene from the novel illustrates the intransigent nature of the Troubles and Cal's overwhelming sense of alienation from his country. Cal and Marcella take Lucy to pick berries. MacLaverty describes the setting in stereotypical, mythical Irish fashion:

> The countryside, a deep winter green, fell away to the blue mountains of Slieve Gallon. It was crossed by dark random lines of trees and hedges. Here or there a red barn or a white gable stood out and far off a window shone like a diamond. Cows all facing in the same direction grazed their way across a field. (117)

Cal is typically unaffected by the romantic vision. He is unable to enjoy the beauty of his own country, because he knows that it is all illusory. True to Cal's vision, "the air is ripped apart by an explosion. Cal felt the shock-wave of it beat through him like the thump of a drum" (120), like the drums in an Orange Day parade. A cow has stepped on a landmine, and as Cal stands frozen, afraid of stepping on another mine, he sees one of the

Preacher's tin signs thrown up into a tree; it proclaims, "The Kingdom of God is within You." Again, with heavy irony, Cal vomits twice, ridding himself of any promise of God or country (121).

Alienation from Himself: Or, The Power of Imagination

Cal's thorough alienation from others, from religion, from any sense of national identity contributes to his final, most tragic, alienation from his own sense of self. The fact that Cal cannot locate himself within, or despite, his environment speaks to the postcolonial question of imagination. As the Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o explains, "In our efforts to decolonize our minds from the devastating effects of colonial and neocolonial control, we must begin to gather and grasp our resources and means of imagination" (Rao 162). Cal cannot imagine himself away from his oppressive environment, created by political violence, intractable mythologies, and religious dogma. He is unable to conceive of a place or time when he would be forgiven for his sin and released from the vicious cycle of political and sectarian malice and the subsequent violent attacks and retribution.

In his book *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State*, Joe Cleary laments the lack of postcolonial imagination in Cal on a political rather than personal level. If, as Cleary argues, Cal and Marcella's star-crossed, romance-across-the-divide is a metaphor for the geopolitical reunion of North and South, then Cal's surrender to the authorities at the end of the novel represents to Cleary

> a paralyzing ambivalence...ultimately derived from its own confessional conceptualization of the conflict in Northern Ireland as a zero-sum game of all-or-nothing control, the only imaginable outcome of which is either a resigned acceptance of the Northern state...or its violent overthrow...That the conflict might be susceptible to some more emancipatory political resolution is something the novel seems unable to imagine. (129)

Suggestions for the Classroom: Novels about Violent Conflict

Ultimately, the value in Cal may lie, not in finding a political solution to an eight hundred year old problem, but in the portrait of a young man's life brought down by political strife and religious zeal. MacLaverty's strength as a writer is his ability to provide an unflinchingly realistic look at Heaney's hard truths. Cal's struggle, his loneliness, his alienation, his love for Marcella are feelings and experiences that resonate independent of Cal's setting. While students in the United States may more readily identify with a Western European character and setting, an analysis—such as the one above— of literature from non-Western countries will evoke as much empathy and compassion as *Cal*. The key is the focus on what Heaney calls the "sympathetic base"—identifying and examining the universality of human needs, emotions, familial ties, and the desire for peace.

A classroom unit on conflict novels might include the following.

- A selection of novels such as *Cal* (see list below);
- A brief review of the geography, political or religious history, and culture depicted in each novel. If the selected novels are from an area of the world in the news (e.g. Iraq or the Sudan), ask students to submit related newspaper clippings, web articles, or summaries of television or radio broadcasts;
- Compile a glossary for the unit noting terms that are unique to the culture or conflict, and those that are found in multiple conflict novels (e.g. colonial, sectarian, landmine);
- Ask students to define the term "universal theme." Create a list of these motifs, characters' experiences, and emotions from the novels;
- Encourage discussion or assign an essay in which students examine ways that they identify with characters. Consider what their world—community, family, friends, school—would be like if they were caught in social upheaval, political violence, or civil war. How

would the students react personally to experiences similar to those in the novels? What feelings might arise in these adverse conditions?

• Consider the role that imagination (as discussed by Ngũgĩ) can play in liberating individuals—and their societies—from violent conflict and oppressive regimes.

Selected Novels

Northern Ireland

Undergraduate-level

Cal (Bernard MacLaverty) W.W. Norton & Co. 1995

Eureka Street (Robert McLiam Wilson) Ballantine 1999

Breakfast on Pluto (Patrick McCabe) HarperPerennial 1998

Junior/Senior High School

Reading in the Dark (Seamus Deane) Vintage International 1998

Trilogy: *Starry Night, Frankie's Story, and The Beat of the Drum* (Catherine Sefton a.k.a. Martin Waddell) (reprinted in 2001 by Martin Waddell) Walker Books Ltd.

Bosnia/Sarajevo

Undergraduate/Senior High

Pretty Birds (Scott Simon) Random House Trade 2006

Junior High

Zlata's Diary (Zlata Filipovic) Penguin 1995

My Childhood under Fire (Nadja Halilbegovich) Kids Can Press 2006

Kenya

Undergraduate/Junior/Senior High

Weep Not, Child (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o) Heinemann 1990

Mozambique

Grades 6-9

Secrets in the Fire (Henning Mankell) Annick Press 2003

Nigeria

Grades 5-8

The Other Side of Truth (Beverley Naidoo) Penguin 2000

El Salvador

Undergraduate/Senior High

One Day of Life (Manlio Argueta) Vintage International 1991

Afghanistan

Junior High

The Breadwinner (2001) and *Parvana's Journey* (2003) (Deborah Ellis) Groundwood

Israel and Palestine

Junior High

Samir and Yonatan (Daniella Carmi) Arthur A. Levine 2000

Junior/Senior High

Habibi (Naomi Shihab Nye) Simon Pulse 1999

19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems of the Middle East (Naomi Shihab Nye) Greenwillow 2002

Reference Materials for Teachers

CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet). Comprehensive information on the Irish Troubles. Ed. Martin Melaugh, University of Ulster. http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/index.html

INCORE. International conflict research by the United Nations University and the University of Ulster. http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/

OUTREACH WORLD. "A Resource for Teaching Kids about the World." http://www.outreachworld.org/index.asp

JAPA (Jane Addams Peace Association) A resource for children's book titles. http://www.janeaddamspeace.org/index.asp

ALA (Mildred L. Batchelder Award). For juvenile literature translated from a foreign language. http://www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=bookmediaawards&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=114441

Children in War (2000). (A film by Alan and Susan Raymond). Documents first-hand accounts of war from children in Bosnia, Israel, Rwanda, and Northern Ireland. For information visit http://www.videoverite.tv/childreninwar/index.html

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Teaching *Clarissa*: Can Students Be Coached to See this Book as More than Another Doorstop?

Michael MacBride

When my graduate literature class was asked to read Richardson's *Clarissa*, the room was filled with groans (probably because it was coupled with *Don Quixote*, *Tom Jones*, *Rob Roy*, *Emma*, and a few shorter works). We had purchased the books for the course and had seen this 1500-page monstrosity among the others, but there had been some doubt in our minds about whether we would be reading the entire thing or just selections from it. The plan was to read it all, in all its epistolary glory. After some signs of mutiny, our professor gave in to the cries of dissent and offered photocopies of the most important final letters instead of requiring the class to finish the last 500 pages.

At first this seemed like an excellent option—in a course filled with eight and nine hundred page books, this was the equivalent of a "get out of jail free" card. Something of a revelation occurred around page 1000, though; I actually became engaged by the complexity of the characters, Richardson's careful design of the story, and the picaresque elements that I began to notice in the text. I began to ask questions. Why did Richardson write such an incredibly long book? Where does this text fit into the grander scheme of literature? Why is our professor having us read it? More importantly, since I wish to teach literature in the future, could I teach this novel? How would I teach it? If graduate students struggled and groaned, what would undergraduates

do? Since I now had a strange kind of love for *Clarissa*, I struggled with these questions and came up with a possible solution.

There are, of course, many ways to attack this novel and in fact I and two other graduate students assembled a panel on *Clarissa* at the 2006 MCTE Conference in Rochester, Minnesota, to discuss a few of these approaches. The notion of the picaresque novel is the key that unlocks the lesson plan that I will layout in this paper. When I first heard the term "picaresque", I assumed that the professor had really meant "picturesque". However, the context in which it was used did not seem to fit with my understanding of the term "picturesque". After shyly raising my hand and asking the necessary question, I quickly learned the difference and also witnessed the look of relief on all the other students' faces in my class. Since the idea of the *picaro* and the resulting picaresque novel is so important to the development of the novel, anyone studying literature needs to grasp it. But, just because it is important does not mean that students are going to want to learn it.

At its heart, *Clarissa* is a picaresque novel. Some would debate this idea, and students will do just that after they are finished reading the novel. The *picaro* is typically a rogue, rascal, or scoundrel, and Clarissa seems to represent everything pure and good. How, then, can I justifiably call Clarissa a *picaro*? While the reader believes Clarissa to be pure and honest, her family thinks she has fallen horribly. She has ruined their family name and they see no reason to forgive her. Clarissa herself has doubts about her worthiness and constantly begs forgiveness. In this way, *Clarissa* represents an interesting variation on the picaresque novel. While she begins the novel in the upper class of society, her self-image and social status depreciate quickly "lower class." In addition to the rogue characteristics, *Clarissa* also manifests other traditional elements of the picaresque novel: episodic adventures, a "hero" that lives in the lower rungs of society (as Clarissa does once she leaves her family's home), and also exposure of the hypocrisy of the society in which Clarissa lives[1].

Alex Goudas, one of the fellow presenters at the aforementioned conference, opened his presentation with a statement

that succinctly explains a feeling that I share about teaching. He said, "the best way to reach students when teaching difficult material is to connect it to their personal lives. We all learn so much more when we make a mental bond between something we don't understand with something we already do." How does one make a foreign phrase or an 18th century text relevant and interesting to a student? The other important question that I struggled with was how to make students find connections from one text to another.

Often it seems that students think of each novel as a single island amid a sea called the library. Unless the author has written a series using the same character, or written multiple volumes that are tied together somehow, once one novel is read and students have taken the test, answered essay questions, or given an in-class presentation, the book can be quickly forgotten. Students move on to a new author, a new text, a new idea, a new period of time, just as they would a new clothing fad. Of course, connections between these authors, books, concepts, and eras are there to be seen; sometimes they just need to be prodded to the surface by an instructor that can make them show their relevance. With an understanding of the texts and the traditions, then the more abstract concepts in literature are accessible.

What is *Clarissa*'s relevance? Can students in the twenty-first century see any glimpse of themselves in a novel written in 1748? Originally Richardson wrote *Clarissa* as a serial novel. In unabridged form *Clarissa* is 1500 pages long, not including the appendices or postscript. Several abridged versions of the text exist but, to foster a full appreciation of Richardson's work, this course is built around the unabridged version. By breaking the novel into smaller, easier to digest, pieces students should be able to get through it in ten weeks. In terms of relevance, each chunk of the novel could be approached as TV mini-series that is ten episodes long. Most of the drama within the novel is probably most applicable to the soap opera format.

Aside from being anchored in a format familiar to most students, *Clarissa* contains many issues that are relevant today. The full title *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady: Comprehending the Most Important Concerns of Private Life and*

Particularly Showing the Distresses that may Attend the Misconduct Both of Parents and Children in Relation to Marriage, displays the primary conflict in the novel—Clarissa's battle with her family—certainly something to which students can relate. Another issue raised midway through the text is what best equates to date rape, when Lovelace takes advantage of Clarissa. Before the rape occurs, Lovelace terrorizes Clarissa. At first that terror closely resembles stalking, then obsession, abuse, and eventually the final act of ruin. Any and all of these issues are just as relevant now as they were nearly 300 years ago.

Below is an outline of an approach for a 15-week, undergraduate course in literature. These are my recommendations to ensure this book is relevant and interesting as students form a knowledge base in literature and understanding of the picaresque novel. The basic approach is to break *Clarissa* into 150-page sections that are discussed every other week; then students will watch a film (6 films total, which are explained in detail in the week-by-week breakdown of the class below) in class on the alternating weeks. The films will provide a break from their reading and will help demonstrate how picaresque elements are represented in our times. In addition to reading *Clarissa*, students will also be assigned short readings from other texts that should provide a background in the history of the picaresque novel.

This class design is structured for a 100 or 200 level undergraduate literature or humanities course. Students need only to bring their life experiences and a basic knowledge of literary terms to the course. In its most basic form, this course is a survey of world literature. The texts explored during the course will span 400 years (16^{th}-20^{th} century) and will expose students to novels from Spain, England, America, and Central Europe. It is designed to be a *reading* intensive course requiring students to read 150 pages a week for five weeks and 250 pages a week for five weeks. The readings will alternate (150 pages, 250 pages, 150 pages…) for the first ten weeks of the course. To make this bitter pill easier to swallow, two concessions have been made. First, movies will be shown in class on the weeks with lighter reading assignments. The films will be used in place

of more modern novels and will allow students to make connections from the written texts to another medium. Second, aside from the reading there will only be three writing assignments and only one of them will be of any considerable length. These other assignments are explained in more detail below.

This course could also be adapted for higher-level undergraduate, or even graduate courses, by assigning more readings and in-depth writing assignments to supplement the curriculum. There are many other picaresque novels that could be included; alternatively non-picaresque novels could be added to offer contrast. The addition of foreign films would shape the course to fit a world literature class model, introducing students to other cultures through multiple modalities.

There are many learning objectives that would be possible from a course designed this way. Most basically, as with any course in literature, students will gain an appreciation and understanding of classic literature. They will also see connections from classic literature to novels and films of the 20th and 21st century. This last outcome can be expanded to encouraging students to look outside the genre of literature for literary traditions in other genres. Certainly students will be familiar with books being made into movies, but it is hoped that they will acknowledge elements of novels that also appear in films (and perhaps even in the other arts). Last, this course will provide students with a better understanding of what is meant when something is described as "picaresque".

In terms of assessment of these objectives, the course will consist of four equally weighted items: a reading log, a paper, a presentation, and a final essay examination.

The reading log will require students to: keep a "character" list that includes page numbers that pertain to characters that they perceive as being important to the story, and to write descriptions of characters in their own words. It will also require students to track themes throughout each text, and of course provide a plot summary. While this exercise is designed to help students keep track of characters, plot elements, and themes throughout the novel (since it will be read

over the course of ten weeks), it is also expected that students will include comments and connections between *Clarissa* and the other novels and movies they read and watch. Students will be required to include at least one journal entry per week, each entry no shorter than 2-3 pages. In addition to ensuring that students are doing their assigned reading every week, it will also serve as a guide as they navigate this lengthy text.

This reading log will make writing their final paper a much easier task. Since I am encouraging students to make connections between novels and films, the paper will require that they compare and contrast *Clarissa* and any other two texts used during the course of the class (one such text must be a movie). For example, students can choose to write about *Clarissa* and two movies, or one movie and one novel. The paper should be at least seven pages long, but no longer than ten. While they certainly could do outside research for this paper, I would encourage students to find linkages on their own using the texts they have read and watched throughout the course. They should have plenty to draw on from the class discussions and their own notes in their reading log. As an educator and lover of literature, I want to privilege their *own* thoughts more than what others have already written. *Clarissa* is a novel on which few recent scholarly works have focused upon[2]; requiring that they write about it as it pertains to one of the other films or novels on the syllabus should help minimize plagiarism attempts.

The third method of assessment will be an oral presentation of an abbreviated version of their paper. Throughout the course, students will watch six films, read excerpts from two novels, and read three novels in their entirety. Thus, the combinations possible should provide for enough interesting presentations that students would not be repeating each other. Each presentation should last no longer than fifteen minutes, with five minutes for questions from the audience.

Finally, the last element of assessment will be a comprehensive essay examination. The exam will feature several issues that were brought up in class, such as: defining what is meant

when someone refers to something as picaresque, how this notion applies to the text we have read and viewed, and how this trend differs from other forms of storytelling or other texts they have read or viewed. Students will be allowed to use any of the texts for the course and their reading log during the course of the exam. Questions for this exam will require students to utilize examples from the texts to help make connections between them.

Week 1: The First Taste of *Clarissa*

Reading assignments:

- *The Life of Lazarillo de Tormes, His Fortunes and Adversities* (1554), 128 pages
- *Clarissa* (1748), 150 pages

There is little argument that *Lazarillo de Tormes* marks the beginning of the picaresque novel. It is a quick read and filled with dark humor and satire. While it may take students a while to get into the rhythm of *Clarissa*, *Lazarillo* should pique their interest right away. The discussion this week will be focused around *Lazarillo*, its style of writing, and comparisons to other novels they have read.

Week 2: The First Movie

Reading assignments

- *Clarissa* (1748), 150 pages

Students will watch *Thelma and Louise* (1991, 129 minutes) in class this week. Since *Clarissa* features a strong female character, the first movie will mimic that theme and incite discussion in this area. After viewing the film, discussions will be centered on the episodic nature of the story and whether Thelma or Louise can be viewed as heroes. Are they *picaros*? What similarities, if any, do students see in the text and the film?

Week 3: *Don Quixote*

Reading assignments

- *Clarissa* (1748), 150 pages
- Excerpts from *Don Quixote (Part II)*, ~100 pages (Duke and the Duchess episodes)

In addition to the regular 150 pages of Clarissa, stu-

dents will be provided with about 100 pages of *Don Quixote*. Since Cervantes borrows heavily from *Lazarillo*, the connections between these two texts should come easily. Discussions will attempt to make these connections in detail and explore whether Cervantes has changed the notion of the *picaro* from its representation in *Lazarillo*. The excerpts from *Don Quixote* will be from the second part, Chapters 32 through 48. These chapters will introduce students to the Duke and the Duchess, and will provide them with a glimpse into the narrative style to allow them to make connections to other texts throughout the course. Additionally, students should be encouraged to look for connections between the narrative style of the previous works with *Clarissa*. At this point students should be nearly a third of the way through *Clarissa* and will have experienced Richardson's style enough to make these connections. To help place these chapters in context of the larger work, it will be necessary to provide a summary of *Don Quixote*. By including the table of contents from *Don Quixote* with the excerpt, students can see obvious connections to *Lazarillo de Tormes* and the chapter titles provide a sort of summary by themselves.

Week 4: The Second Movie

Reading assignments

- *Clarissa* (1748), 150 pages

Students will watch the film *Pulp Fiction* (1994, 154 minutes) in class during the fourth week. While this movie does have violence, strong language, and nudity, it does a wonderful job of portraying picaresque elements in film. Violence is prevalent in *Lazarillo* and *Don Quixote,* and students will easily see that connection between the written works and the movie. Comparisons of crass language may come up as well, since picaresque novels typically involve the lower class and such language is more common with less-refined characters. Discussions should focus on similar elements: whether the characters in *Pulp Fiction* can be viewed as heroes and if they might represent the modern day version of the *picaro*.

Week 5: *Huckleberry Finn*

Reading assignments

- *Clarissa* (1748), 150 pages
- Excerpts from *Huckleberry Finn*, ~100 pages (The Raft, Grangerfords and Sheperdsons, and King and Duke episodes)

The reading of *Clarissa* this week will be supplemented with roughly 100 pages of *Huckleberry Finn*. These readings will include chapters 15 through 22, which cover Jim and Huck missing Cairo in the fog, the Grangerfords and Sheperdsons episode, and several episodes with the King and Duke. Comparisons between these readings and *Lazarillo*, *Don Quixote*, and the two films should come easily to students. Discussions will compare how and if the picaro has evolved, and if students are starting to see any of these elements in *Clarissa*. At this point in their reading, they should be approximately halfway through the novel. Clarissa will be in the clutches of Lovelace and, if needed, comparisons can be made to modern day Soap Operas, sitcoms, and the like to encourage students to stick with reading this huge book. While there is certainly drama in *Clarissa,* there is no action. Richardson provides readers with first and secondhand accounts of action but no action itself. Can students think of any other modern day programs that do this?

Week 6: The Third Movie

Reading assignments

- *Clarissa* (1748), 150 pages

Decidedly lighter than *Pulp Fiction*, *The Princess Bride* (1987, 98 minutes) will be presented in class and will grant some comic relief for students. A discussion this week will center on books that are made into movies, such as the *The Princess Bride*. There is a debate about whether or not the author William Goldman (the author of the novel *The Princess Bride*) creates a false history within the introduction of the novel. Goldman claims that his text is simply an abridgement of an ancient Florentine author named S. Morgenstern. At this time, students will be provided with a few excerpts from the introduction to the

novel, and from the introduction to *Don Quixote*. A discussion can then be aimed at what the purpose of providing such "red herrings" might be, or if they are meant to be taken seriously.

Week 7: The 1st Half of *The Painted Bird*

Reading assignments

- *Clarissa* (1748), 150 pages
- The 1st half of *The Painted Bird*, ~115 pages

Kosinksi's *The Painted Bird* provides a number of opportunities in a classroom. First and foremost, it is a modern (1965) picaresque novel. Certainly discussions can be directed around that topic, as with the previous texts. Repetition can be a useful learning tool in this class discussion, as the teacher asks again: How has the notion of the *picaro* changed? Do they see changes? However, it also presents a chance to address Holocaust literature. Some students may be familiar with Wiesel's *Night*, especially now that it is part of the Oprah Book Club. If so, then comparisons can be made between the different approaches the two texts take, but most importantly Wiesel claims that *The Painted Bird* is "one of the best indictments of the Nazi era… Written with deep sincerity and sensitivity." Do students agree? What connections does this text have with *Clarissa*? Has it somehow enhanced their understanding of the novel?

Week 8: The Fourth Movie

Reading assignments

- *Clarissa* (1748), 150 pages

This week students will view the most modern film that will be examined in this course, *Sin City* (2005, 124 minutes). While *Sin City* is best recognized as a detective noir film, it has many picaresque elements included as well. Comparisons between *Sin City* and *Pulp Fiction* should be readily apparent. Students will be asked to inspect it closer to identify linkages between characters in each of the texts. Who are the main characters in *Sin City*? What do these characters have in common with characters from *Clarissa* and the other texts in the course? How does the violence in *Sin City* resemble the violence in the other texts?

Week 9: The 2nd Half of *The Painted Bird*

Reading assignments

- *Clarissa* (1748), 150 pages
- The 2nd half of *The Painted Bird*, ~115 pages

After finishing Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, students may now be better able to answer some of the questions that came up earlier in the previous week's discussion. Excerpts from Wiesel's *Night* could be provided, to show differences in narrative style. Both novels are about the holocaust, and both authors are holocaust survivors. Why might Kosinski have chosen to tell his story the way he did? How effective is his approach? Which *picaro*, from the other texts, does Kosinski's unnamed young boy seem most similar to?

Week 10:The End of *Clarissa*

Reading assignments

- *Clarissa* (1748), the last ~150 pages

As students finish off the last 150 pages of *Clarissa*, they will watch *Kill Bill Vol. 1* (2003, 111 minutes). Discussions again center around the concept of the *picaro*: has it changed? Since they are both written and directed by Quentin Tarantino, what similarities do students see between *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill Vol. 1*? Both films have main characters that are unsavory—assassins. How do the *picaros* differ? How are they the same? Is The Bride, from *Kill Bill*, more justified in her mission than Jules and Vincent or Butch from *Pulp Fiction*? Most importantly, are these *picaros* the same as the ones students find in earlier texts? Or has Tarantino tweaked the *picaro* for his own purposes?

Week 11: Reading Log, and Draft of Final Paper is Due

Now that students are finished reading *Clarissa*, a discussion should focus on what picaresque elements (if any) they see in the text. What relation does a novel like *Clarissa* share with the other texts and films in this course? Any questions that may have arisen from the reading should be addressed now as well. Another useful exercise would be to require students to reduce

the novel to a few simple plot points, or episodes (for example: leaving home, the temptation, the rape, the fall, and her death).

Week 12: The Final Movie

During this last week of new material, students will watch the film *Memento* (2000, 113 minutes). *Memento* offers another example of a modern film that features a *picaro* as the main character—Leonard. The story unravels in reverse as Leonard pieces together his broken life and eventually comes to understand how he lost his ability to retain new memories. What other *picaro* does Leonard resemble? With all of the reading completed, and all the films viewed, students will now be asked to discuss any connections they have seen throughout the course. How do they view picaresque novels, their development, and the idea of the *picaro* and its development over time? Do they see these elements through film as well, or do they believe that is too much of a stretch? Can they think of other novels or films that represent these same ideas? Any suggestions that can be successfully expanded upon and defended are fair game for inclusion in the final paper or essay exam.

Week 13 and 14: Final Paper is Due, Presentations of Papers

These weeks will be set aside for presentation of papers. Presentations should last 15 minutes followed by a 5 minute question and answer period. In Week 13, the rough draft of the final paper will be handed back to students to allow them a week to make any final edits. The only difference between these weeks will be that the final papers will be due during week 14. This should allow enough time for the instructor to read and evaluate them.

Week 15: The Final Essay Exam

This class period will be dedicated to the final exam. Students should be granted the entire class period to take the final.

The design for this survey in literature, or humanities, course allows a lot of flexibility. It demands that students wrestle with a difficult text, but it also allows for some excellent discussion. During the course of the class, students will gain some exposure to novels from the 16th to the 20th century and they will

also have read Spanish, English, American, and Central European literature. The course will have introduced them to several films that hopefully expanded their thinking about literary concepts and opened their eyes to the prevalence of these concepts in modern day entertainment as well as historic and modern literature. Finally, it also serves to introduce them to the beginnings and progress of the picaresque novel. While a 1500-page novel may seem a daunting task, and some doubt the relevance of such a book, breaking it apart into smaller pieces and exposing students to other, perhaps more approachable, works can be done with wonderful results. I hope that college students will benefit from a literature class structured this way and that it would show them that *Clarissa* is more than just a doorstop or defensive weapon.

Notes

1. See Robert Alter's Rogue's *Progress: Studies in the Picaresque Novel*, Frank Wadleigh Chandler's *The Literature of Roguery*, Carmen Benito-Vessels and Michael Zappala's *The Picaresque: A Symposium on the Rogue's Tale*, Stuart Miller's *The Picaresque Novel*, or any other number of works for a more thorough examination of picaresque novels.

2. A search of the major literature journal databases (Academic Search Premier, Biography Reference Bank, Essay & General Literature, Historical New York Times, Humanities & Social Sciences Retrospective, JSTOR, MLA Bibliography, WorldCat, and Xreferplus) returned 273 possible documents. The majority of these hits referenced *Approaches to Teaching the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, edited by Lisa Zunshine, and published March 2006 by MLA; and *Passion and Virtue: Essays on the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, edited by David Blewett, and published March 2001 by the University of Toronto.

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Thelma and Louise. Dir. Ridley Scott. Perf. Susan Sarandon, Geena Davis, Harvey Keitel, and Michael Madsen. 1991. DVD. MGM, 2003.

The Princess Bride. Dir. Rob Reiner. Perf. Cary Elwes, Mandy Patinkin, Chris Sarandon, Christopher Guest, and Wallace Shawn. 1987. DVD. MGM, 2001.

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Stepping off a Small Cliff: Going Back to Ninth Grade with *Romeo and Juliet*

Scott Hall and William D. Dyer

Teaching is all about "audience." Both of us have come to know this from having pressed our heads and hearts against student audiences for over forty years—Dyer in his college classes at Minnesota State University-Mankato, and Hall in a much more diverse set of audience interactions that includes high school juniors and seniors at Irondale High School in New Brighton, MN, and adjunct classes at Anoka Ramsey Community College in Coon Rapids, MN. We know that we've done our best work, had more fun (it's all about fun), and learned more when we were mindful of and attentive to our audiences. And we've been fortunate over the past few years to carry our long friendship and vigorous discussions about teaching into each others' classrooms. Those team-teaching engagements have kept the friendship and professional association alive, providing unique opportunities to meet each other on our respective professional turf, to watch and participate in each other's attempts to draw students into challenging pieces of literature, to critically evaluate the results of those interactions, and to rediscover the literature that we were teaching in the process. That is, we had always used our own classes as places to perform our experiments with audiences and literature. But this year would be different.

1. Can We Get There From Here?

"Let's try teaching *Romeo and Juliet*," Scott said. "Good grief," said Dyer, "I haven't taught that play in years, and I can't say that I remember liking it that much. Why *that* play?" "Maybe we ought to try something we don't know so well," Hall said. "And maybe, by doing that, we ought to find out how other teachers are teaching Shakespeare to high school students." "Doesn't that mean ninth grade?" I gasped. "Yep," Hall said, "but that's pretty much where Shakespeare begins for school kids, and it would be good for us to know how they like it and how they're being brought into it. That way, we might better find out for ourselves what students are bringing to our classes." "So, then, when's the last time you taught ninth-graders?" Dyer queried. "Years ago," Scott said, "and very briefly. You?" "I remember *being* in ninth grade once. And I think I was pretty much of a jerk when I was there," Dyer said. "Ok, then," Hall said, "that seals it. It's that particular lack of experience on our parts that says we have to do it. I'll talk to the ninth-grade teachers about the possibilities and make the arrangements—you re-read the play. Those teachers will want to know what we're going to do in those classes, that they'll be giving up their classrooms for a good cause, and that we won't be wasting their kids' time. And—they're gonna wanna know who the heck *you* are!"

Right. "I'll be down to get you in a taxi, honey—better be ready 'bout half-past eight."

Hall was right. There was a pedagogical adventure in the offing here. Lots to learn. But very risky. We'd be jumping into the middle of a teaching unit on *Romeo and Juliet*, and, given that three teachers were opening their classrooms for our use, we couldn't be absolutely certain of what we'd be stepping in. We'd be granted two days to do what we'd ultimately decide upon—much better than a one-day guest appearance but too brief to allow for any unfortunate miscalculations or wheel-spinning. Both of us needed to know the *play* like the back of our hands—however, because we both thrive on chewing over the layers of meaning in Shakespeare's plays, *knowing Romeo and Juliet* would be the least of our problems.

Two problems confronted us. The first was radically about "audience." Who would these young people be? What did ninth-graders know? What did they *need* to know? And what might make these students most receptive to our intrusion into their classrooms—their lives? The second problem was contingent upon the first—what could we do with six different ninth grade classes, over two days, that wouldn't squander the small blocks of time we were given? How were we going to be able to access their responses to the literature, get them to see something in the text, and get them to express that to us and to each other? And we were both concerned about what we would learn from this experience that could inform and illuminate our understanding of Shakespeare and further interactions with students in our more familiar teaching environments. We'll share some of the answers to those questions in what follows. But, let's talk about ninth-graders first, shall we?

2. I Can See the Horizon Over Yonder

Who's the audience, here, anyway? What do they know? What do they need to know? And why should they care about *Romeo and Juliet*? Well, we had to start somewhere—we knew that this was a ninth-grade audience. So what? We assumed this meant that these kids have a very limited attention span. The very real presence and attraction of the opposite sex draws away some of their attention. These kids, we thought, would be nearly feral in the way their glandular secretions would lead them. Besides the scent of young women filling the nostrils of these young men, and the equally powerful attraction that these young women feel for those young men, the culture of their friends drives them—cliques. It's one of the most important elements of "school" that impels many of them to come at all. Yet, there is something about a ninth grader that is also aggressively individualistic—even if only within a group. If they are anything like we were, we'd find some wise guys and class clowns trying to rise above the group and make the classroom a showcase for their attention-getting abilities. Things academic are just beginning to draw the attention of some of them—most see their senior year of high school light years away.

Ninth grade is about social endeavors, stretching beyond their sometimes insecure selves to connect with their peers in important ways—ways in which they haven't before: going to the football games; formal and informal dances; private parties; engagement in high school varsity and junior varsity sports teams, as well as membership in formal organizations like band, theatre, forensics, the school newspaper, student government, and academic decathlon events; and the sifting-out of kids into an unofficial, complex ladder of social identifiers. Some of the identifiers are celebratory—smart, popular, cool. Some of them are derogatory—nerd, geek, loser, froshy. There are many more derogatory terms for ninth graders than there are celebratory ones.

Depending upon how their school is organized (perhaps a middle school organization in which the ninth-graders are located at the top of the pecking order, or a high school organization in which the ninth-graders are the lowest-of-low), these kids may feel even more unsure of themselves and more socially threatened than they usually do—and they usually do. For many of them—young men and women—this is the beginning of the process of their being defined and classified (and unfairly limited) by members of their sub-culture. They can't drive yet, so the imposition of social labels like "greaser" and "motor-head" won't kick in for a while. Nonetheless, they can express their difference from their peers in other ways that can have negative, and sometimes extended, impacts on them that can't be reversed easily without moving out of town.

Social cliques include the obvious ones, like folks involved in sports (jocks), or band/orchestra (band-heads), or activities and clubs with a classic academic emphasis (play-heads or chess geeks). But other groupings loom large—those determined on the basis of race, ethnicity, physical or mental challenges, socio-economic position, perceived or real engagement in drug or alcohol use, engagement in activities that are on or over the edge of criminal behavior, behaviors bordering on or well over the edge of the bizarre or unacceptable or unusual (kids overly "pierced," or "Goths" who dress in black and wear heavy black makeup, or "Satanists" who practice uncommon rituals). We've

just scratched the surface of these social siftings. And then, of course, there's the "religious" rung of the ladder—there are Christians and Muslims and more; and nearly one hundred first languages are spoken within Irondale's school district. A rung or two must be reserved for those who set the trend for the dress and behavior and manner of verbal communication—the style—for most of the rest. The social ladder has room for everyone. The leaders, the "Chosen," or privileged students on the cutting edge of determining the social ladder, will always find rungs for the perceived "outsiders": those who don't fit or don't belong or find themselves isolated from the rest or who look or talk or dress differently. And just as vehemently, the outsiders will not want to be considered on any rung that has a "preppy" or an "honor roller." The social sifting starts in a major way in the ninth grade, and ninth-grade teachers often can contribute substantially to how it progresses. If all of this sounds a little like the way things work within a prison culture, you've got it.

Having said all this, without a bit of situational grounding, it was scary to pick up the Sunday *Trib* (19 Feb 2006) and see, featured on the front page, a piece simply titled "A fresh look at freshman year." The article inferred or stated directly—sometimes by means of little interviews by those kids who should know best—what we'd been thinking. Ninth grade is a "transition" year for students. They're betwixt and between, fish out of water poised anxiously to plunge into the complex soup of high school adolescence. The article asserts that "ninth grade has become the pivotal year in American schools." Kids who do well in it gain confidence and go on to more successful, fuller high school experiences. Those "who don't can drift through high school or drop out. Kids in ninth grade feel their alienation from a middle school experience, where they weren't terribly pushed and not asked to be so nearly independent, and an upper-classman high school status, where kids are more settled into a set of social and academic roles, are older, bigger, and demonstrably freer." "'In ninth grade, the kids get lost in the crowd,' said Jay Hertzog, dean of the College of Education at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. 'They're

the ankle-biters of the high school.'" But, as the article indicates, ninth-graders "tend to have a hypersensitivity to social standing," have a lower self-worth, and are consequently at a higher risk for suicide. That's why there's been a movement of late to configure "ninth grade centers, in the hope of insulating them from some of the rough and tumble of teen life."

But these kids are also feeling alienated from those who have anchored them thus far and made them feel secure. A substantial number of them think ninth grade "stinks": nearly one-third of Minnesota ninth-graders don't like school; a third says their teachers don't care about them. And one in ten ninth-graders thinks the kids at their school "aren't friendly." And here's the kicker:

> Perhaps friends are critical to ninth-graders because so many feel disconnected from their families. When asked how much their families care for them, according to the student survey, more than ten percent of Minnesota ninth-graders say 'some,' 'a little' or 'not at all.' More than a quarter say their families don't understand them. And nearly one-third say their families don't respect their privacy. All those responsesare higher than for sixth- or twelfth-graders.

At this point, gangs need to be mentioned. This volatile group of people poses special challenges to anyone who interacts with ninth graders in a pedagogical way. Students' peers may be members of these gangs—gangs are always recruiting new members. Boys are often drawn to these gangs for the clear social structure they provide—they join for a sense of belonging. And they'll do just about anything for that feeling of acceptance. Even young women are being drawn into the gang and rap culture and perhaps being victimized sexually by these gangs—some violent movies and videos illustrate this spin-off of the rap music culture where women are often referred to as "bitches" or "hoes." That's all arguable. But these young people are subject to the gang influence and the powerful pressures to belong to what can become a substitute for the family. And the gang culture is all over *Romeo and Juliet*.

3. The Edge Approaches

But who are *these* ninth-graders at Irondale, really? Would they make us fear for our lives? No. Would we need lots of candy to bribe them for even putting up with our antics? No. We knew that most of our preconceptions were probably off-center. And we actually knew that most of our students were going to be relatively normal, relatively middle class, and relatively Caucasian. Dyer had only to walk down the hallways of Irondale and look into their classrooms to get that picture. Nevertheless, we really needed to plan for any possibility we might walk into. Dyer *read* about ninth-graders while Hall made contacts with the ninth grade teachers[1] and asked a lot of questions. Both read, re-read, and met regularly to discuss the play for any meanings and/or possibilities within the text that might give us an "in" with our audience.

The ninth grade teachers told Hall about their reasons for teaching *Romeo and Juliet*. There were several, but the following list should give some insight into what teachers plan for when approaching literature in high school. By reading this play, students can:

1. empathize with the play's content and characters
2. learn decision-making skills—the play offers models/un-models
3. identify consequences for rebelling against the status quo
4. see modeling by the parents in the play
5. see the cost of a propagated feud—cost of redemption
6. understand culturally universal themes
7. read a text rich in imagery/detail about another era
8. enjoy it—have fun!
9. language—how to decipher Elizabethan English
10. translate it—make it their own, ultimately
11. practice research skills and increase knowledge of the era
12. read it together—communal experience/discussion—classroom as a text

13. interpret the film as an extension of the text

Hall was impressed but not surprised by the length of the list that resulted from his discussion with his teaching colleagues. However, he was surprised (genuinely and pleasantly) at the number of skills teachers expect to teach their ninth graders at Irondale. Hall saw extensions of those skills in his own room, but assumed he was *introducing* his students to some of those skills. Ah, life in a vacuum can be so snug and self-important!

It was also important that we find out what students had done with the play before we arrived—how well prepared would they be for us? We discovered that they would have read all of *Romeo and Juliet*, taken an exam on it, watched portions of either the Luhrmann (starring DiCaprio) or more romantic Zefferilli video of the play, and researched aspects of Shakespeare's culture. Thus, the students would bring some knowledge of the world of the play that we could base our teaching upon. We then brainstormed a list of topics that might drive our planning:

1. How do Romeo and Juliet provide a lens for their/our society?
2. How does our society provide a lens for Romeo and Juliet?
3. What historical considerations should we reflect upon? Emphasize?
4. What questions do students carry away from the text concerning love? death? family obligations? authority? identity? rebellion? the status quo? rites of passage?
5. Romeo and Juliet—who are they? Are they more than just cookie cutter figures? Are they capable of change—are they dynamic?
6. Assessment—how can we assess love? What data is available—in the text—outside of text? how does that data support our opinions/views? What kind of love is found in the play?
7. *Romeo and Juliet*—Is it love? What test can be used/found within the text? Outside of the text?
8. How do the other characters help us enter the

text?

We also generated a list of "journal" questions which we could ask the students to respond to:

1. Who do you listen to/go to for advice—and why?
2. Why do you rebel against some authority figures and unhesitatingly follow the rules/directions of others?
3. Why do you follow the rules or not follow the rules?
4. What rules/templates do we impose upon ourselves?
5. What rules/templates do we try impose upon those around us?
6. What differences are highlighted when the rules/templates are not followed?
7. How do we react when our expectations are not met? are met?
8. Is family peace more important than meeting your own desires?
9. Is family identity more important than individual identity?
10. Are you really free to make any decision you want to make?
11. How do you find an individual identity within the family structure?
12. How do we become individuals within a societal structure? [race/heritage/culture]
13. Will you be able to choose your own spouse/partner without family judgment/interference?
14. What would the end of the play suggest about fate/free will? what would the end of the play suggest about love?
15. Are Romeo and Juliet just pawns or do they have an integral/individual identity?
16. Do Romeo and Juliet have an obligation to keep the peace in the community?
17. Do Romeo and Juliet have an obligation to fol-

low the family's rules/policies?
18. Do Romeo and Juliet have an obligation to maintain the feud?
19. What experience is authentic? Why?
20. Which characters in the play are authentic? why?
21. What emotions in the play are authentic? why?
22. What information do insiders have that outsiders don't have?
23. How does that information make/allow us to be part of a group?
24. What gives us a feeling belongingness to any group we are part of?
25. How do we determine who is part of which group?
26. Can we tell without knowing someone [masks] whether they belong to a group pr not?
27. What kind of role-playing is evident here in the text?—in your life?
28. Is knowing your role essential to being part of a group/acceptance into a group?

Eventually, after several phone calls, meetings, and libations, we pared our lists to a few essential topics:

1. What have you sacrificed/given up or gone without for the happiness of your family?
2. What role do you play in your family [peacekeeper, boss, non-entity, comic, hero, attention-getter]?
3. How does Romeo know that this time it's love with Juliet? How does Juliet know?
4. Is Friar Lawrence a hero or a criminal? Should he be praised or condemned? Excused or blamed?
5. How can we test/assess whether a feeling is true love [within the text—or in our own lives]?
6. Why do you follow directions? Listen to authority? Follow rules at school? At home?

It's obvious to us, when we look over the lists again, that our focus was always on our audience. Every item on every list

points directly at their understanding of the text—both what they see in it and how they see themselves in it. And, after having met with six different ninth-grade classrooms-full of these kids, we understand who our audience *really* was. They are, to a fault, polite, malleable, coachable, cooperative, friendly, and open. Most important, though, they're *smart*, and they're not afraid to seem so.

4. Grasping for the Root on the Edge of the Cliff Face

And this is where Dyer came in. Irondale was rather imposing with tones chiming to begin and end classes; there would be no going over the time limit as Dyer was accustomed to do or quitting early if we ran out of material—all had to fit into the 53 minutes we were allotted. Irondale's seven minute "passing time" was also our prep time; we ferried all of our materials on a cart from room to room through a deafening throng of students standing at lockers, digging for books and loading backpacks, hitting one another, cursing, laughing, hugging, and talking in the hallway. Somehow we managed to arrive in the next classroom to get our act underway by the time the next tone chimed. There was barely time for coffee or the restroom. Hall ran Dyer around like an athletic trainer with a vengeance.

Once in class, we decided to tap in to those research activities that each of the teachers had assigned their students. We were curious to know what they knew. And there were two things Dyer wanted to ask them which might, after a little discussion and some engagement of their "personal texts," make them see that this play was about them and that they were *in* it. After talking informally with them about how we believed very strongly that Shakespeare lives for us, that we're in these plays, and that every time we read one of them, that play is *different* because we re-author it with every successive read, Dyer embarked on his questions: "Did your teacher tell you about or ask you to do a little research on Shakespeare, the times he lived in, or the process of putting together his plays?" Of course, they said "yes," in response to which Dyer asked them selectively to tell him what they'd researched and what they'd learned along the way. Those easy responses greased the skids

for a question about "audience": "who would be likely to go to see *Romeo and Juliet* at the Rose or Newington Butts or the Theatre north of the Thames and on the east side of the city walls (the Globe was still a glimmer in the theatre company's eye)?" They hadn't investigated the issue of audience, they told us, and this was Dyer's wedge in. "Just about everyone," he said. "Public theatre was quite nearly 16th-century England's version of our television—by 1600, about 21,000 a week went to the theatres, almost one in every eight of London's 160,000 residents."

"But, might it have been possible for me to find any of you there?" Dyer asked. "Could 14 or 15 year-olds possibly be present among the 2300 plus attendees of an afternoon from two to five?" They were quietly skeptical about this one, maybe even a little apprehensive, but attentive. Dyer suggested that "folks as young as you could have been there—young apprentices to haberdashers or goldsmiths or glovers or shipwrights or dyers or carpenters; maids-in-waiting attending to their aristocratic female charges in the upper galleries; drawers on holiday from a tavern or hostelry, stable boys employed at local inns, day laborers, touts, pick-pockets elbowing through the pit, prostitutes, boatmen, young soldiers, young aristocrats and high-born students, young daughters and sons of moneylenders, merchants, and shopkeepers. Peter Thomson, in his *Shakespeare's Theatre*, observed that "the groundlings in the open yard, standing and jostling for their pennysworth, would be artisans, craftsmen, soldiers returning from the wars. In the twopenny galleries would be the middle-class merchant, perhaps with his family, together with the less showy and perhaps less wealthy lawyers and students from the Inns of Court. The costliest seats would then belong to those members of society who went to the theatre to be seen—courtiers, younger sons of the nobility, friends and relations of the resident company's patron" (24). And young people could well be among them. In her chapter entitled "Elizabethan Playhouses, Actors, and Audiences," from *A Short History of the Theatre*, Martha Fletcher Bellinger wrote about the public theatre's ambience: "The house itself was not unlike a circus, with a good deal of noise and dirt. Servants, grooms, 'prentices

and mechanics jostled each other in the pit, while more or less gay companies filled the boxes. Women of respectability were few, yet sometimes they did attend; and if they were very careful of their reputations they wore masks. On the stage, which ran far out into the auditorium, would be seated a few of the early gallants, playing cards, smoking, waited upon by their pages; and sometimes eating nuts or apples and throwing things out among the crowd" (www.theatrehistory.com/british/bellinger001/html).

Since "audience" is such a huge part of every Shakespeare play, and because he makes such a big and intentional deal about "audience" to those who come to the show by repeatedly framing scenes that *include* audiences of various sorts, Dyer wanted them to hold that idea in their minds. But he also wanted them to feel that *they* could be there, that Shakespeare hadn't written something that dealt them out because it was "above" them. They needed to know that this was the "television" of the Elizabethan world, the entertainment of choice for so many of the citizens of the London of 1600, and that they could very well have been among a very diverse audience who'd willingly pony up a penny to attend. They were noticeably surprised. Suddenly, for a moment, they and we were back there, in Elizabethan London, more willing to give our pennies to one of the gatherers outside the theatre.

But it was the next question Dyer needed to hook them with: "Who would have been in the show, and could *you* have been in it?" This proved a real puzzler to them. This was a "theatre company" question. If it was conceivable to place these kids on the receiving end of Shakespeare's play, was it equally possible that they could find themselves on the "delivery" end, treading the boards in support of the Lord Chamberlain's troupe or, at least, providing some valuable service to help sustain the enterprise? After some hesitation, several volunteered that none of the young women in the class would be taking acting parts. We laughed a bit over this, talked briefly about why, and shared our mutual experience with Gwyneth Paltrow's taboo-busting role in "Shakespeare in Love." But they clearly felt unable to speculate beyond that important reality, and they showed some curiosity at discovering other possi-

bilities for their participation in a 16th-century *R&J* production.

And, so, Dyer told them that, in a play company that was comprised of some thirty-two to thirty-six folks, there would have been some real opportunities for them. In addition to the share-holders of the company—maybe numbering eight, representing the major players and playwright—two or three of those folks might have been even younger than them. These kids, from twelve to fourteen or so, wouldn't have yet formerly entered their adolescence. Their voices wouldn't have changed yet, enabling them to be enlisted to play the young girl parts—the ingénues, the "Juliets." The students helped me to remember that Juliet was still a couple of months from being fourteen. The two or three high-voiced kids would have been brought to the troupe—perhaps even recruited—as apprentices, perhaps for time periods of three to seven years (but, most probably closer to the three), placed under the control of individual actors who paid for those contractual relationships. In exchange for the kids' service, the actors fed and boarded them and taught them their trade. But those young apprentices would have come to those experienced actors with skills derived from a rigorous education at an establishment such as St. Paul's School across and up the river, where, from eight years old, they would have have been taught and worked rigorously from dawn to dusk, learning and practicing their singing and dancing under tough discipline and maybe a bit of abuse. Clearly, those young kids would have learned their craft in Shakespeare's company for a few years, grown into young men and, perhaps into more mature women's roles or other tasks in the company.

So, then, other pre-adolescents might have been brought in to replace them, with some of the older boys sticking around to do a variety of things. A couple of hired boys might have been brought on board to work with the musicians, or as stage boys or helpers in the tiring house. So, along with the apprentices, perhaps four to six boys of twelve to fifteen might have been in service at any given time. And, as those kids "graduated" or matured, perhaps a couple of more kids might have been added, swelling the population of young people of twelve to nineteen year-olds to six

to nine. So it's entirely conceivable that, at any given moment in time, our ninth-graders could see themselves on the stage, in the troupe, serving an *Romeo and Juliet* production in various ways.

Then it was Hall's turn. We'd decided earlier that we had better explain to them a little bit about what we believed about readers responding to texts. Dyer had captured their attention and pulled them in, assuring us that these students were right on board with us.

Hall based much of his theory for our presentation on the work of Norman Holland, who not only studied texts (Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in particular), but people's responses to texts. Holland (in "'*Hamlet*'—My Greatest Creation," *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*) says that because no two people have had the exact same experience in life, then no two people can ever read the exact same play. Each reader relies on the prior experiences of their lives when making meaning in texts, and he further states that each reader actually re-creates *Hamlet* in images, memories, and previous experience that "pop-up" in one's brain when given the stimuli of the words, singularly, or in context, on the page. People create a *Hamlet* reminiscent of their own life—*Hamlet* becomes a concoction of each reader's memories and experiences. For example, one reader may have traveled to Europe and meandered through old castles. That reader would have a completely different take on what "ramparts" are than someone who has never actually been through a castle and had only seen a castle on television. The image of Elsinore to each reader is different. Going a little further, each student has created his or her unique vision of *Romeo and Juliet*. That is the point that Hall wanted students to leave with on that first day. To illustrate that point, he gave them a little quiz. "I know we said there weren't going to be any tests," Hall told them, "but I want you to think of something. When I say a word, I want you to picture it in your mind—get a good mental image of it, so that, if I ask you about it, you could tell me about what you see—you could describe it, even." And this is how it unfolded:

> 'OK, I want you to think of a DOG—any dog—the first that comes to your
> mind—picture it completely—in detail.'

> 'OK—ready for the test? What did your dog look like? Who thought of a small dog? Raise your hands. A big dog? Raise hands. A white dog? A brown dog? A black dog? Your dog? A cartoon dog?'
>
> 'So, a lot of different answers there—do you think any of us had the exact same dog pictured in our minds? No? So, do you think any of us had the exact same Romeo, or Juliet, or Tybalt or Mercutio or even the whole play, *Romeo and Juliet,* in our minds? No? Then what are we, Bill and I or anyone else, talking about when we say that Shakespeare created this play? You just created a dog in your mind. You are creating *Romeo and Juliet* in your mind when you read it. We are the ones who make meaning of it when we read it. We create it. If Shakespeare wrote the play, but no one read it, would it exist? Or, does it only exist when we create it, or create the idea of it, in our minds? So, is there anything in life that we don't really create—or recreate—in our lives? No.'

We ended that first day with a little homework assignment for them. We posed a few questions that they were to write some short answers to in their notebooks:

> 1. Define the word "authority." What is it? What characteristics are associated with it? What kinds?
> 2. Why do you follow directions? Listen to authority? At school? At home? Why do you listen to the authority of some and not others?
> 3. Where do you find your own authority? What rules do you impose upon yourself?

The students had left the room, but still, questions remained—which *Romeo and Juliet* have they read? Will we find out what they brought to the play concerning certain issues and themes that we felt were important? We wanted to get at their interactions with the text—what they were bringing to it, how they saw themselves in it (which we felt sure that we had set up on

Thursday). For example, do 9th grade girls read the part of Romeo the same as boys or would a 9th grade boy have some different understanding of what that role of Romeo is, what that role of being a young male means—what it is to have male friends, what it means to try to impress a girl, try to get her attention, act macho, play a lover? Do girls see themselves ever as Romeo? Do they sympathize with the character, see the character in terms of what they wish Romeo to be—if Romeo was to woo them—or if Romeo was to be their lover? Do they see Romeo for himself or do they see Romeo as an extension of the boys around them? Do they judge Romeo's behavior based upon today's morals and norms? Do they judge Romeo based upon norms in their school, their community, their state, their country? The same can be asked about the reactions of the 9th grade boys. Do they see themselves as Romeo? So they see Juliet as, perhaps, someone they could love? And students' perceptions of gender boundaries could be really blurred if readers are lesbian or gay, from a non-western culture, or come from a particularly religious upbringing. There are as many factors in how we *read a text* as there in *who we are*. Then how do we learn how to socialize, how to act upon the same morals and impulses and threats and reinforcements that others do? Do we have to re-create everything? Or, is imitation enough until we can make it a habit or grow mature enough to make a rational decision to change it? What have they taken away from the text that can be applied to their own lives?

5. Fly the Friendly Skies

So much for the first day—but what then? The first of our two-day sortie had come to an end on a pretty positive note. We could tell that, in every one of the six fifty-minute classes we taught on that Thursday, we'd grabbed their attention and interest. We hadn't actually drawn them into the text of *Romeo and Juliet* yet. We had "set the table;" now we needed to demonstrate that the play (and the act of putting it on or watching it) was about them. All teachers are promoters and car salesmen, without the cynicism or materialism. We'd set those classes up for the "sale"; it was up to us to "close," bring the play to them and with them. We told them that Friday was going

to require their direct involvement in the text, and we needed nothing more than their good-natured and willing cooperation.

We'd prepared on the fly for Friday for about an hour and a half immediately after our Thursday experience. We talked some about how Thursday had gone. We'd had to adjust on that first day—we'd initially thought that showing them the opening piece from the early-forties video of Olivier's *Henry V* might be a good thing; Olivier had determined to do the show according to 16th-century conventions, replete with Globe Theatre set, a real and responding audience sitting in the galleries and standing in the pit, the opening speech of the "Prologue" that emphasized Dyer's point to our students that Shakespeare's language created with our imagination everything we needed in the playspace between our ears. But that clip took too much time for what it gained for us. We'd scrapped it in order to concentrate on getting to know the students, allow them to get comfortable with us, and begin to understand that they could be in the audience or on the stage, and, by the third class, we'd developed a tight and involving interaction.

We'd also decided to show no video clips. We had Luhrmann's version all racked up. It contains lots of images that our students could relate to, but we knew it would take them away from the text of the play and rob us of valuable time we'd need to work some group interactions with specific scenes. The play was the thing. Too little time, too much to do. A classic and cautionary example of what the three ninth-grade teachers we'd stolen these six classes from faced every day.

So we decided to break them into groups of four or five. We'd begin quickly by summarizing briefly what we'd done together on Thursday: that they *are* in the play, that they are subject to all kinds of authority, and that they exert authority. As Hall had gotten them to proclaim just before our Thursday sessions disbanded—no one, but no one, knows *them* better than they do, and we wanted them to know how crucial that is in *Romeo & Juliet*, where issues of freedom and bondage ring like a bell through every scene. Students were to respond to specific scenes in the play. Still, we'd agonized over that fifth classroom encounter

with the students from two combined classes—so unwieldy that we'd had to herd them into the library for the encounter. How in the hell would we be able to work collaborative groups in that mess, and would they rebel against us and eat us for lunch?

On Friday morning, we dug into their homework. We felt it was important that they hear their own voices right away to let them know that this day belonged to them. They had put up with us talking "at" them for most of Thursday. It was their turn to say what was on their minds. We asked them to share some of the ideas that they wrote about in their notebooks. Hall emceed the short segment, trying to stay in the background and not judge or make the connections for them. Although the following questions seem rapid fire, we took time for answers in class. Here is some of the pattern of Hall's questioning:

> 'What authority do you have? Where do you find your authority? What did you write in your journals about that last night? Did you find that there were areas of your life that you completely control? Are there areas in your life that you don't control? What if you didn't do your homework? Who is in control of who does your homework—is your teacher in control of your homework? Do your parents make you do homework—or do you decide to do it to avoid and penalty or consequence? Maybe you always make the decision whether to act on something or not—maybe it's always you who makes every decision—but you base it on the consequences and rewards that are offered or are implicit. So, who has control over you? What did you write in your journals? Did the teacher make you do that or did you decide to do it for another reason? So, who makes decisions for you? Do your parents decide what you are going to eat for dinner? Do they make you eat it? Who tells you when to get up for school?'

The idea behind all of this was two-fold: we wanted them to help us test the degree to which Shakespeare's play is

relevant to them and their contemporary context; and we needed to prime them to begin to see how they could *be* these characters and *in* this play. We'd developed five groups, with a different scene and prompt for each one. There'd be time only for a quick and dirty and hopefully clear set-up of those prompts and the rules of the game—each group would need to choose a recorder to collect the interactions of each group. We'd have to work fast. To help move the activity along, we'd agreed to move among the groups, easily and affably answering questions and responding to their problems. We would try scrupulously, we'd decided, not to "prompt" their responses and make them our ventriloquists' dummies. What would *that* prove for us?

And what scenes did each group grapple with? Group #1 was charged with 2.2, the declaration of love scene, and we wanted them to see how and where in it the authority and power of love was expressed. Group #2 dealt with 2.4, the trash-talking scene involving Mercutio and Romeo, and, eventually, the Nurse—how does authority and power get expressed in terms of language in it? Group #3 was assigned 3.1, the all-important pivotal face-off between Tybalt and Mercutio that results in Mercutio's death and that causes Romeo, under great peer and "rule" pressure, to be drawn in and kill Tybalt—we wanted this group to look for evidence of the presence of personal and group authority in the scene. Group #4 took 3.3—one of the "Friar Lawrence" scenes, this one involving Lawrence reading Romeo the riot act and delivering some really bad advice, which included directing Romeo back to Juliet's house, a stay that he instructed Romeo to conclude before sunrise—good thinking! We wanted this group to evaluate Lawrence's authority in the scene, where he got it, and the quality of his power and advice. Finally, we gave Group #5 3.5, in which Daddy Capulet tyrannizes over Juliet in forcing her to marry Paris under threat of being disowned and thrown out on the street—it was evidence of parental authority, and the nature of it, that we wanted them to look for.

6. Free Falling

And things went on Friday just as we had planned it.[2] Dyer didn't know that he should have been surprised, but he

was. There was no time-wasting, no deviation from the task that, once we'd delivered it, took them about ten minutes to process and left us another ten to facilitate discussion and then a final five minutes to connect them to what they'd written the previous day and to the play for the final time. One of these interactions provided a totally unexpected feeling of success—it was that huge double class, so high-spirited and so full of energy on a Friday after lunch that we thought we'd never get their attention or anything but a smart-assed response. And this is where having no expectations rewarded us. Surprisingly, they'd liked us on Thursday—there's no accounting for taste—and, despite their high spirits, were ready to walk off a short cliff for us. We'd decided that, against our better judgement, we'd run the same group exercises with them. There'd be ten groups instead of five this time, totally unworkable and probably unlikely to enable us to process the work and do anything but set them to work and leave the enterprise unfinished and without conclusions drawn. But they fooled us. Hall worked the left side of the library and those five groups while Dyer worked the other five on the other side of the room. Fortunately, the librarians had watched us working interactions with the crowd of students the day before and liked what had unfolded; they'd provided us tables that eased the task of separating the crowd into groups.

But the kids were terrific and exceedingly bright. They jumped all over their responsibilities. And, although we were more directive than we'd been with the other classes—we had to be in order to get them through it to the point of discussion—the discussion that ensued was more vigorous and enlightening than what had occurred in the other five smaller classes. Thanks to their focused and insightful work, we were able to lead them to the conclusion that earned them a piece of the play. And they even gave us an impromptu ovation at the end. Was it because they were glad to see us go?—we don't think so. What an unexpected pleasure!

7. The Old Account Was Settled Long Ago

So, what did we get out of all of this? No small number of things. As Dyer had labored to tell each class the day before, we'd come before them because, as teachers, we both

believed we needed to place ourselves outside of our usual comfort zone. Dyer had informed his twenty-five upper-level university students in his "Shakespeare's Tragedies" class that he'd be going to Irondale, and, when several of them asked him "why ninth-graders," he'd said the same thing—we all get comfortable, maybe even complacent, dealing with the same audience every day. We both always tell our students that we expect to learn stuff we never knew in the process of working with them, but the chances of that happening diminish if we're not challenged and pressed. However, interacting with a group of students far out of our comfort zone exposes us to risk, the unknown, and the prospect of failure. That prospect puts us back in the place we occupied when we began teaching—the need to really *know* the play we're teaching, think out our objectives and the kinds of activities that might best help us to fulfill them. Teaching 101. It's all about audience. We couldn't fall back on our old stuff; we had to throw our assumptions about audience out the window. And that, and that nervous boiling in our bowels before that first class, is a good thing. Show time.

So we were bound to learn from our audience, and to see *Romeo and Juliet* anew. We both had to work at knowing and reading and re-reading the play and to really know where all of the bodies were buried in it before we could stand before them. Take nothing for granted. And the experience, and our fevered and careful and collaborative preparation for it, refreshed us.

And what about them? We think they learned plenty. And not just about the play. They learned a little about themselves, about how literature is life with training wheels mounted on it, about how they, in spite of what they thought going into the play, are inscribed upon it, as should be the case with any wonderful piece of literature they enter. But they also got to meet and work with us, teachers that they won't get to work with until sometime in the future. They'll know Hall now, how he goes about his work, and will look forward to that engagement.

Hall was greatly impressed with both the staff and students at Irondale. Nothing would have been possible without the willingness and cooperation of three ninth

grade teachers, a couple hundred ninth grade students, and his principal who allowed him the time to visit other classrooms. Collaboration is highly supported at Irondale.

But what about Dyer? While this wasn't a recruiting trip for MSU, his presence there made the reality of college and college teachers more palpable and approachable for them. They'd learned that college teachers were truly interested in them and what they had to say and felt that they were bright. Although college won't happen for them for another four years, and never for some of them (of the five classes, we dealt with one honors class, but our students represented a true cross-section of the ninth-grade population), we'd bridged the gap, brought college closer to them, de-mystified a little of that future prospect, placed a name and three-dimensional presence to the label of "college professor," and made them feel important, valued, and worthy. And it doesn't get any better than that.

Appendix:

Samples of Student Responses to In-class Prompts

The ACTUAL Prompts (that we did use with students):

1. Define the word "authority." What is it? What characteristics are associated with it? What kinds?
2. Why do you follow directions? Listen to authority? At school? At home? Why do you listen to the authority of some and not others?
3. Where do you find your own authority? What rules do you impose upon yourself?
4. How do you see YOURSELF in this play? Has this <u>changed</u> since the beginning of the unit on *Romeo and Juliet?*

What is <u>authority</u>?

"having power or someone or something" [many students used this exact phrase]
"power over people"
"power to enforce a set of laws or rules"
"related to author—who writes or controls some-

thing"
"a right to make rules or laws"
"someone with more experience or dealt with difficult situations"
"a kind of expertise in one area or another"
"someone who is able to take the lead and teach others"
[several student responses listed ideas such as respect, control, knowledge, and confidence]

Kinds of authority:

"There are authorities from high to low, from God to plankton."
"The public gives authority to people—therefore, authority truly lies with the public—we are all equal"
"God"
"President Bush"
"bullies"
"*given* authority and *taken/forced* authority"
"having the right words or actions or thoughts"
[one student listed Osama Bin Laden—perhaps I should contact the FBI or CIA??]
[several student responses listed teachers, counselors, principals, and other school officials]
[several responses listed police, fire, elected officials and others who serve communities]
[several students cited parents, older siblings a authority figures in their families]

Why do you follow directions (at home, school, community)?

"because I have respect for the people who I listen to"
"so we don't get punished or have to do extra work"
"you can get expelled or suspended, or even just yelled at"
"so you don't feel embarrassed or ashamed"
"From birth, we as humans are trained to follow the directions of and respect those in authority"

"if we don't, we will face consequences in the future"
[several students mentioned future plans like college and careers]

Why do you listen to some authority and not others?

"if you don't listen, you either get in trouble or get a bad grade"
"because I feel they don't have authority over me"
"because I don't think they will follow through [with consequences]"
"I fear repercussions"
"when it is demanded or unkind, or disrepectful"
"when I think someone is right and wouldn't lead me into something wrong"
"they are older than me"
"I don't respect when someone acts as if they're better than us or if they don't demand any respect"
"It's hard to follow and respect someone who has no confidence or respect for themselves"
"Sometimes I don't obey my parents—but only when I know they are 100% wrong"

Where do you find your own authority?

"I find authority within myself" [several students began their responses within this idea]
"I find authority in the things I do well"
"I don't find it—it's kind of always there"
"where I teach pre-school"
"within my own friends, because they give it to me"
"in my room"
"Inside me—I make choices that benefit me"
"when I'm looking after young children, babysitting"
"when people need advice" "looking at what others (in authority) have done"

What rules do you impose upon yourself?

"I must always do my best"
"I must obey the rules that God set up for us"

"stay on task and not be disrespectful"
"watch what I do and ask myself first—will this get me in trouble?"
[several responses included exercising, sleeping enough, eating healthy, following/setting my own goals, getting good grades, doing homework, not doing drugs, not drinking]

How do you see YOURSELF in this play?

[note: answers to this question varied from naming a character to giving some general principle]
I see myself in the play . . .
"during the situations that Romeo and Juliet go through"
"but I would never let my friends get hurt or get into any trouble"
"I am bound in my house by my parents' wishes, like Juliet"
"because of impulsive decisions—I have found how quick I can make stupid decisions"
"I'm a little bit like a lot of characters in this play—sometimes keep the peace—sometimes want to fight"
"but I wouldn't be the spotlight, I'd be off on the sides helping"

I see myself as _____ because:

Romeo: romantic, gets crushes, sometimes loses out on love, he has no control over anything
Juliet: not always in control of her life, finds love, loses love, falls too hard/too fast for love, innocent, a little girl, thinks about "the one" all day long
Nurse: has to follow orders, is a peacemaker, cares about others' lives
Mercutio: always talking, loves to have fun and make jokes, exaggerates
Tybalt: is bad, too tough to deal with, doesn't take anything from anyone his age, quick to action
Benvolio: peacemaker, helps others and mediates

between arguments, compromises, calm
Prince: has the ultimate authority
L. Montague: wants to make peace for her son
F. Lawrence: tries to bring peace to his friends, is quick to take up a challenge
Citizen: "I don't get involved in other people's problems"
Best friend: "cause one of my friends falls in love really easy and I always have to stand up for her"
"I have friends like Romeo and I'm always there for them—help to forget about crushes"
Bystander: [several students responded with these ideas: as if I am watching/reading the play, or standing in the streets or at the party watching the characters go through the actions that they talk about in the play]

Has how you see yourself in the play changed? Examples of students who answered "Yes":

"I now know more about the play—I was ignorant before, but am not as ignorant now"
"I just read the play at first—now I can draw insight into human ways and personalities"
"I felt a lot less connected to the story and found the language and antics difficult to understand, but as the play progressed, I got more into it and was able to compare myself to the characters."
[many students who answered YES talked about the language, how as they got through the play they got more and more into it, they became different characters as the play progressed—thought they were a Romeo, but found later that they were actually more like Benvolio or Mercutio]

Has how you see yourself in the play changed? Examples of students who answered "No":

"I really don't see myself in the play—I wouldn't have done well in that time period—women didn't have many rights—I like my freedom too much"

"I was not able to connect on a deeper level with any of the characters"
". . . and I am not a fool for love"
"I used to think that me and my boyfriend were like Romeo and Juliet, but we are nothing like that at all"
"Me personally no—Juliet seems to stay the same too, and gets what she wants—to be with Romeo"
[students who answered NO either saw themselves as Romeo or Juliet (or other characters/bystanders) and it continued that way throughout the play.

Notes

1. Ruth Kinney, Lou Worsley, and KyleAnn Christian teach ninth grade English at Irondale High School. Hall is lucky to have peers that believe enough in camaraderie—and respect and trust him enough to let Hall and Dyer "commandeer" their classes for two days. We could not have done any of this without their cooperation and support. We thank them mightily.

2. Please see the Appendix for student responses to the actual writing prompts we used.

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Teachers: The Ruby Slippers

Peter Henry

Unwittingly and en masse, the lot of teaching in America has arrived at its Dorothy moment. The great authority Oz (the Federal Government) has given us an important charge (increase test scores). We have battled the wicked witch (the achievement gap) and returned with her broomstick anticipating a great reward. Unfortunately, we soon discover the fakery involved in Oz's authority over our local schools' mission and the false hope it has generated. But we don't despair because we have come face-to-face with a profound truth: achieving excellence in education—culturing a brain, swelling a heart, instilling courage, or just plain getting a student home—was always about the shoes. Or, at least, the people that fill them. And, especially, that the real power of transformation was within our grasp all along.

In point of fact, despite calls for reform from right and left, wonkery and grandstanding in Washington, and research studies of every stripe and flavor, there is one truth with which everyone agrees: the number one factor governing educational achievement by students is the quality of teacher in the classroom. That is why NCLB requires "highly qualified" teachers in every subject, at every school. It is also why individual States experiment with incentive pay, job-embedded in-service, and ways to make teaching a more…well… "professional" profession—with increased responsibility, longer school years, and a

more appealing career ladder. Minnesota educators understand this: the governor, along with the legislature and school districts, developed Q-Comp in 2005, a ground-breaking merit-pay proposal that is already in effect in a handful of districts.

So, inevitably, despite the raucous hue and cry, we gravitate back to a single question without an answer to which no real progress will ever be made in education: *What makes a teacher effective as a professional?*

This article will propose, in a kind of Dorothian way, that it is precisely the personal element in teaching which yields the best results. That, in fact, looking elsewhere or giving authority away when the answer lies within is a prescription for chasing fool's gold. And further, that in training, developing and coaching young educators, maximum attention must be paid to building their personal sense of mission, fortifying their unique strengths and giving them the kind of support, latitude and experiences that most develop their human potential. In short, we need to conceive of teaching the same way we should be conceiving of learning for students: as a process of fully developing unique abilities, assets and potential in individuals, then trusting that "whole" person to respond in original and dynamic ways to challenges confronted in the larger world.

I. Giving Schools The Business

For decades, most professions have sought to diminish or even eliminate shadings of personal identity, flavor or sentiment in employees. This is the logical extension of the "business model" where, by dint of training, efficiency and market forces, only ruthlessly lean and mean organizations deliver cost-effective services and products to customers. Little weight or time is given to personality, creativity or ideas. The job is to do the job, not hob-nob or revel in the task, and, thus, effectiveness is measured tangibly: costs, sales, production efficiency, resource inputs, etc.

Interestingly, since the landmark report *A Nation At Risk* (1983), business-leaders and politicians have wanted to bring a kind of business ethos to the task of public education. Thus, the efficiency of schools and their bureaucracies was held up for criticism; methods, curriculum and, especially the "product" (i.e. the

students) were called into question. Many still argue that what is needed is to adopt the business model in education: control every step in the production process until the end result measures up—and, if not, start over, eliminate problems, get the job done right.

As rational and well-intentioned as this may sound, it is, for lack of a more nuanced term, wrong. Terribly wrong. It should be, by now, cliché to point out that students are not products, test scores are not end-points of learning, and schools will not be whipped into shape by tougher managers, strict control, or the organized fomenting of public panic.

And, in any case, the question of excellence is always about a teacher in the room, the students, and what makes him or her effective. This has nothing to do with the business-model, as private schools, like their public counterparts, face the same critical challenge every day and have not fared much better—once adjusting for their decisive advantages in clientele, resources and self-chosen mission.[1]

It is my thesis that, at this historic moment, we need, more than ever, to put our faith in the humanity of the teaching/learning experience—what you might call our Ruby Slippers. For three critical reasons, we need to see education, unlike a business operation, as a process that is open-ended, highly personal and dependent upon relationship within a team or community. In the end, the true "business" of education is not to serve business, but to serve the spiritual, developmental and meaning-making needs of the people within it. And, counter-intuitively enough, if we do that, young people will be better prepared for the rapidly changing and highly competitive economy of the 21st century than if we continue with endless testing and intrusive mandates that make education unappealing, even unlikable, for student and teacher alike.

II. What is personal is indispensable

> *Authority is granted to people who are perceived as authoring their own words, their own actions, their own lives, rather than playing a scripted role at great remove from their own hearts. When teachers depend on*

> *the coercive powers of law or technique, they have no authority at all.* (Palmer 33)

The first law of teaching is to earn respect from students. This can be accomplished variously, though subject mastery, verbal command and force of reputation seem most common. In any case, it is true, as Parker Palmer suggests, that lasting authority is not won by repairing to standard lines or institutional rules, but by a kind of personal comfort with leading a class forward into ideas, discussion and experience—and being trusted to do so in a unique and fruitful way.

Paradoxically, the truth is, virtually every specific fact, reading and lesson elicited by a teacher will be forgotten by students over time, and in most cases within weeks. Thus, content mastery accumulated by a teacher, while impressive and effective in the moment, does not form, in and of itself, the bulk of what a student "gets" from that teacher. In fact, what students value and remember most about effective teachers is much more relational and implicit, rather than isolated, discreet or explicit. And more, cached within that relational and implicit radiance are the very striking and unique personal qualities of the teacher.

When I reflect upon those teachers who became instrumental to me as mentors, it is almost exclusively their unique personal qualities that stand out. Mr. Burns was a strapping Scotsman and historian who loved to laugh and lampoon remote characters and situations from American history. Nothing was too sacrosanct to escape his rapier wit and rapacious sweep of understanding. Long, wispy strands of orangish hair rolled off the back of his balding dome, making him seem a jocular gnome. Ms. Ayers was an aged but well-read and highly intellectual spinster whose quixotic and well-lined face reminded me of a mime. She quizzed herself as much as anyone wrestling with the high modern era of Woolf, Joyce, Conrad, Mann, et al. Each inspired through their devotion and integrity for finding rich and rewarding material, areas where they could delineate shades of meaning or locate a kind of sweet intimacy of knowing. I perceived little of this at the time, but now realize how crucial they were in forging a template which eventually proved invaluable to me for teaching.

So it is that the most salient aspect of teaching is also the least contrived: the individual character of the teacher. It is precisely this that strikes the student as being so original and specific to their life-experience that it is treasured, sealed up in a vase of memory and serves as a kind of Ur-text on how to proceed when alone in the field of human inquiry. None of this can be devised, faked or created. A good teacher brings wholeness in all its natural beauty to the job of teaching and is never afraid to reveal it to others.

> *The challenge of teaching is to decide who you want to be as a teacher, what you care about and what you value, and how you will conduct yourself in classrooms with students. It is to name yourself as a teacher, knowing that institutional realities will only enable that goal in part (if at all) and that the rest is up to you.* (Ayers 23)

Uniqueness, even to the point of personal embellishment, is vital to teaching because the implicit and fundamental theme of education is about finding your own way of doing things: fully realizing the potential that is yours and yours alone.

III. Above all, a sense of passion

> *We can, and do, make education an exclusively outward enterprise, forcing students to memorize and repeat facts without ever appealing to their inner truth—and we get predictable results: many students never want to read a challenging book or think a creative thought once they get out of school. The kind of teaching that transforms people does not happen if the student's inner world is ignored.* (Palmer 31)

There is no higher end for learning than taking a particular pursuit to the level of excellence: one that is well informed, scrupulously detailed and rigorously open to truth. Being "caught" by intricacy and aesthetics of a subject results in pushing forward and developing new possibilities, whether they end as economic, intellectual or spiritual events. This is the ultimate goal of learning, the finish line which seems so

distant when students set off from their marks in Kindergarten.

How does it happen? Inspiration. Wonder. Curiosity. The exact things which are extant in the young child are crucial to the brilliant scholar. As highly educated as we become, the natural and inherent qualities of humanness are our primary sources of motivation and satisfaction. Undergirding this is a deep, abiding pool of passion—the place we go, like no other, that offers us energy, meaning and fulfillment.

It is a truism to assert that passion is highly personal. In education, what makes for one student's trash is inevitably another's treasure. The richer and more important question is: How do we ignite passion in young people? And here, once again, the touchstone is a teacher's personal character, vision and determination. When a teacher communicates a sense of passion, their love of beauty or reverence for a topic or field, it poses a challenge to the student to look at that material deeply for themselves. Do they see something similar? Is it true about Da Vinci's drawings or the structure of the human vertebrae?

> *Passion for the subject, throws that subject, not the teacher, into the center of the learning circle—and when a great thing is in their midst, students have direct access to the energy of learning and of life*. (Palmer 120)

Humans are meaning-makers. We feed on personal connections we feel for the objects of our affection. When in the throes of passionate pursuit, time stands still, as well as necessities like food or sleep. We become Einstein on the train, lost in contemplation, his wife's oversized note pinned to him informing the conductor of his destination. Probably each of the world's great accomplishments in science, art, math and religion were realized by a passionate—and personal—connection between someone and their object of delight. There is not one way to do this; pathways are multiple and open to unique approach.

The same is true of teaching. It is by authentic, specific and concrete originality that a teacher attracts interest in students. Faking it, going through motions or imitating others won't get it done. And neither will reading a script, a la Edison schools, or telling stu-

dents that they need to learn something because it's on the exam:

> *The child who wants to know something remembers it and uses it once he has it; the child who learns something to please or appease someone else forgets it when the need for pleasing or the danger of not appeasing is past.* (Holt 289)

In a competitive, abundant and disposable world economy, only excellence is indispensable. This is one asset that is in constant demand. Thus, the job of teaching, more than ever, is to inspire learners to tap deep-seated passion so that they desire learning for its own sake and pursue excellence with vigor and abandon. It is always and only when the fuse is lit that the learner does for herself far more than we could imagine. In a sense, this makes teaching a lot simpler, though in no sense does it make it any easier: inspire a student's personal passion, then simply get out of the way.

IV. Join Us, Won't You?

Objectivity makes us far more vulnerable emotionally than compassion or a simple humanity. Objectivity separates us from the life around us and within us….Physicians [and teachers] pay a terrible personal price for their hard-won objectivity. Objectivity is not whole. In the objective stance no one can draw on their own human strengths, no one can cry, or accept comfort, or find meaning, or pray…Life is the ultimate teacher, but it is usually through experience and not scientific research that we discover its deepest lessons (Remen 78-80).

I once heard an educator list the three most important aspects of teaching: 1.) relationship; 2.) relationship; 3.) relationship. Despite the rest of this article's high-minded rhetoric, nothing trumps the reality that good teaching is dependent upon good relationships—and that they, in turn, are dependent upon personal qualities in the teacher. This does not mean that a teacher is 'best friend' to students or that relations require high-degrees of intimacy or personal sharing. It means that there must be trust running both ways, and that it be clear the teacher has a *personal* interest in a student's success—not just in school but in life itself.

Young people are in great need of quality relationships, whatever their situation at home—and today, more than ever, home-life is a crap-shoot. Relationships are the one consistent and effective antidote to each of the maladies afflicting young people: reducing pregnancy rates, truancy, substance abuse, suicides and promoting pro-social behaviors like extra-curricular activities, work, community involvement and even higher academic achievement. In fact, researchers have found that having a teacher who cares about them, or just an environment of high expectations, yields improved academic performance and fewer anti-social behaviors among teens.[2] The benefits that flow from relationships—and not just between teachers and students but among students especially—are tangible and hugely beneficial.

Teachers stand at a unique crossroads. On the one hand they are public representatives of an important social institution and the entire concatenation of influence which that affords. On the other, they represent a uniquely personal guide who may be profoundly significant to any given student. It is a complex position to occupy—one that is fraught with dangers of caring too much or too little, of being too tough or too kind, of pushing too hard or too soft. And, as the Rachel Naomi Remen quote makes clear above, there is a personal hazard for instructors: walling themselves in a cocoon of objectivity, a kind of hermetic professionalism, that, in the end, limits human connection and extracts a profound personal price.

Teaching needs to be about creating a nexus of relationships for young people. How the class is structured and run either promotes or limits the students' ability to meet, share and connect with peers. Moreover, how the teacher interacts, prods, pushes, holds back and generally navigates personal exchanges is a tremendous source of modeling, skillful or unskillful, for youngsters. From methods to feelings to means of expression, the roots of effective relationships are personal and emerge from the individual character of the instructor.

Like many things, there is not an absolute right or wrong way to do this. There are unique and personally effective ways, as well as well-intentioned (hopefully) approaches

that fail. Attempts to identify beneficial behaviors and response patterns—which I think are tremendously valuable—would necessitate a much longer treatment. Nonetheless, as a child of a large family, and someone who has stumbled to a certain level of effectiveness, I want to highlight three things.

First, the importance of listening. For a young person, to be heard is to be valued; to be unheard is the same as being value-less. There is tremendous healing, growth and transformation that happens in allowing each youngster to exit their shell and share a piece of identity, with adult or peer. Making sure that every student has a chance—and at times, is required to share—is more fundamental to teaching and learning than any activity I can think of. And when students do share, voluntarily or involuntarily, it needs to be clear that people are listening, that genuine "care" exists for that student:

> *Listening is the oldest and perhaps the most powerful tool. It is often through the quality of our listening and not the wisdom of our words that we are able to effect the most profound changes in the people around us. When we listen, we offer with our attention an opportunity for wholeness. Our listening creates sanctuary for the homeless parts within the other person. That which has been denied, unloved, devalued by themselves and by others….In this culture, the soul and the heart too often go homeless.* (Remen 219-220)

Second, the truly crucial thing in responding to students is to come from a place of authenticity and genuine concern, not as a representative of an institution. This is the basis of a true relationship with students, the way they gauge whether they are worth caring about or not. Young people are unaccustomed to the world of adults, to closing down feelings or ignoring needs in others to complete a task. More than anything, youngsters at school are seeking what it is to be a full person—intellectually, emotionally, spiritually—and how to do it in a way that allows for individual identity. Their connection and relationships with

adults, and especially teachers, alert them to boundaries and the realities of human interaction while simultaneously promoting their sense of being valued for who they are. This implicit acceptance, already discussed above, provides a kind of loving halo that promotes personal growth and integrated development.

Third, as much as anything, promoting relationships is about creating a larger sense of team or community. Students are able to bond more completely when they share a sense of purpose or belonging. That's why team sports, activity groups and school organizations are crucial to a school's identity and spirit. In fact, there is a strong inclination in all people to belong to something larger than themselves—a family, a community, a church or political organization. Why schools and teachers ignore or devalue this is one of the epic mistakes in public education, and the exact reason why the "small school movement" is winning hearts and minds, parents and educators alike. Small is beautiful because it allows for common goals and identity.

In my courses, I use cooperative groups to build this sense of purpose and togetherness. To me, it seems effortless and common-place that students share in significant ways with peers they barely know, or that discussions blast through walls of superficiality and convention to genuine risk-taking. It can be done, but only with real trust in the equanimity of the teacher and the overall ethos established in the room. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that important relationships happen more frequently and bonding occurs more completely if there is an understanding that the whole is greater than its sum of parts. In a way, that is as much a part of the job of teaching as anything: creating safe harbor and common cause from a random cross-section of local humanity.

There's No Place Like Home

The trajectory of recent American history suggests that more than ever economic, and particularly corporate, values and concerns have come to predominate. As a reflection of the larger society, schools too appear to be taking on the premises of modern economics: measuring inputs against outputs and weighing the worth of investment versus return. At times, this seems like

a particularly frightening social development, one not unlike that depicted in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* or George Orwell's *1984*. We are literally talking about the worth of human beings to our society, and how much to spend so that they might be happy, fulfilling and healthy. In an important new book, *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink describes a looming and profound change in economic eras he believes is about to sweep the industrialized world. Namely, that left-brained linear functions, such as those favored on standardized tests, will no longer be the basis of economic vitality because such functions are merely routine and easily executed by low-paid employees abroad. Rather, it is the creative, aesthetic and fully integrated right-brain skill-set which will be the source of innovation and economic vitality in the future—principally because human beings will seek a return to meaning-making activities like narrative, play, spirituality and design. If Pink is right, and I believe that he is, what becomes essential in educating young people is that they learn to think, feel and create for themselves—that they come to believe in their uniqueness, the power of collaboration, and the importance of integrating life around a vision that is both purposeful and fulfilling. That happens most readily in a classroom where the teacher exhibits wholeness of their own character, the joy, passion and play derived from being hard at work helping others find a way. Nothing is more contingent or personal.

We live at a momentous time, one that is fraught with peril as much as possibility. While the American public demands "accountability" from schools and a very narrow level of proficiency, educators must remain alert to the larger and more lasting needs of those in our care—what are, first and foremost, human beings. To acquiesce to the premise that all will be fine if only test scores improve is to indulge in the fantasy that the great Wizard will solve all our problems. And to pass on to students the sense that education—like life—is a bland and heartless accumulation of what other people tell you to do is to turn our back on Dorothy's epic discovery and what each of us understands reflexively: namely, that the power of transformation lies within us, and that its awakening is the one great purpose of education.

Notes

1.http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2006461.asp, The Nation's Report Card, National Assessment of Educational Progress, *Comparing Private and Public Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling*, authors Henry Braun, Frank Jenkins and Wendy Grigg, July 2006.

2.http://www-news.uchicago.edu/releases/05/051018.voisin.shtml, *Teacher Concern Associated With Reduced Anti-social Behavior Among Troubled Teens,* Dexter Voisin, October 30th, 2005. http://www.mdrc.org/publications/419/overview.html, *Student Context, Student Attitudes and Behavior, and Academic Achievement: An Exploratory Analysis*, Theresa M. Akey, January 2006.

Annotated Bibliography

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A stunning, brilliant peek into the mind of a celebrated and gifted teacher of young children. Gatto's essays remind us that what we don't know can often be our undoing—and that, in most cases, running America's schools like factories and prisons ends up reinforcing the exact negative outcomes in kids we are attempting to avoid.

Ayers, Williams. *To Teach: The Journey of a Teacher*. New York: Teacher's College Press, 2001.

The accumulated wisdom of an educator whose life included involvement in the original Weather Underground. Bill Ayers has been in education for the last 30-plus years, working with young people in a variety of professional settings. In this wide-ranging book, Ayers produces a clear and honest appraisal of the role of a teacher, the obstacles in our path, and the best approach-

es he has found for engaging the body, mind and spirit of those in our charge.

Holt, John. *How Children Fail*. Cambridge: Perseus Publishing Group, 1982.

Originally published in 1964, Holt's journals go all the way back to the late 1950's, when the author and his colleague, Bill Hull, were first describing the reasons why young children failed in school. Their ground-breaking conclusion: *the system was failing our children* by not engaging their essential meaning needs as human beings. A must read for educators who think they are alone or unique in resisting today's high-stakes testing environment.

Palmer, Parker. *The Courage To Teach*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998.

Palmer, a Quaker and long-time sociologist at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, provides a penetrating self-reflection on the inner world of a teacher: his doubts, triumphs, longings and failures. Painfully honest, incisively reasoned, incredibly rich, almost no one who teaches can read this book and not be changed by Palmer's sheer humanity. Now the center-piece of an initiative by the Fetzer Institute of Michigan, Palmer has become a principal figure in the drive to humanize, personalize and energize America's teaching corps.

Pink, Daniel. *A Whole New Mind*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2005.

A bombshell big-concept book whose thesis is that the old information economy is in eclipse, and that what will replace it is much more favorable to the right brain attributes of collaboration, harmony, aesthetics and personal

fulfillment. Anecdotal but nonetheless compelling, Pink, who accurately predicted the rise of independent contracting over the last 15 years in his book *Free Agent Nation*, produces a visionary scenario which has an infinity of implications for how we educate young people.

Remen, Rachel Naomi. *Kitchen Table Wisdom*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1996.

Remen, a physician, counselor and educator, offers a pioneering glimpse into the emerging field of end-of-life care. By producing brief but touching portraits about the people she has worked with, Remen points the way to an ethic of caring and wholeness in handling death and disease. Overcoming a near-fatal illness herself at a young age, her unique perspective is helping to reshape a profession that is often cold and unfeeling, and has unlimited potential for helping educators face a similar challenge in working with young people.

The Magic In Between

Mary Godwin

The pace and protocol of "ivory tower" academic life can often blur remembrance and distort the value attributed to bits of life sometimes called "small." Small bits come packaged *in between* one thing and another – just-for-now preparations made anticipating a tomorrow I hope to occupy. Adjunct teaching can be seen as "small" in such a light and might consequently be devalued or dismissed as no more than a vehicle for getting from one place to another. A third-year doctoral student, I can claim more than five years employment experience in variously funded contingent positions: adjunct hires, teaching assistantships, research, and supervisory assignments. What I find to be true: As rewards increase for upwardly aspiring professional development, the right-now productive potential of classroom teaching/learning can be overlooked and the possibility for realizing the magic *in between* can be lost. I equip myself against such loss by recalling one particularly dynamic semester of teaching and being reminded again therein of the difference realized on both sides of a teacher's podium when discovered learning is as prized as predetermined outcomes. I was first helped to remember through an unexpected interruption on a fine summer night.

That June day of summer break was already drifting into a northern Minnesota evening perfect for tennis—new lights having been recently installed at outdoor courts alongside the

local high school. Two years had passed since I'd left home to continue graduate studies at Purdue University, and summer's days of leisure were now held as treasured times for me. I love playing tennis, though like others of my family on the courts that evening, I found more pleasure than precision in friendly competition. It would be fair to call me a "born teacher" type, and I was just then instructing my daughter-in-law on the subtleties of a forehand groundstroke when, from across the span of a six-court complex, I heard my name being insistently and enthusiastically shouted: "MARY! Is that YOU? It IS you, isn't it?! Mary!"

I didn't recognize the speaker, and the situation offered no indication of identity, so I only cautiously waved a friendly affirmation, acknowledging with a lift of my chin and a smile the speaker's confident remembrance of some connection with me. I returned to the instruction from which I'd been distracted, and with repeated certainty the speaker shouted once again, "It IS you! Mary! Come over. Can you come over? My friends want to meet you." Pushed by the nearly palpable attention of players occupying adjacent courts, I surrendered to the summons wrapped with excitement, excused myself from family, and crossed over to find … Samantha, very much a woman now yet every bit as passionate for life as she had been when still a first-year student enrolled at Northwest Technical College two years before. In her eager remembrance that night, I learned to revalue the teaching I had once done at NTC and to realize a magical potential in shared firsts and celebrated in-betweens.

Those two years before, I had arrived ten minutes to the hour feeling under-prepared, over-dressed, and obviously nervous about being a first-time adjunct instructor. The industrial clock high on the *back* wall and an alienated table standing solo at the front of the room denoted teacher from students, and I several times divided and restacked piles of handouts on the table while I watched ten minutes go by. The novelty of "new teacher" held no more than a moment of student attention before individual anxieties/excitement restored a classroom buzz. Even at 8:00 a.m. most students were early for a first day at Northwest Tech, and, before directions could be given, had intuitively or-

dered seating arrangements along customary lines: mechanics – all males – to the back; hygienists – all females – to the front. Sharon and Sue claimed senior status by virtue of age and comfortably commanded front row center. Justin was contentedly asleep in row five – far right, and at one minute to the hour, Kurt, Jeremy, and Travis shuffled match-step past me to a trio of seats in the back row, seeming to argue as they did that mechanics work better in threes. And then there was Samantha – third row, two seats in from the left, engrossed in conversation with Stacy until the very moment I began a brief introduction to get the semester underway. "Hello. My name is Mary" – dutifully writing in big letters on the board, "and this class is Applied Communications, so if …" I had not reached the end of my sentence before Samantha's question jumped into the air: "Do we get to call you *Mary*?" An uncomfortable pause made it clear I understood the cue, and a confirming hush in the room provoked even Justin to wake up for the answer. Though prevailing patterns directed the use of my surname, I'd never been handy with a pretense of authority, so I answered from the ease of habit: "'Mary' works for me." Obviously thrilled with my answer, Samantha then and there dedicated herself to the liberal use of my first name. Justin went back to sleep. And that was only the beginning.

Samantha was one of eighteen students enrolled in Applied Communications, an entry-level, business related composition and speech class required of students pursuing associates degrees as dental assistants and automotive mechanics. My semester teaching these students was to be an adventure of *firsts* all around, discovery that would be in turns challenging, constructive, disappointing, and at last decisive. In what was sometimes no more than a collective act of desperation, we would chip away the granite walls of convention to overturn expectations, finding a labyrinth of possibilities where only a single channel of expression had been thought to be. There is an odd sort of freedom born at the convergence of seeming disorder and the absence of any reliable guide for what is *right* – therein can be found a fascinatingly productive liberty.

The magic of *firsts* underwrites the power of a produc-

tive "in-between" particular to the adjunct teaching experience, a bonanza of discovery for novice instructors not entirely unlike those new beginnings familiar to students receiving first instruction. Indulge my intention here, if you will, and understand my discussion as limited to first experiences of adjunct teaching. Do not suppose me to condone long-term contingent contracting or the sometimes institutional misuse of part-time employees; rather, I want to highlight here what I believe a wonderfully productive outcome common to adjunct instruction. I aim to draw attention to and value the excitement that can take place in classrooms where an instructor, herself passing through in-betweens, works together with students to combine the forces of possibility in unexpectedly meaningful ways.

When I speak of *in-between*s, I mean to name a kind of *third space* anchored on either side by what might be regarded simply as the known: one side an occupied location defined by unquestionably familiar aspects of life and the other a (somewhere) destination imagined to be known – that goal, aspiration, or purpose believed apparent when within reach of anticipation, comfortably certain for being so often rehearsed. Between these two *known* locations of perceived stability lies a place of crossing-over, a passage where anything can happen and nothing is beyond question save the noise and movement of emergent possibility. The adjunct instructor alike with first-year, post-secondary students will foot this bridge which, for all its trepidacious swing, issues forth the thrill of a lifetime in opportunities for the creative production of person, what Michel Foucault regards a formation of ethics in relationship with oneself. The combined adventure of common crossings for teacher and student, the shared provocation for invention, and the unimagined excitement to be found in discovered lines of disjunctive flight can culminate for these players in a flow able to generate new subjectivities, a possibility for becoming that reaches beyond anticipation to celebrate the unknown. The great value of adjunct instruction is shared bridges, liberating firsts, and the common ground of in-betweens.

Pat Speckman had been both fellow student and friend in several of the graduate courses I'd taken to complete my M.A. in

English at Bemidji State University. She was also a department chair at Northwest Technical College, so, when the unexpected need for an adjunct instructor arose in her department, Pat asked if I'd be willing to fill the position. The opportunity was a first for me, and though a twenty-year veteran teacher of high school English, I was wonderfully nervous accepting the offer. All the mystique of *teaching college* informed my expectation; I was making my way into "the big game" now. Like most of my students, I stood at the threshold of unknowns. Master's degree at last in hand, I'd been encouraged then to apply for doctoral study and faced the work of tests to take, letters to write, and papers to gather just as the semester was opening for my first semester of adjunct teaching. I imagined only an outline of what acceptance to ongoing study might mean, though I guessed it would change my world in ways I could not begin to suppose. Was it not the same for Sharon, Samantha, Justin, and Jeremy? Could not beginnings common to teacher and students alike be understood as shared anxiety, anticipation encountering new places in learning? Many of my students that semester would be the first in their families to complete a college degree: the pride with which they carried themselves was evident. My own family, too, celebrated an adjunct hire as the *first* rewarding answer to a commanding completion of Master's study – new legs under a fresh born career. I was nervous; so were most of my students, though evidence of apprehension was as varied as the students themselves. None of us knew exactly how this passage was supposed to play out. So…

We opened it up a bit: You can do that when the lines between here and there are moving. We affected new seating arrangements by experimenting with directionality in the classroom: when the "front" was moved to the back, mechanics were in the front row for the first time ever – Sharon and Sue bore the displacement politely. Given a free hand in course development, I selected new texts and designed instruction to more innovatively address course requirements. "Getting it right" mattered less than exploring new ways of getting it done, so we tackled the tough part first: public speaking. Students were encouraged to liberate the assignment, to select a venue for delivery that

made sense according to the topic and audience defined – though a minimum of two classmates had to be present and some connection to course materials had to be maintained. I heard speeches in auto shop, the library, a biology lab, and the local park; every student completed the task they had once regarded "an assignment from hell"! Students engaged online resources not so much for research as for support in productive networking – defining, contacting, and interacting with professionals already accomplished in their fields of study. James worked with a local photographer to develop promotional video materials for the area United Way. Austin exchanged email with a Ford engineer redesigning airbag deployment for F150 Pickups, and Kurt's interaction with a paintball supply dealer led to summer employment with a local paintball club. Students repeatedly found greater courage to realize themselves in new ways, to embrace identities believed validated by the notice of specialists willing to exchange correspondence or extend a respectful welcome.

Capstone projects for the course focused on group problem-solving skills and asked students to overcome roadblocks commonly confronting a developing business. One group faced an expansion of services while another solved for gender equality in workplace facilities. A third group planned a stockholders' banquet on a limited budget, and a fourth dealt with the sticky business of missing inventory. Real-world solutions had to be calculated against constraints of time, budgets, proofs, and supporting materials. Culminating presentations were configured with respect to rhetorical devices and groups addressed their proposals to remaining class members as to a board of governing regents. Of course the proposed menu for the stockholders' banquet was laid out in "samples" on a last day of class – treats all around. It was a good day, and the semester was over. I graded too generously, I suppose, but I didn't care. I was proud of my students: I was proud of me, and getting it right was so much less the point now than it had been in the beginning. From the liberty of a third space between what is known and what is hoped for, I had begun the adventure of becoming a great teacher and, in the process, opened a door or two for that handful of daring students willing

just then to explore prospects in *other* directions, other lines of flight, and the productive possibility of emergent moments. Most students bought a ticket to ride; some made it all the way through with their eyes wide open. It was a semester worth remembering.

An adjunct hire might be conventionally regarded "a foot in the door" for those seeking a career in post-secondary education. As a line item on a curriculum vita, adjunct instructing is good professional grooming as well as a modest (all too modest) source of income. And, of course, teaching experience is always a plus in positioning oneself for acceptance to ongoing graduate study. I received the benefit of all these things, but the real reward for a semester of teaching at Northwest Tech was in learning to embrace the productive forces of un-knowing and explore with every willing student those possibilities of just-then, otherly ways of doing/being – the what-ifs and maybes found in between and along the way.

When Samantha blew into my summer evening of tennis those several years ago, she built a memory for me, a reminder of the value "small" properly holds when rightly situated alongside the rush of Big Ten aspirations. Bits of life *in between* tend to keep moving—want to keep moving, and they reliably surprise us for where they are willing to go. The other day I dropped a deposit at the drive-through bank in town, and Stacy's mom, recognizing my name on the paperwork, interrupted the transaction to enthusiastically report Stacy's progress. She was managing a dental office now and doing very well for herself. Oh, and had I heard news from Samantha? "No," I answered with an interest to know more. Well, Sam, it seems, had gone on with her schooling and was now approaching the completion of undergraduate studies, though Stacy's mom didn't recall the degree focus. And it didn't matter. I celebrated Sam's accomplishment with the lift of my chin and a smile, appreciation for the value of next and always adventures born from magic in between, and I set myself in anticipation of any just-now possibility awaiting the coming semester. It's bound to be a great ride.

Multiple Intelligences Theory and the College English Classroom

Loli M. Dillon

Imagine walking into your first college English classroom. Instead of rows of desks facing the chalkboard, they are arranged in clusters of three to four. Each cluster is assigned labels: "Small Group Discussion," "Journaling," "Hands-on" etc. There's even a cluster that has a television and a VCR. Many teaching materials such as educational games, flash cards, and books are piled on the clusters as well. Upon further investigation, you notice a stack of large pillows in the corner of the classroom and assorted types of plants lined up on the window sills. Colorful displays and posters about English concepts adorn the wall, and a bookcase full of college English books occupies the corner opposite the pillows.

You are probably thinking that the above description hardly sounds like a college English classroom, and you are right. During classes, nearly all college students still experience an hour or two of pure lecture or discussion as the way they encounter course material in the college classroom. Though those teaching methods are effective, they may be only reaching a fraction of students who have much linguistic strength. Students' learning potentials are multifaceted and multidimensional; therefore instruction should be as well. This is the main reason why so many instructors of all different subjects at all different levels have turned to Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory.

For over twenty years, kindergarten through high school

instructors have recognized Gardner's MI theory as a key part of creating effective lesson plans, pedagogies and classroom environments. As Reichert noted in her article, "Using Multiple Intelligences to Create Better (Teachers of) Writers: A Guide to MI Theory for the Composition Teacher," college application of the theory, however, has continually been lacking at all subject levels and still is today. This could be in part due to lack of knowledge about the theory, and instructors tend to teach from their strengths. For these reasons, an explanation of the theory, application strategies and activities will be discussed. Much of the information within this article can be altered to include many age groups as well.

For my master's thesis, I applied MI theory into two sections of English 191, first-year composition. Students had no knowledge of the application. In order to gather whether or not I had effectively applied the theory, I obtained student feedback from four different sources. The two anonymous sources were from frequent note card feedbacks and surveys, and the two non-anonymous sources were from class blog entries and individual conversations during or out of class, usually occurring during individual conferences. Though two sources were not anonymous, the students' identities and names were kept confidential. The most frequent sources of feedback were on note cards at the end of class every two to three days. On the note cards, students were asked to answer the constant question, "Which activities helped you learn the most today or in the last two class meetings?"

Another way I collected feedback occurred during individual conferences. I chose certain aspects of writing or course material that the student needed to improve on; then I used either questions or prior knowledge and observation of the students' intellectual strengths to find pedagogical methods of helping the student grasp the material. If the student did not seem to understand a particular method, then I found another way to present the concept. In this way, I individualized students' education as their strongest or preferred routes to learning were discovered.

Finally, students filled out anonymous surveys based on all the activities that transpired during class. The surveys assisted in determining not only if an all-intelligence inclusive

pedagogy was successfully accomplished, but also if the inclusion of all the intelligences facilitated their learning more than other intelligence exclusive college pedagogical approaches.

Background of Multiple Intelligences Theory

Howard Gardner and his colleagues at Harvard created a multidimensional view of intelligence. By studying the effects of brain-damaged individuals, savants, prodigies, the learning disabled, and the autistic, Gardner developed criteria to determine the existence or nonexistence of an intelligence. Thus, Gardner has concluded that there are eight tentative intelligences: linguistic, mathematical-logical, spatial, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and bodily kinesthetic.

Gardner's pluralistic view is in contrast to the prevalent view of intelligence—the unitarial approach—that believes that a person's intelligence can be determined through an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test. Evidence of this predominance is the continuation of the ACT and SAT tests that can determine whether or not a student can get into a particular college. Gardner believes those aforementioned tests only test two of the eight intelligences—linguistic and logical-mathematical—the most commonly utilized intelligences in instruction. Though the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences are important in our Western culture, Gardner insists that no intelligence is better than another. All individuals who have not had brain damage or have some other condition that affects their brain have all eight intelligences. Therefore, MI theory is not meant to pigeonhole students into categories such as "bodily-kinesthetic," or "logical-mathematical." Any individual can develop any intelligence to a reasonably high level with particular environments, stimulation and encouragement (Gardner, *Frames of Mind* 35).

For better understanding of these eight intelligences, descriptions are provided below. Again, the linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences are among the most widely incorporated into the classroom. The linguistic intelligence involves aptitude with the oral and written workings of language. According to Gardner, any individual could exhibit sensitivity and strength in all or some of the following linguistic abili-

ties: word meanings, word order, word sounds, and language function (*Frames of Mind* 77-98). Such a person, as Kagan and Kagan describe, is "Word Smart." Individuals with highly developed linguistic intelligence may be a poet or a novelist. The logical-mathematical intelligence involves ability to "…analyze problems, logically, carry out mathematical operations, and investigate issues scientifically" (Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed* 42). Kagan and Kagan describe this intelligence simply as "Math Smart." Accountants and statisticians have many strengths in their mathematical-logical intelligence.

Gardner defines spatial intelligence as the "…potential to recognize and manipulate the patterns in wide space…. as well as the patterns of more confined areas" (*Intelligence Reframed* 42). An astronomer, interior decorator or an artist may have highly developed levels in their spatial intelligence. The next intelligence, musical, can be described as individuals having skills in the "…performance, composition, and appreciation of musical patterns" (Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed* 42). Not surprisingly, a composer or a music critic manifests high levels of functioning in this intelligence.

The interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences, though distinctly different, are termed the "personal intelligences" because their capacities involve humans. Interpersonal intelligence involves the ability to perceive other individuals. Politicians and salespeople have high levels of interpersonal functioning. The intrapersonal intelligence includes the capacity to know oneself and the skill to use that information to adapt (Gardner, *Frames of Mind* 239). Religious leaders and counselors tend to have much strength in the intrapersonal intelligence.

The naturalist intelligence can be described as the "… recognition and classification of the numerous species—the flora and fauna—of his or her environment" (Gardner, *Intelligence Reframed* 48). Farmers, hunters and cooks rely heavily on this intelligence. Finally, the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence is the "…potential of using one's whole body or parts of the body to solve problems or fashion products" (*Intelligence Reframed* 42). An athlete, sculptor or carpenter ex-

hibits many strengths in their bodily-kinesthetic intelligence.

Though the above descriptions are only a snapshot of each intelligence, the activities associated with these intelligences tell much more about their capacities.

MI Activities

Linguistic

The following activities mainly involve the linguistic intelligence. Armstrong proposes using worksheets, manuals, brainstorming, word games, sharing time, student speeches, storytelling, talking books and cassettes, extemporaneous speaking, debates, journal keeping, individualized reading, reading to the class, memorizing linguistic facts, tape recording one's works, publishing, and writing (*MI in the Classroom* 40). Campbell, Campbell, and Dickinson also suggest using all the activities listed above by Armstrong, but also list others such as teaching and expanding upon effective listening skills, interviewing others for knowledge, developing a classroom library, nurturing an appreciation for the process of writing, and including computer programs to learn linguistic concepts (6-26). More narrowly, to engage students' linguistic intelligence, Kagan and Kagan suggest an activity they term "Round Robin," which can be easily applied to college instruction. It entails having students share their written work with their peers for the purposes of either sharing or generating ideas or publishing their work (8.10).

Mathematical-logical

To include the mathematical-logical intelligence, Campbell, Campbell and Dickinson offer many great ideas such as diverse questioning strategies, posing open-ended problems, applying math to real world situations, and using concrete objects to demonstrate understanding (34). They also suggest using prediction and verifying logical outcomes, discerning patterns and connections in diverse phenomena, justifying or verifying statements or opinions, providing opportunities for observation and investigation, using technology to teach, learn, and extend student understanding, and connecting mathematical concepts to other subject matter areas (34). These approaches were in-

cluded in my pedagogy through the implementation of a class and personal blog, requirements for students to visit workshops and/or presentations that apply to class material with the purpose of students reflecting, and connecting and writing about the subject matter. Also, some of my students have created websites on which to publish their papers and/or class work.

In my classroom, I incorporated the mathematical-logical intelligences mainly by translating English terms into mathematical expressions, creating recipes to make certain English "dishes," and problem solving. For example, classical arrangement can be explained with math: introduction + background + proposition + proof + refutation = classical arrangement. Over 68% of students in the MI sections found the translation of English terms into mathematical ones beneficial to their learning. Recipes are also a great way of incorporating mathematical-intelligence into the English classroom. An example of a recipe for properly punctuating compound sentences might look like: ingredients: two independent clauses, one comma, one coordinating conjunction, and one semi colon (optional route). Process: remove period at the end of the first independent clause; replace with comma. After the comma, add one coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). Optional: you may combine the sentences only using a semicolon. Process: remove period at the end of the first independent clause. Place a semicolon in its place. More than 55% of students found recipes helpful to their learning. I've also incorporated problem solving in my pedagogy to include the mathematical-logical intelligence. I've given students worksheets and/or sample papers for practice in finding and discussing errors as well as praising areas; I've also given students a real or imagined societal problem and had them take sides and create a viable solution. Of all the students in class, 73% found problem solving beneficial to their learning in English 191.

Spatial

Many activities involve an individual's spatial intelligence. Instructors can employ the use of visual-spatial learning environment equipped with access to visual tools, intentional display areas, and changing perspectives through rotating seat-

ing (Campbell, Campbell, and Dickinson 96). I have tried the above suggestions with success; I've found that the creation of educational displays that address particular problem trends as well as informational displays about a particular author we'd be reading greatly helpful. I've exhibited these displays both in my classroom and desk space. Armstrong also suggests using charts, graphs, and diagrams, visualization, photography, videos/DVDs, slides, and movies, visual puzzles and mazes, art appreciation, imaginative storytelling, picture metaphors, creative daydreaming, idea sketching, visual thinking exercises, mind mapping, visual pattern seeking, optical illusions, and color cueing (*MI in the Classroom* 42). I've found color cueing particularly helpful to teach organization. In this activity, students assign a color to the thesis, supporting topic sentences and their supporting information. Each sentence is highlighted according to its topic. Students are directed to constantly ask themselves the question, "What is this sentence talking about?" (This helps in determining what topic the student is addressing). With color cueing, students easily see when they stray to another point. They can also better determine when to move/combine sentences or break topics into separate paragraphs.

Musical

To incorporate the musical intelligence, instructors can play mood and background music, linking tunes with class concepts, and giving students musical options for their projects or assignments (Armstrong, *MI in the Classroom* 42). Campbell, Campbell, Dickinson suggest that background and mood music helps set an engaging climate for students to work in, as well as providing supportive technology (145-46). Even having a portable compact disc player in class gives students options. The majority of students in my classes used the compact disc player when giving presentations. Students can also be encouraged to create music from class material as a project or to show they understand the material as an alternative. For example, one student in class decided to write a song in response to a reading instead of writing a poem. He even offered to share it with the class by performing it to a beat he created at home!

Interpersonal

To help students learn with and from others, instructors can incorporate cooperative groups, interpersonal interaction, conflict mediation, peer teaching, group brainstorming, peer sharing, community involvement, and parties or social gatherings as context for learning (Armstrong, *MI in the Classroom* 43). Approaches such as encouraging the development of social skills and service learning are also interpersonally grounded (Campbell, Campbell, Dickinson155), as well as interviewing for knowledge and finding individuals with like interests (Kagan, Kagan 8.52-8.56). To encourage interpersonal interaction in my classes, students often work in small groups that I assign. Later in the semester, students have become comfortable enough to choose their own groups. I also require a variety of research sources for students with a requirement to interview experts about their paper topics.

Intrapersonal

Instructors can include the intrapersonal intelligence through activities such as independent study, self-paced instruction, individualized projects and games, private spaces for study, one minute reflection periods, encouraging personal connections, options for assignments or projects, exposure to inspirational/motivational curricula, journal keeping, self-esteem activities, and goal setting (Armstrong, *MI in the Classroom* 43). Campbell, Campbell, and Dickinson also add the following activities for the inclusion of intrapersonal intelligence: compliment circles, individual acknowledgement, peer support, challenging students to learn, metacognition, and encouraging the identification and expression of feelings (188).

Naturalist

For those students in tune with nature, the inclusion of the following activities may help them learn English material by creating a naturalist inclusive atmosphere: nature walks, pet or plant in the classroom, and nature films (*MI in the Classroom* 43). In order to teach summary writing, I've played nature films, and because the naturalist intelligence is the most difficult to incorporate in the English classroom, film can be an excellent way

to engage those students who are naturalistically inclined. Armstrong also suggests using plants as props; this is where natural things or elements are used to explain course concepts, and it also invokes learning from observation from class windows (43). To incorporate the naturalist intelligence, Kagan and Kagan suggest using categorization of class concepts (8.48). Activities such as blindfolded walks (for the purpose of relying on different senses), inferring, theorizing, keeping field logs, noting distinctions among similar items, understanding interdependence, hypothesizing, and experimenting all engage with the naturalist intelligence as well (Campbell, Campbell, Dickinson 227-41). To incorporate these elements into pedagogy, I have students journal about upcoming assignments regularly, hypothesize about problems they believe they'll encounter and keep note cards about research sources not only to remind themselves what the source covers, but also to compare and contrast among research.

Bodily-kinesthetic

To include those students who have many strengths with "hands-on" material, instructors might try using creative movement, hands-on thinking, field trips, classroom theatre, competitive and cooperative games, use of kinesthetic imagery, tactile materials and experiences and using communicative body language (Armstrong, *MI in the Classroom* 42; Campbell, Campbell, Dickinson 66). Kagan and Kagan emphasize the bodily-kinesthetic game of charades to help students learn (8.5), while Campbell, Campbell and Dickinson highlight exercise breaks to help energize or calm down students (66). I've found versions of games such as Charades, Jeopardy, Family Feud, and Heads Up 7 Up to be useful tools. These games were particularly helpful for review or gauging if students understood difficult course material.

To apply the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, I have also often incorporated skits in my lesson planning. For example, when I want students to practice argumentation strategies, I have them imagine that they're an expert on a talk show representing a particular view on a topic. Then the students try to convince the audience (i.e. the rest of the class) as to why they should take their side. Afterward, a discussion ensues

about effective and non-effective argumentation techniques.

Students reported that the incorporation of games and skits into class material created high levels of learning, interest, and engagement. Most importantly, 95% of one section of students found that educational games facilitated their learning, and over 68% of students found skits beneficial to their learning. Overall, 86% of students felt that bodily-kinesthetic activities helped them learn course material.

College English Application

All the above activities are meant for the college English classroom, but with careful planning, they can be easily tailored for almost any age group. Below, I describe an example of how to include all eight intelligences into pedagogy. During a memoir writing unit, I would include all eight intelligences in my lesson plans over two to three 50-minute class meetings. (Gardner does not recommend including all eight intelligences in one class meeting). If the objective of my lesson was to teach students how to write concrete, realistic setting sketches for use in a memoir unit, I would take the students outdoors and have them write from their senses what they experience in front of them. An overwhelming 86% of students reported that writing in nature helped inspire writing and learning. This incorporates the naturalist and linguistic intelligences. Then I would have the students come inside, place them in groups of three to four, and have them share their setting sketches. Next, students would be expected to take the most concrete and realistic images or "best practices" from all of the sketches to write a collaborative "super sketch." The small group work and collaborative writing incorporate the interpersonal intelligence. Following the small group work, students would play an educational game to solidify concepts. Since students would be expected to write concretely about the settings in their memoirs, they need to be clear on what is considered abstract as well as concrete. The game would involve me calling out either a concrete and abstract word. (For abstract, I might call "beautiful"; for concrete I might call out "door.") After the word is called, one member from each of the two teams is responsible for running up to the chalkboard, and needs write "concrete" or

"abstract." The first person finished writing the correct answer gets a point for their team. Playing this sort of game involves students' bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as they use their bodies to communicate an answer. To make sure that students really get a feel for the subject, they would be given time to read and discuss samples of students' past papers that have hit expectations well. Students will be given specific questions involving the samples, particularly asking them what the student did well as well as what elements they could have improved on. While they read, discuss and answer questions, light classical music would be played. (Classical music was found to be the most effective genre of music since it was found the least distracting. A large majority of students—91%—thought background music helped them focus more than silence in class). Viewing the sample papers hits on spatial intelligence as students can better visualize what is expected; students then use their mathematical-logical intelligence as they problem solve the discussion questions, and musical intelligence is incorporated with the background music. Finally, students would be asked to journal about what they learned and also their plans for their memoir assignment, which consequently hits on their intrapersonal intelligence.

The above pedagogical application of MI theory is only one interpretation of many ways college instructors could incorporate the theory into their pedagogy. The following approaches are all intelligence inclusive. Armstrong suggests a station method he calls "MI Tables." Eight tables are placed around a classroom, with each table representing an intelligence. A note card at each table describes what intelligence specific activities students should participate in, and students rotate from one table to another (35). Yet another all intelligence-inclusive approach is the use of board games. Though board games might seem bodily-kinesthetic specific, Armstrong suggests having all intelligence-inclusive activities within a game. Students could draw cards that stand for various intelligence-specific activities that they must finish to make progress in the game (36). Lastly, workshopping is another pedagogical approach that is all intelligence friendly. Students are put in small, stationary

groups and work on activities and/or class work that engage all intelligences. Though students are working in or near groups of students, they can also work independently (Reichert 172).

Another effective method is called bridging. For example, Wendy Simeone, a high school English instructor, builds bridges from students' strengths in other intelligences to their linguistic intelligence through assorted activities (60). For example, to help students learn about character development and theme in her English classroom, Simeone builds bridges from her students' linguistic intelligence to their bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, and musical intelligences as she instructs them to "compose" their knowledge with a video camera instead of a writing utensil.

An additional approach has been named "re-presenting" by Reichert. Re-presenting does what its name indicates—presents similar information in the many different lenses that MI theory provides. As a short example, I might be teaching students about argumentative thesis statements. I give students a definition of what it is followed by examples. To make sure students understand the concept, I might re-present the definition as a mathematical problem, which would hit on their mathematical-logical intelligence. Subject + Position + Reasoning = Argumentative Thesis Statement. Though this mathematical problem may seem to limit students' creativity, in the *beginning* stages of learning concepts it has proven quite successful. Once students master what a thesis statement is, their own styles emerge.

Conclusion: What the Students Thought

The results of MI theory application were quite favorable. Students reported high levels of engagement, participation and retention of course material. Learning potentials were expanded as their experience with linguistic material was expanded to include their other ways of interpreting information. The perception of their learning environment was also positive; students thought the environment seemed more "natural" and "open" which in turn encouraged them to participate. Students reported that the environment felt more laid back, which led to quite positive reports. In describing the environment, one student wrote, "…everyone was relaxed and willing to talk and in-

teract." Similarly, one student communicated, "I loved the classroom environment. I felt very comfortable saying what I felt." Finally, one student described the environment as "relaxed," and that she or he "… felt like a person and not just another face."

Many students commented on their high level of engagement. One particular student wrote on an anonymous survey that "In English 191 she [Loli Dillon] didn't just lecture the whole time, which helped whereas in a lot of my other classes the teacher just does a lecture and that can get boring." When students were asked anonymously the question, "Was the way in which class material taught more beneficial to your learning than other classes you've had in college? Why or why not?," students highlighted the increased participation levels of themselves as well as their peers. One student iterated this well when he or she wrote, "I definitely think it was more involved a lot of the time." Finally, students reported high levels of retention. When comparing English 191 with other college classes, one student wrote, "The only thing I did was take notes like a zombie the whole time. To remember what was said in class, I had to refer back to my notes each and every time. With this class [English 191], I leave every day knowing what was talked about." Students also felt their education was more individualized and tailored to their specific learning needs. MI theory also helped create a strong sense of camaraderie and community. Finally, students found that their comprehension of material during class time was also greatly improved from other college classes they had encountered.

Applying MI theory to college English composition took more time, research, effort and creativity, but the overwhelmingly positive results showed me that there was a way not only to teach effectively, but create excitement for a required class. By creating a more intelligence-inclusive pedagogy, I discovered something unexpected—I could build bridges from my own intellectual and instructional strengths to my weaknesses and taught in ways that I never thought I could. Students reported that MI theory helped them learn, but what they didn't realize is how much I learned from them.

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Reader Response:
Learning from Teacher Research

Elizabeth Berg Leer

Like many adults across the United States, I grew up thinking that understanding literature meant figuring out the right answers to all of the boring study questions that were assigned for English homework. Because being a good student constituted a primary part of my identity in secondary school, I diligently jotted answers for most questions as I read along in the text (the questions usually followed the plot in order), but resorted to guessing when I got to the difficult but inevitable queries about theme and tone and conflict. Those answers weren't written explicitly in the text, and it was hard to figure out what the teacher was looking for. Regardless of what I came up with, I always hoped that the teacher would eventually reveal the "right" responses—which he or she almost always did. I would then scribble that knowledge in my notebook, memorize it, and get an A on the test. Unfortunately, this quest for correct answers continued throughout my undergraduate literature studies and even emerged at times in graduate school whenever I found myself in a seminar taught by a New Critic. Thus, stumbling on to theories of reader response was a liberating experience, in Appleman's (2000) words, "a friendly antidote to the tyranny of the text" (54).

Because reader-response theorists posit that each reader is actively and individually involved in the construction of meaning,[1] they question the New Critical view that if readers attend

closely enough to a text, they should come up with its "correct," intended meaning. Reader-response critics insist that because individuals bring different backgrounds, cognitive abilities, and reading experiences with them to a given text, one "correct" response to literature cannot exist. According to Louise Rosenblatt (1978), one of the earliest reader-response theorists, objective meaning cannot be found within a given text any more than it can be found exclusively within the reader of that text. Instead, Rosenblatt argues that meaning is derived, or, in her terms, a poem is evoked from the transaction between the reader and the text during a particular act of reading, and therefore meaning is unique to an individual within a specific context and in each successive act of reading. A change in either the reader, the text, or the situation will, in Rosenblatt's terms, result in "a different event—a different poem" (14). No two readers will have the exact same response to any text, and no single reader will have the exact same response to a text read multiple times.

Many scholars have theorized explanations for the wide range of responses that can result from a single text. For example, Vipond, et al. (1990) agree that response to literature will be unique to the particular reader, the text, the time, and the place where the reading transaction occurs (Rosenblatt, 1985), but they have developed a theory of reading modes to further account for the diversity. They argue that readers approach texts from a predominantly information-driven, story-driven, or point-driven stance depending on the text and the situation and that these modes or stances will affect response. Responding to literature is a learned social process, and therefore readers will also respond to literature differently depending on their different social roles (Beach, 1993). Beach posits that socialization by cultural institutions will affect the subject positions readers assume, and their responses will reflect this positioning. Fish (1980) developed the concept of "interpretive communities," groups of people who share particular assumptions and strategies for reading, to explain how the activity of reading does not bear universal interpretation.

Given the variety of meanings that readers can construct from a single text, I was interested in exploring how three people

in three different roles would respond to the same text. How would a ninth-grade student, the student's parent, and the student's English teacher respond to a contemporary novel written for young adults? What similarities and differences would emerge between the way a young adult responded to a novel written specifically for her age group and the way two adults responded to the same text? In addition, how would the difference in the adults' roles affect their reading of the text? By analyzing the various responses I planned to glimpse the novel through three different lenses and reflect on the complex process of meaning-making in reading. Months later after completing this informal study, however, I realized that although I did learn about reader response, I learned more about the value of teacher research. I am now convinced that classroom studies can be powerful tools for teachers as they shape their curricula and pedagogy.

The Study

I conducted this study in a small Minnesota city, and the participants included John, a high school English teacher who is interested in incorporating young adult literature into the curriculum, Amy, one of his ninth grade students, and Amy's mother, Sheri. John has been teaching for six years. This is his first year back in the classroom after a two-year hiatus when he was pursuing his master's degree in English. He is married, but has no children. John identified Amy as a good research candidate based on her enthusiasm and cooperation in the classroom. Amy has good work habits in school and earns good grades, but she does not generally spend her free time reading. She is popular among her peers and is a cheerleader, but she is also known as a "good girl" who likes to please her parents and is very active in her church youth group. John has good rapport with Amy's mother and predicted accurately that, given her and her husband's interest in their daughter's education, she would be willing to participate in the study as well. Sheri is college-educated and chose to be a stay-at-home mom when her three daughters were small (Amy has a twin and a sister in fifth grade), and she now works part-time as a teachers' aide, a job that allows her to attend all of her children's events and supervise their after school activities.

She considers herself a fairly strict parent and holds high expectations for her children's conduct. Sheri reads non-fiction frequently and is usually into multiple books at once, but she rarely reads fiction for pleasure. John, Amy, and Sheri are all part of the white, middle class, Christian mainstream of their community.

Each of the three participants was given a copy of the young adult novel *Rats Saw God* by Rob Thomas to read within two to three weeks; none of them had read it previously. *Rats Saw God* is the story of an extremely intelligent high school student, Steve, who gets into trouble and ends up almost failing out of school. The school counselor will allow him to make-up credit for English class and ultimately graduate only if he writes a 100-page narrative, so he begins writing about his sophomore and junior years—and the reasons his life went downhill. I chose this book for its controversial nature; it was praised by critics, but some of the content—profanity, sex, drinking, and drug use—could prove disturbing to some adult readers. At three places in the novel I marked the text with instructions to the participants to stop reading and write down brief responses to the story up to that point. Participants could write down anything they wanted to, but I provided a few examples: "Responses may include identification with characters and the situations they are in, emotional responses, comments about the writing, your interest level, etc." I also asked for written responses at the end of the novel. After each participant finished the book, I collected and reviewed the notes and then conducted individual follow-up interviews to clarify and extend the written responses. The interviews were open-ended, and questions were largely determined by the participants' written responses. However, I did make sure to elicit comments about what the readers liked and disliked about the book, its degree of realism, its appeal to teenagers, the messages the books conveys, how the study design affected the participants' reading, and whether they think books and/or television can affect kids' behavior.

Amy's Response

Amy's written responses to *Rats Saw God* were very

brief and revealed little about how she engaged with the text as a reader. Although she was not quite finished with the novel when we talked, she had read through many scenes containing profanity, drinking, drug use, and sexual activity. As Amy is a "good" kid, I was surprised that she provided almost no personal responses to the book's content in writing. Other than commenting that "what these kids are doing is a little on the dumb side . . . I wouldn't want to spend [life] 'getting hammered' or using drugs like cocaine," she withheld judgment of their behavior. More than half of Amy's notes were actually questions about the novel's plot. She was confused because the book was "different from any other books [she had] read" the way it jumped back and forth between Steve's sophomore and senior years, and some of Thomas's phrasing and vocabulary left her wondering exactly what was going on, too. Amy likened *Rats Saw God* to *Romeo and Juliet*, which she had recently read in school, because "you had to read things more than once to understand."

In contrast to her written comments, in her oral comments Amy was very forthcoming with personal responses to the book's content. She thought the book was interesting and fun to read, and she really wanted to keep my copy until she could finish it. When asked what she found interesting, she said that "when you got past the beginning boring part—when it got into the descriptive details—it was more fun." Amy's comment that she "kind of liked the drugs and sex—even though Mom didn't at all," revealed that she is very conscious of her role as a daughter. This role probably affected her transaction with the text because she admitted that, as she read, her mom "was always on [her] mind." Amy knows her mother's value system, and she knew that Sheri would not be pleased with the content of *Rats Saw God* and would be uncomfortable knowing that her daughter had read it. She observed, "I don't think [Mom] realizes that I can handle stuff like this and it's out there." Thus, whenever Sheri asked Amy how far along she was in the book, Amy answered vaguely and led her to believe that she hadn't read much. She also told her mom that she thought it was "a pretty dumb book," hiding the fact that she found it entertaining.

When Amy was at school among her peers, however, her adolescent role would take precedence over her daughter role. During free periods when Amy would be reading, other students questioned why she would possibly want to spend her time immersed in a book. Not wanting to appear strange or overly scholarly, she would quickly explain that she had to read the book for a research study. She would also tell her peers that *Rats Saw God* was "really pretty good" and then she would show them especially juicy excerpts to prove her point.

Amy found Steve a realistic character and said, "I know people like that. I know people who've done drugs and I know people who've had sex." She also noted that divorce can have a devastating effect on kids and that "divorce could give [Steve] a reason to be rebellious and not do the right things." Amy thought that Steve's life was so mixed up because of his anger toward his mother and father. (At the time of the interview she had not read far enough to know that his girlfriend had an affair with their English teacher.) She said that "he had nobody to turn to and nobody really cared." Obviously, Amy values her own two-parent family and the love and guidance that her mother and father provide, even though, in typical adolescent fashion, she finds them annoying at times:

> Sometimes I wish my parents were more like [Steve's] dad and I didn't have to communicate with them. I'd like just writing notes back and forth. Sometimes I just don't want to talk to them. Like last weekend, my mom was gone the whole time, and when she got back I just didn't feel like talking to her, even though I knew I should.

In the next breath, she continued, "But if we didn't talk I suppose I could end up like Steve," and she knows her parents behave like they do because "As much as I don't want to admit it, [they] just want the best for their kids."

Amy also found the plot of *Rats Saw God* realistic, and when asked to comment on any messages the book conveyed she said that "it's kind of reality . . . People who don't

want to face reality—this would be a good book for them to read." But she was also quick to add that "in a way it's a turn off because of all the bad stuff." Although she was disturbed by how mixed up Steve's life was, Amy was confident that reading about all of Steve's problems and the way he lived his life would not affect her own values and behavior, however, because she has already set her own moral standards.

Sheri's Response

Sheri, approaching the text as a parent, responded to *Rats Saw God* quite differently. Her written response to the book as a whole left no doubt about her feelings:

> I was truly appalled by this particular example of young adult literature. This particular book, I feel, is quite representative of all the garbage young people are exposed to. I think it's dreadful that young people have literature like this available to them.

Anticipating some negative reaction, I did warn Sheri about the book's major sex scene before she agreed to participate in the study. However, as I had not reread the text yet at that time, I had forgotten about the romantic relationship between a teacher and a student and the extent of the substance use and profane language. Sheri's responses to the first few chapters, though, show that she tried to maintain an open mind about the book:

> I was a little taken back when I first started reading the book. I knew there would be a part about sex, but I hadn't thought about drugs. Once I got over the initial, "Oh, there's drugs in this book too," I was okay with it.

She also commented on the book's easy reading and the good description of relationships.

Subsequent written responses conveyed increasing disapproval with the text. An initial comment about disliking the "bad words" later became "Do all teenagers talk like this? The language really turns me off. I hope the majority of young adult lit. isn't like this." As the book went on, Sheri also questioned the nonchalant approach to teen cocaine and cigarette use and

the lack of adult guidance. She was especially disturbed by the romantic relationship between Steve's girlfriend, Dub, and Sky, their English teacher. The whole time she was reading she thought about her daughter reading the same text, and by the time she was three-fourths through she called me one evening at home to voice her concerns. The content made her so uncomfortable that she did not want Amy to finish the book. Sheri called herself a protective mother and said she wants to "shield [her daughters] from things" as long as possible. She thinks that "kids grow up way too fast in our society, and they need [time] to be kids and not mini-adults."

Sheri also shared with me her concerns that Amy would not finish the book in time, anyway, because she seemed to be reading very slowly. Ironically, Amy, as a caring daughter, was trying to protect her mother just as her mother was trying to protect her, and she purposely tried to hide how far she had progressed in her reading. She did not want to disillusion Sheri by letting her know that the teen drinking, drug use, sex, and language use in *Rats Saw God* is realistic for some of her peers. When she found out that her mother had called me and wanted her to stop reading the book, she was surprised and then indignant. Reacting in typical adolescent fashion, she said her mother's objections just fueled her motivation to read more.

Sheri does know that some kids behave like Steve, but she "would like to believe that he's the minority." She attributed most of the "immorality" in the book to "lack of adult guidance" because she believes that adults, particularly parents and teachers, have the responsibility to be role models and to set appropriate limits for children and adolescents. She thinks that kids end up like Steve because parents are not involved enough in their lives. Her own experience as a parent supports this view. Because Sheri and her husband have always made their expectations and values clear to their daughters, Amy found much of Steve's conduct dumb and wouldn't think of doing those things herself because that is not "the way we're brought up." Amy's recognition of the value of strict parents is affirmation of adolescents' need for adult guidance. Sheri also believes that teachers have an obligation to set a good example for their students. It is not surprising that

Sheri, as a parent, found the teacher-student romance extremely disturbing. Parents trust that teachers will educate their children and treat them with respect, and seeing such a gross betrayal of this trust must be especially frightening for mothers and fathers.

Sheri talked about her strong Christian background, and she described herself as conservative and idealistic, all of which affect her reading stance. When she first saw the title of *Rats Saw God*, she thought that the novel must have a Christian theme, and if that were the case she would naturally enjoy it. Perhaps this expectation made the actual story harder to swallow. Much later, when she read that Steve's club, GOD, was "dead," she recognized the statement as "a subtle, yet blatant, message seemingly directed toward insecure teenagers to instill doubt" about the existence of God. Sheri would disagree with Langer (1990) about the purpose of literature instruction: to develop critical thinking rather than to "indoctrinate students into the cultural knowledge, good taste, and elitist traditions of our society" (p. 812). Sheri believes, in contrast, that a book should "have some moral outcome to it [and kids] should get something positive":

> I sure hope a book like this is not required reading for a student. I'd be quite upset if my daughters were reading something like this and *not* reading something that taught values.

She also believes that while limited exposure to morally questionable material probably won't affect the behavior of kids, parents need to be careful:

> Even if good kids read enough of these ["negative" books] it will make a difference. A person becomes numb to it and indifferent. If they were to read book after book after book . . . It depends on the number of times they're exposed.

John's Response

Like Sheri, John has a strong Christian background. Not surprisingly given the many factors that affect how a reader makes meaning, his responses were very different from hers, however. This difference can be explained at least in part because John is not a parent, because he assumed a teacher stance

as he read *Rats Saw God*, and because, with an M.A. in English, he has experience reading diverse texts and has been well-trained to do literary analysis. John readily admitted that he almost always "reads from the perspective of 'How can I use this in class?'" And anytime he reads or views anything with young adult protagonists, he finds it hard not to judge the realism of the characters and plot against his own considerable knowledge of teenagers. Thus, while Amy predominantly maintained a story-driven stance toward reading (Vipond, et al., 1990), whether she was putting herself into the story or using the text to reflect on personal experience, John's relationship to the text was more mutable. His responses revealed that he was sometimes aesthetically involved in the text, but at other times he read from an evaluative stance. For example, John pointed out that Steve was not like most kids he has known over his six years of teaching:

> It strikes me as a bit unrealistic that *such* a brain would also be *such* a rebel. It's a combination you really don't see—okay *I* haven't seen. You've got your rebels who are intelligent, but none that would use "et al." voluntarily in writing.

John was especially surprised that for half of the book's episodes, Steve was only supposed to be a sophomore ("If he's a sophomore, I'm Edgar Allen Poe."), and he questioned why a tight-laced girl would choose to date Steve. Despite these departures from the typical high school world, though, John acknowledged that Steve's problems were real, and he could picture himself as the school counselor negotiating with Steve over graduation requirements. John also appreciated that Thomas portrayed Steve's girlfriend Dub as an average high school girl instead of a breath-taking beauty:

> How refreshing to have Juliet be rather bland . . . even funny looking. Thomas' realism here is very important, I think. It'd be so easy to make her the prototypical "beauty behind ugly glasses and a big sweatshirt." I'm grateful he fought off the urge.

Even though Steve's quick wit and impressive vocabulary were unrealistic, John found them entertaining and enjoyable. However, he feared that the book's "focal audience [was] misaligned" and the humor "would be wasted a bit on the young adult audience." He compared *Rats Saw God* to Dr. Seuss books or other cartoons that are presumably written for kids but have a layer of complexity for adults as well. He was confident that, because of the content, teens would enjoy the novel, but he wondered whether freshmen and sophomores, including Amy, would "get it." For example, John noted that "Steve's allusion to Desdemona and Cassio is very funny, but most JH/HS kids haven't read *Othello*."[2] Judging from all of Amy's questions about the book, John's concerns are probably valid. Her understanding most likely lacks some of the richness of John's because she has less reading and life experience to draw on. Interestingly, Amy reported that even though Steve's big words were "hard to understand at times," she did not question their use, and she saw Steve as a realistic character. Sheri also missed the humor of *Rats Saw God*, but because she found the book so offensive, she was not adopting an aesthetic stance toward the reading and attending to its "lived-through experience" (Rosenblatt, 1978). Sheri was perhaps assuming a point-driven stance (Vipond, et al., 1990), as she kept hoping that a positive message would emerge to give the book redeeming value.

John read as a teacher, but some of his analytical responses marked him specifically as an English teacher. At one point he was troubled by a seeming lack of character motivation, and he also wondered whether the plot fulfilled the expectations it had created. He was pleased, however, by the plausibility of the book's conclusion:

> I suppose Steve must be screwed over by Dub so we/he sees a parallel with his dad. I'm glad the conflict with Dad wasn't immediately a "happily ever after" piece of junk. The conflict is real . . . and the resolution can't be fast.

John assumed, though, that his students would want more closure in a piece of literature (like Sheri, who was searching for a

happy ending).

Perhaps the biggest difference between the two adult readings of *Rats Saw God* stems from the difference in how John and Sheri view the purpose of literature instruction. John's goal as a teacher is to get his students to leave his class thinking more critically than when they came in, and he uses literature for this purpose. He thinks that *Rats Saw God* tackles a lot of controversial issues pertinent to teens' lives and that, instead of trying to shield kids from them, they should be demystified through discussion and analysis. John pointed out that issues like drinking and sex are relevant to all teens because, regardless of whether they decide to participate or abstain, they will all have to confront the decision at some point. Because Steve's gradual "recovery" involved looking back at his life and examining his problems, John thinks that the novel encourages kids to think about the choices they have made and, more importantly, to think before making decisions in the future. John also noted that discussing a book like *Rats Saw God* would promote learning because "kids can relate better to me if I assign material that's interesting to them." He admitted that this might sound like a superficial ploy to "get kids to like you," but he insisted that as a student he learned the most from teachers he could relate to on a more personal level.

Despite the potential that John sees in *Rats Saw God*, though, he did question some of its content. He did not like how the teacher-student relationship seemed like "it's your standard girl leaves boy for other boy. It [didn't] 'feel' illegal here." He is not sure that Thomas passed any judgment on the teacher, and he thought perhaps he should have. John also wondered about the portrayal of Steve's and Dub's sexual relationship. He thought that the scene where they lose their virginity was very significant because they felt regret afterward; he liked "the negative spin on it *without* the preaching." However, Steve and Dub did go on to have sex often after that first incident, leaving John with feelings of ambivalence. Like Amy, though, John thinks that reading negative messages will not cause an adolescent to do negative things unless he or she was ready to do them anyway. He is agreeing with Beach (1993)

when he notes that "It's not the book as much as it is the kid."

Teacher Research and Literature Instruction

By the conclusion of this small study, my research questions were answered and I had gained insight and understanding into reader response theory. However, upon reflection, I realized that perhaps my most important learning centered around how teacher research has the potential for improving the quality of teaching and learning in our classrooms. Specifically, teacher research can help teachers get inside students' heads and understand their thinking. Because of the difference in age, social roles, life experience, etc., teachers do not read like adolescents do, and they need to be aware that their personal responses to a text will be very different from the responses of their students. John and Amy expressed opposite perspectives about the realism of Steve, for example, and they gleaned very different messages from the book. This study was a good reminder to John that, even though he has been teaching for several years and has a good grasp of what adolescents are like, he will not always accurately predict their responses to a text. He might assume he knows his students, but sometimes his assumptions about their reading are actually more reflective of his own viewpoints instead. To illustrate, he anticipated that Amy may have some trouble with the vocabulary and allusions in *Rats Saw God*, but was surprised to learn, instead, that the book's structure and plot proved confusing at times.[3] Therefore, teachers should always encourage student questions about a text and be ready to clear up confusion about seemingly obvious (to the teacher) story elements. Even though a book may be marketed for young adults, this target group may lack the reading or life experience to understand or appreciate its structure, humor, themes, etc. In these situations, the teacher can build on students' responses and guide them to a more complex reading.

Given that a primary goal of literature instruction is to "develop an enjoyment of reading so that lifelong reading is realistic" (Maxwell & Meiser, 2005), this study also underscores the importance of choosing literature that reflects students' interests and complex lives—and allowing students to choose their

own literature. Amy was not an avid reader outside of school, and yet when she was given a text she found interesting, she could not put the book down. Reading became a "want to," not a "have to." Amy's comments acknowledge that even though she's a "good" kid, she has acquaintances who drink alcohol, use drugs, and have sex, and she finds reading about kids her age like this engaging. Amy's comments also support Beach's (1993) claim that reading texts will not directly affect the behavior and/or attitudes of readers. He argues that many other factors influence behavior, including family, school, and community:

> [T]he claim that a particular book will have a particular effect on a group of students—that it will cause them to behave in deviant ways or to change their attitudes—underestimates the strength of their socially constituted roles and attitudes. (110)

Thus, including contemporary young adult literature in the curriculum is a prudent choice for English teachers seeking to engage their students with books.

Finally, this study suggests the importance of teachers choosing literature purposefully and understanding why parents may view the curriculum differently than they do. Just as teachers need to understand their students' thinking, it is helpful for them to understand the "parental stance," as well. John's and Sheri's thoughts about the purpose of literature instruction generally and the value of *Rats Saw God* as a teaching tool specifically were very different, but if John can be empathetic of Sheri and aware that her objections stem from a concern about her child growing up too quickly or growing up into a person with questionable values, he will be more likely to work with her as an ally instead of an adversary. Hearing Sheri's comments stressed to John the importance of communicating with parents, respecting their points of view, and convincing them that he wants what's best for their children, too. Thus, when selecting texts for his classroom, John needs to take care to choose high-quality materials that support his goals for English instruction. Teachers have the responsibility to provide sound, well-reasoned rationales for their curricula,

and they should be aware that, when parents object to materials, they are generally not trying to be enemies of education but are acting in what they believe are the best interests of their children.

Although an interest in seeing reader response theory at work prompted this study, these unexpected lessons about teaching are ultimately more important to me. I have discovered the potential of informal classroom research to inform and influence classroom practice. While the specific results of this small, local study cannot be generalized to other contexts (the responses of Amy, Sheri, and John are not meant to represent the opinions of all students, parents, and teachers), this kind of inquiry can prompt teacher reflection, heighten sensitivity, and ultimately improve classroom practice.

Notes

1. Although prominent reader-response critics like Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, David Bleich, Stanley Fish, Peter Rabinowitz, and Elizabeth Flynn "adopt quite different conceptions of readers' roles, purposes, texts, and contexts, suggesting that there is no single 'reader-response' theory" (Beach 5), they share the belief that readers create meaning through their experience with a text.

2. John is basing this comment on his own experience as a student and as a teacher. He has taught in three different school districts, none of which included *Othello* in the English curriculum.

3. Because I thought it would be helpful to John professionally, I chose to share some of Amy's responses with him. I did not share the adults' responses with her. John and Sheri agreed that they would be interested in hearing each other's thoughts about the book, though, so during the follow-up interview, I shared some of their general impressions and comments with the other. I do not know if John and Sheri had any face-to-face conversations about the study later.

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Speaking of Writing: International and Immigrant Students Share their Experiences at a Northern Minnesota University

Avesa Rockwell

INTRODUCTION

In my first two years teaching freshman composition at the University of Minnesota Duluth (UMD) I have felt inadequate teaching English Language Learners (ELL)[1] students in my classes and in the Writing Workshop, where I tutor with six other graduate teaching assistants. At least a third of the students who visit the Workshop struggle with English and I often wonder if my syntactical cues and grammar exercises do any good.

In the next few years it is likely that the number of non-native English speaking students in Minnesota colleges and universities will rise significantly. According to U.S. census data, in the last ten years Minnesota's foreign-born population more than doubled from 110,000 to 240,000. With the highest number of Somali refugees in the U.S., Minnesota is also home to more than 70,000 Hmong. Compared to the median age of 35 for the entire Minnesota population, the median age of Hmong is 17, which indicates that a large number of Hmong youth will soon enter the state's colleges and universities. With the elimination of the General College at the University of Minnesota's Twin Cities campus, more urban immigrant students will apply to community colleges, the MSU state university schools and the smaller UM schools, like Duluth. In addition, while UM strives to become one of the world's leading research institutions, it will

likely boost its recruitment of talented scholars from overseas.

Despite these state-wide trends, at this time international and immigrant students still represent a linguistic minority[2] at UMD. At this time UMD does not offer any ESL sections of freshman composition, though it does provide a few elective remedial courses for students who may struggle with written English. At UMD adjunct faculty and graduate assistants teach this required entry-level course, and less than 5% of the instructor pool possesses any ESL training or certification, factors that almost make UMD resemble how P.K. Matsuda (2003) describes universities in the 1950s, when ELL students were either placed into mainstream writing courses with no linguistic support, or automatically lumped with basic writers in remedial sub-freshman courses (p. 782).

The University administration is very aware that departments need to ratchet up their services for Minnesota's new populations, but, as any seasoned teacher knows, talk of top-down policy changes will not help one's students today. When I began this study in January of 2006 I entered it with two questions and two assumptions. First, I wanted to know how ELL students are faring now in the current system, and second, what we as non-ESL composition instructors can do to support minority ELL students in our mainstream classrooms.

My first assumption was that there exist vast differences between international and immigrant students. To begin with, international students are much easier to identify since they must submit their Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores when they apply to the university. These students often come to study in the United States as fluent writers in their native language(s), and plan to return to their home country once they accomplish their educational goals. On the other hand, students who immigrated to the U.S. before they finished high school do not take the TOEFL; they may simply submit their ACT scores. Many immigrant students that participated in this study learned to speak English as early as Kindergarten, speak without an accent, and consider themselves as "American" as the next student.

UMD does provide tutoring and advisement for in-

coming ELL students, but as one director from the Multicultural Center said, identifying first-generation immigrant students is particularly difficult when these students do not label themselves as "ESL." She said that at the beginning of each semester she combs through each application of new students of color. She assumes that those with ACT verbal scores lower than nineteen are ELLs, and she advises them to acquire additional tutoring and instruction before they register for freshman composition. She can only make recommendations, and frequently, she said, students do not have room for more electives.

My second assumption was that English Language Learners could tell us college writing instructors a lot about how they learn and what we can do to help them.

Methodology

In this study, I sought to understand the writing experiences of UMD's international and immigrant students[3] and to gather their insights and recommendations on how the University can best address their needs in college writing. My methodology is based on in-depth phenomenological, qualitative interviewing as a "basic mode of inquiry" (Seidman, 1998 p. 2). Since I had only six weeks to complete this project, I was not able to go as "in-depth" as Seidman's model of three successive interviews allows. Instead, I met with volunteer participants for one interview, which lasted from fifteen minutes to an hour. I asked participants to sign a consent form, pick a pseudonym, and respond to nine open-ended questions:

1. What is your first language and what has writing in your first language been like for you in the past?
2. What has writing in English been like for you in the past (before you started college)?
3. What is writing in English like for you now, in college?
4. Have you participated in peer revision workshops in a writing class (where you trade papers with another classmate)? If so, please describe that experience.
5. Have you gone to any of UMD's tutoring centers

to get help with writing? If so, please describe that experience.

6. What are your plans after college and how does writing in English play a role in those plans?

7. Do you think college writing instructors should adapt any part of the course for students whose first language is not English? If so, what should they do?

8. Is there anything specific that you would like the composition department administration and instructors to know about your writing experiences here at UMD?

9. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

For Internal Review Board (IRB) exemption status I took an online CITI course on the protection of human research subjects, and I had to demonstrate that my interview questions would not solicit personal information. Of course, writing experiences are not divorced from "real life;" they reflect our self-identity, our relationships with family and peers, and our attitudes about learning and literacy. "Writing," as Donald Murray writes, "is not superficial to the intellectual life but central to it; writing is one of the most disciplined ways of making meaning" (2004, p. 3). Speaking about writing adds another layer of self-discovery to this kind of methodology, which is grounded in Vygotsky's view that the words one chooses to convey experience reveal a model of the speaker's consciousness (1987, pp. 236-237). In this way, qualitative interviewing seeks to understand that consciousness in order to grasp the complex abstractions of social and educational issues (Seidman 1).

Access to Participants

Often, finding volunteer participants is the most challenging part of this kind of research. I knew three of the participants before the interviews; the others I met through "gatekeepers," the people within an institution who hold either legitimate authority or "moral suasion" (Seidman, 1998, p. 39). Without their help, I never would have been able to complete this project. They also shared their perspectives on the issues surrounding services for ELL students at UMD.

Initially, the Director of Asian Student Services did not respond to my two e-mail queries. Instead of taking silence as an answer I walked into his office and introduced myself. He admitted that he remembered my name, and then paused. I reminded him what I had asked before: I wanted his advice on how I could interest Hmong students in participating in the study. He reflected that he often wonders if the numerous researchers who contact him for leads to Hmong students have a genuine interest in improving the lives of the students, or if they simply want to "suck up their wisdom like a vacuum."

I admit that his comment forced me to reconsider my intentions. I have been drawn to this subject because of my background working with immigrant populations in San Francisco. I missed them as individuals and the sense of purpose I had as an advocate. I also recognized the arrogance of wanting to give "under-represented people" a voice, which, in turn, can deny their right to self-determination. Nonetheless, I began to think that doing nothing would be worse. For all of these reasons I accepted my responsibility to convey participants' responses with accuracy and to share my findings with those who are in the position to influence change. If I don't do these things, my research *will* remain within "a vacuum."

The Participants

Fifteen undergraduate students participated in the study. Two-thirds indicated that they plan to pursue graduate and/or professional degrees after they complete their bachelor's. Four were male and eleven were female. At the MCTE Spring Conference in Rochester an educator who had done similar research with immigrant students said that most of his participants were male. Obviously, we concluded, potential participants felt more comfortable being interviewed by someone of their gender, particularly for those who come from cultures that reinforce traditional gender roles and segregation. Of those fifteen, five were international students who planned to return to their home countries in the near future. Of the ten permanent U.S. residents (who were either first or second-generation immigrants), only two said they could read and/or write in their native language(s).

The Process

The themes did not emerge from the interviews in a linear way. Some participants responded to the questions with short, succinct sentences while others told their life stories. To formulate follow-up questions I listened carefully to the stress participants put on certain words, to the places they laughed, or the words they repeated.[4] Sometimes I asked relevant follow-up questions, but other times I didn't hear what a participant *really* said until I was transcribing. In fact, as my research advisor Linda Miller Cleary attests from doing this kind of research in collaboration, two researchers will hear different themes emerge from the same narrative. In this way, I acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of my presentation. I will provide connections between the narratives, refer to what other researchers have published about the issues raised, and summarize some recurring responses, but, overall, I want to allow the participants to speak for themselves. [5]

The Interviews

I identified five categories to describe certain variables that may determine ELL student success in college writing: motivation (both instrumental and integrative); preparation (high school and remedial courses); access to on-campus support (tutors, instructors, and peers); access to off-campus support (friends and family); and their ability to adapt to academic discourse and rhetoric. By no means complete, this list does begin to form a three-dimensional model of what influences student learning.

Motivation

Initially, I expected that I could draw a clear line between international and immigrant students based on Gardner and Lambert's (1972) instrumental and integrative motivation model. According to their scheme, instrumental motivation pushes one to learn the target language to accomplish some other goal; while integrative motivation pushes one to adopt the target language's discourse community. Of course in real life such categories seem too reductive to describe the complex factors that influence motivation.

However, for the most part, I did find that many in-

ternational students learn to speak and write English to serve clearly articulated goals. Andre plans to work in the U.S. for a few years before he returns to his native Kazakhstan:

> Primarily I chose engineering because I saw that it wouldn't require that much writing but I was wrong. Since I am going to pursue career as an engineer and actually write reports (and write in general), it requires at least ten percent of what I am going to do. For example, if you look at job requirements, they always require writing skills, so I guess it's very important.

Andre said his abilities to write in English will add to his valuable experiences here designing mobile heart monitor machines.

Audrey and Karen, who both play on the UMD women's hockey team, said that they will survive without English when they return to Montreal, but as bilinguals they will have an edge in the Canadian job market. Suzannah does not foresee having to write in English when she returns to Switzerland, but she expects that knowing how to read the science literature in English will give her an advantage in graduate school.

Nicole, also on the women's hockey team, said: "I want to come back to the U.S. and teach. As a teacher I will have to write in many different forms. I will always stay in touch with many friends that I made who speak English." Nicole's response combines career (instrumental) and relationship (integrative) goals.

For many first generation immigrants, mastering English serves both integrative and instrumental purposes. Vang, a Political Science major who was born in a Hmong refugee camp in Thailand, described how he played a key role in his family after they arrived in the United States:

> For me, growing up, it was really on myself to learn the language to help my parents out. When you're the oldest son you are the translator of the family. It's on me to translate for my mom, for my dad, when we're going to the store, to the car shop, whatever,

> it was on me to learn it. So learning, reading, writing in English…I won't say it was easy, but I enjoyed it because I knew I could use it.

Vang said he has always done well in English classes, plans to go to law school, and even writes for creative expression: "I do a lot, just poems and rhyming stuff… if I need to just get something out, I write."

Like Vang, Coco said she has both instrumental and integrative motivations to write:

> I've always had good writing experiences: it's always been easy for me. I do like it, I do enjoy it. I journal, whenever I get a chance. I do love to, that's the best form of writing for me, that's what I enjoy the most. [In my upper division comp class] we're doing resumes and cover letters, and I enjoy that, and we're working on the I-Search paper, which I have never done before, which I am really excited to do because it's different.

Like Vang, Coco sees how writing will allow her to achieve her goals: she said she plans to serve in the Peace Corps and earn a Master's in Social Work.

Many Hmong participants said they lacked instrumental motivation to learn how to write in Hmong. For example, Xiong, a criminology major, voiced a common complaint: "My parents tried teaching us one or two summers ago, it's pretty hard. It's not hard, but we just don't have the time to learn it. We find it kind of useless to have it."

For immigrant participants who belong to large families and communities in the Twin Cities, the need to integrate into mainstream U.S. culture may be minimal. Instead, one learns English and attends college in order to support their family while they strive to maintain their cultural identity. Mohammad, a recent immigrant from Somalia who speaks perfect English (though he began to learn less than seven years ago), said that he knows many people in his community who have lived in Minneapolis for fifteen to twenty years and still cannot speak Eng-

lish. He said that once he realized that he wanted to provide for his family, his instrumental motivation led him to college:

> I went to high school. I was here eight months, and I took an assessment test. I just took it and they said, 'You did well!' Because before I went to school, I was kind of going to the library getting those English cassettes where they teach you. I was learning a lot. One thing I found out, I always learn quick. So I went there and they took a test and they said, 'Oh, you did well! We'll put you in tenth grade,' and I said, 'That's fine.' I went to high school, and I was kind of motivated to go to school, and it was fun for me to do it because I didn't experience it before. I knew that to succeed here in the United States I must speak English.

Mohammad had a personal connection to the people who inspired him to learn: his father; his former teacher; and his high school teachers who elected him Student of the Year:

> I went to school, I was [there] one year, and I was chosen Student of the Year. My teachers were saying 'Yeah, you are really good,' and that motivated me a lot. And they took a picture of me, and they put it in front, where they put the pictures of the students, and my picture was there until I graduated. That was really motivating me, every time I came to the door, it was looking at me.

His story reminds us that even the most focused and intelligent students need positive role models, and that a little public recognition can make a big impression. For most young immigrants, public schools provide their first exposure to mainstream U.S. culture and values and, the kind of support and feedback that they receive in high school can determine the course they will take after graduation (C. Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001).

Overall, the participants in this study described mostly instrumental motivations to become fluent in English and/or to

acquire college-level writing skills. Of course, for students like Vang and Coco who are completely fluent and integrated into American school culture, these instrumental and integrative categories seem irrelevant, especially when they experience an intrinsic motivation to write. To enhance both internal and external motivation, writing instructors should find ways to allow ELL students to articulate their goals for each semester (Kasper & Petrello, 1998). One method would be to ask students to write a self-addressed letter, collect it, and then return it to the students at the end of the semester to reflect on how well they met their goals.

Preparation for College Writing

Many immigrant participants had mixed feelings about their high school experiences. Pa, a senior majoring in elementary education, loved writing at her St. Paul high school:

> Well, I had a lot fun because I took a lot of really nice classes like creative writing. It was like more of the teacher because I knew him for four years, and he inspired me. He was like, 'You can write about anything.' I liked it because it wasn't really limited.

On the other hand, Pa felt anxious about her ability to write standard academic papers. She complained that high school didn't prepare her for college-level writing:

> I don't remember focusing on grammar, and I kind of wished they did that in middle school or high school, so it made it really difficult. Because I was like, 'Really?' I never knew that this was that important until everyone was saying that and making all these marks on the paper. I think that would be helpful. [In high school] we were just reading literature, and doing creative writing. I don't know why they do that; it makes college writing more difficult.

For Coco, whose Minnesota high school taught grammar and the conventions of academic writing, college writing was easy:

> I felt like I didn't struggle as much as I thought I would. I thought it would be com-

> pletely different from high school, but in a lot of ways it was just writing. It was not too different I suppose. I took what I thought was a pretty simple class. I've always used MLA style. That's the only style I used, and then taking psychology classes I learned the APA. I used reference guides even in high school.

Though they never attended an American high school, a few of the international students felt confident that they received a more solid academic foundation in their native countries. Andre said:

> I noted that freshmen who went to high school here, they don't know how to write. In every sentence they use a 'like,' like they speak. They write like they speak. So I guess I had an advantage on that.

Suzannah criticized mainstreaming in American public high schools:

> It's just that my base education is so much better than people here, even in math; it is so much easier for me. If I tell Americans they get mad because they think I am conceited, but it's just that Swiss education, sorry, is so much better. When I went to school, kids that were going to a big college were separated. If I had to go to school that was not doing as well, it would be frustrating, but with the separating you can adapt your teaching. I feel in high schools here they just have some average, and the good ones don't want to do anything because it's too easy, and the other ones are frustrated, and there are two or three that actually learn anything.

In the European tracking system that Suzannah describes, low performing secondary students will never have the option of attending college. Similarly in the U.S., course prerequisites and a Darwinist attitude among departments also tend to preclude

low-performing students from entering difficult classes.

Currently, UMD provides only two college writing preparatory courses: one that is suited for international students who need more practice speaking and orienting to U.S. University culture; whereas, for students who attended high school in the U.S. and need more step-by-step writing instruction, a remedial course offered through "Supportive Services" is the only option. Nonetheless, as electives, many students who could benefit from these courses do not take them. Even more perplexing were the number of immigrant participants who said that it took at least several months before they knew about these classes, free tutors, advisors, and the Multicultural Center. This indicates that the University could do more to orient ELL students to these valuable on-campus resources by providing special tours or information sheets. In addition, composition instructors could play a key role in communicating this information.

On-Campus Support

Tutors

Currently there are three places at UMD where ELLs can receive tutoring: The Writing Workshop staffed by graduate teaching assistants; the Tutoring Center staffed by undergraduates; and the Multicultural Center, by special appointment. Participants indicated that they picked one place and remained faithful to it, meaning that the quality of advertising, outreach, and personal warmth exhibited by the tutors could largely determine the success (measured by number of returning students) of each respective facility.

Of course, participants appreciated the place that gave them the most explicit instruction. Mohammad said that the Tutoring Center really helped him:

> I always wanted someone who could proofread my paper…. Not only did they proofread my paper, they taught *me* how to proofread my paper. So now whenever I just write a paper, even for my class, my normal class, I have to proofread it, and proofread it, and

> proofread it, and after I proofread it three times then I just give it to someone who is native-English to see to what I don't see.

Mohammad said that the tutors asked him to read his paper out loud to listen for errors or missing punctuation. I was glad to hear this technique worked for him: I used to do this with students until I read that ELLs do not have an "intuitive ear" for their second language (Harris & Silva, 1993). This may demonstrate that Mohammad has achieved a certain level of fluency, and, in fact, this "intuitive ear" seems to indicate language fluency in general, a phenomenon in which Stephen Krashen bases his "monitor hypothesis" (1982, p. 31).

Xiong agreed that he wanted to have someone proofread his papers:

> You type up ten pages and they just read it, 'Do this, do that, don't put the comma there.' I never knew that the comma was supposed to separate things out, like two different ideas; it was just like one of the things I learned from them. Just simple stuff that you don't understand.

At the Writing Workshop we graduate assistants enforce a policy against proofreading student papers. We reason that if we proofread students' papers they will never learn how to do it themselves. Sara, a Somali pre-med student, expressed frustration about this policy:

> They tell you, 'I'm not going to proofread your paper–I'm just going to help you.' But sometimes there are things you don't know–like commas. Sometimes you put something where they're not supposed to be placed. So if they cannot help you with like, they make it so hard for you, then you're going to wonder, 'Why did I come here?' Why, if they say it's help?

After listening to several complaints like this I began to wonder where and how the ELL student can learn proofreading techniques. I also wondered if our proofreading policy discourages some students from ever visiting the Workshop. Meanwhile,

Xiong thought the Workshop served only freshman, while another Hmong student said, "I was a little bit too scared to go there." I understand why a student may feel like a cat in a roomful of rocking chairs once she steps into the Writing Workshop: what could be more intimidating to someone who feels insecure about her grammar skills than asking for help from a stressed-out English graduate student? Any negative signal, such as "I won't proofread your paper" will indicate that she has come to the wrong place.

This indicates that the no-proofreading policy should not be made explicit. Instead, tutors could welcome students by asking them to read their paper aloud and then giving them specific instruction on one kind of punctuation or grammatical rule. By giving different feedback on systemic errors (those that follow a consistent rule of grammar that can be applied in similar contexts) rather than on idiomatic errors (which reflect the maddening inconsistencies of English and must be memorized), tutors could begin to teach ELL students how to edit their own papers. Of course, only repeated visits over a semester may produce significant improvement. Luckily, the Writing Workshop is staffed by 6-7 highly qualified tutors and open 30 hours a week. In other words, with some minor adjustments, the Writing Workshop could become an incredibly valuable resource for UMD's ELL students.

As a student advisor, Mohammad said that for many undergraduates, the stigma of tutoring can outweigh the threat of failing a class. Vang also acknowledged this: "A lot of people get the perception if you're there you're dumb, or whatever, but I never really thought that stuff." Mohammad said he thinks that instructors should require some students to visit the tutoring center. By giving class credit, he reasoned, students would have an added incentive. However, Mai said that she resented one of her professors for recommending a tutor in lieu of providing further instruction:

> I remember my professor gave me a piece of paper with the assignment, the only thing is, she forgot to tell us it was a formal essay. She said, 'Write an essay answering these questions.' So I answered, because in high school you do that, but when I turned it in she gave me a C or a D or whatever. And she

> didn't write to explain, or to come talk to me. All she said was, 'Go to the tutoring center because I think you need help with your writing skills.' I went once, and it didn't help me; it wasn't effective. But all I needed to know was what she wanted: she wanted a formal paper. I wrote my formal paper, I got an A, and then she wrote: 'Oh, I see you've been going to the tutoring center,' but I hadn't! I think that when the professors say, 'Oh, you need to go to the tutoring center. They will be able to help you there,' I think that's just wrong because the reason why we're taking this class is so that the professor can help us. And if he or she can't help us what are they there for? We're paying them lots of money just for them to say, 'Oh, you need to go to the tutoring center.' The tutoring center should be secondary help; professors should be the primary help.

Like many immigrant students, Mai has had to work to support herself through college; therefore, she's very aware of the cost of her education and the amount of time she can dedicate to her studies. Instructors need to consider these factors if they decide to require students to get additional tutoring outside of class. Coco also said she prefers to go to the professor "Because their method of teaching is different than how tutoring centers will teach you."

Instructors

Many participants said that having a relationship with their instructor made all the difference in the world. Mohammad described a recurring problem he sees among the students he advises at the Multicultural Center: "There is a gap between the instructor and the students, and that is not created by the instructor but the students. So I always encourage them to 'have a connection with your teacher.'" Coco shared this belief:

> I feel a lot of it is up to the student. That's when you need to reach out to your other resources, like talking to the teachers or the professors… If you feel you are not as proficient, I think you have to help yourself

> get there. You can build that relationship with the teacher to get you there.

Vang agreed that these relationships are important, but he places the responsibility on the instructor: "It's really on the teachers to recognize the needs of the students to give that individual attention." Xiong said that he wished he had gotten that kind of support in freshman composition: "There should be more one-on-one for each student. The class that I took, the size wasn't that big, so the teacher should have taken a one-on-one chance with us." Many participants agreed that the instructor needed to initiate contact. Mai said: "A lot of students are intimidated to go to the professor. The only reason why I had to go to see [mine] is because he required [it]." Given this feedback, ELL students seemed to appreciate formal one-on-one instructor conferences.

College writing instructors may read this and think, "That's great, but I have 100 students and sit on two committees! How could I possibly find the time?" While Donald Murray asserts that one-on-one conferences are "the most effective–and the most practical–method of teaching composition" (2004, p. 147), one must remember that Murray exchanges class time to hold one-on-one conferences, a method that belongs to a larger pedagogical model that may be incompatible with some institutional policies. However, after presenting this finding to my colleagues last spring, several said that they hold quick one-on-one conferences within the classroom by roving around the class during in-class or lab assignments. Essentially, the goal is to allow students to ask questions that they would be too shy to address in the larger group and to allow instructors to better understand students' individual needs, an objective that can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Another colleague said that she takes full advantage of the time before and after class and finds that this "small talk" often makes her students feel more comfortable to approach her later with important questions.

Peers

Like many college writing instructors, I assign in-class peer revision workshops to help with revision. Students are required

to bring a copy of their draft to share while they provide specific written feedback to another student. Participants described a wide range of reactions to this kind of in-class collaborative activity. Mohammad thought the workshops made him a better reader:

> I always took it serious when I critiqued other people's papers. I am a slow reader and I tried to read it faster and respond at the same time, so it was kind of helpful, it actually pushed you to find the mistake, find the mistake! It's helpful.

Vang said he valued the feedback of his peers: "Like the class we have now, you probably edit something like three, four times before you turn it in, just to get it perfect. If I let someone else see it they may see something I didn't." Lora, who is Hmong and studying mechanical engineering, thought the workshops were uncomfortable but ultimately helpful:

> We had six or seven papers we had to write on different topics and then like, we'd be in groups of four and trade, and then it was kind of intimidating because a lot of the other race would have better English, I suppose. It was just me and my other friends that are Asian in there, so for me it was kind of hard. After awhile, I became used to it, and since they are better in writing they did a lot of corrections on my paper so that helped a lot too.

A study has shown that ELLs tend to speak less than native-speakers during these kinds of activities (Zhu, 2001, p. 275). For these reasons, peer revision workshops have the potential to make ELL students feel excluded. Xiong said: "What I found out, those other students who are mostly white Caucasians have better writings and better papers…when I compared my paper to theirs I could tell that there's a big difference."

Lily had a similar experience:

> To be the only Asian person nobody wanted to exchange papers with me. I tried though… I felt like, I don't know, it was like, I felt kind of left out. When I read oth-

> er people's papers, it was better than mine.

These comparisons may have pushed Xiong to improve his writing, but they seemed to make Lily feel self-conscious. Sara's experiences with peer revision were even worse:

> Some of them were so critical, so judgmental. For peer reviews, they were more critical than the professor! I don't know why. Of course, the reason for the peer review is to have somebody else check for your mistakes so you can go and correct it. But it felt like they went kind of beyond that, or like maybe for me being the minority was the issue, I don't know. They criticized a lot.

Lily and Sara's narratives tell us that students are very aware when they are the only person of color in the classroom. If they also feel uncertain about their writing abilities, it's likely that some ELLs will avoid peer revision workshops whenever possible. To make matters worse, these students' grades will suffer since most instructors require participation. Andre, who avoided the workshops for other reasons, lamented the fact that not participating lowered his grade for the class. Another international student found the peer revision sessions frustrating for other reasons:

> To be honest, I don't think they really help me. I always ended up with someone who didn't know how to write. It just drove me nuts the way they would write. I would correct their grammar, and they would just read my paper and just say 'Oh, it's good.'

These stories illustrate how mismatched, untrained or overly critical peer revision groups can undermine the benefits of collaborative learning. According to Krashen's (1982) fifth hypothesis of the Monitor Model, anxiety, self-doubt and its subsequent apathy can block language acquisition. Krashen stresses the importance of not putting students "on the defensive" (74). Kasper & Petrello (1998) characterize the ideal learning environment for ELLs as one that reduces anxiety and promotes risk taking (181). However, I still think that mixed peer

revision groups can provide valuable learning experiences for both ELLs and native-speaking students with instructor guidance. Lily and Sara remind me that students need more than editing checklists: instructors should also model the activity, monitor group dynamics through quiet observation or anonymous surveys, as well as evaluate the quality of peer feedback.

Off-Campus Support

Understandably, many participants said they preferred to get help with writing from those they know and trust: friends and family. Mai had the opportunity to take her upper division Composition course as an independent study, which allowed her to form a peer review group with her friends:

> We would write a paper and at the end of the week we're like, 'OK, we need to get together.' [We'd] revise each other's paper, make a copy and send it to the professor. When you're writing a paper on a computer screen you over-read a lot of stuff, in your head you know what you're writing, but you can make a mistake but not know you made a mistake. Your mind has already made up its mind. You can't see it for yourself. Somebody's got to tell you.

Karine and Audrey have formed a family with their hockey team, and Audrey said she doesn't know what she would do without that kind of support network.

Given either the physical distance from home or the fact that most immigrants are the first generation in their family to speak or write in English, many said they rely on siblings and cousins for help with writing assignments, not parents. Some recognized that this put them at a disadvantage. Pa remarked:

> I grew up in a family who spoke Hmong, and then we barely spoke English and that made it difficult, and then in high school that's where we started speaking English more. And my parents don't really speak English now, and I guess that's a factor.

Xiong had a similar experience:

> I guess in high school my writing wasn't that great because if you look at all the other students, like the white students, their parents were able to help them because they speak and write in English. With my parents, their grammar is not that good, (or that great), and then they can't really help me out. So I kind of struggle, and most of the things I learn I learn by myself, [or] by watching others write, (other Caucasians, white students), and you kind of pick up on their forms of writing.

These students[6] don't blame their parents, but they recognize that native-English standard dialect students tend to have a higher fluency in the dominant school discourse. Nonetheless, studies show that the benefits of using the primary language at home (to maintain family traditions and intimate communication) far outweigh the inconvenience of having to rely on others to practice English (Crawford 1997; Wong-Fillmore 1991). Many participants said they speak Hmong only with the older generations in their family and community, but with their siblings and peers they "switch between the two languages," speaking what Coco called "Hmonglish."

When students do not speak English at home or cannot turn to their families for support with English, students may have to rely on peers and school resources (such as tutoring centers and instructors) to get help with writing assignments. Once again, instructors could learn a lot from an early in-class survey or autobiographical writing assignment to determine what language students speak at home and whom they turn to for help outside of class.

Adapting to Academic Discourse and Rhetoric

Flower and Hayes (1981) coined the term "cognitive overload" to describe how affective filters (emotional, intellectual, and social) can overwhelm students and consequently hinder comprehension and the composing process (33). In addition, ELLs must constantly interpret information, a process that can exhaust and overwhelm students. Mohammad described the challenge that most ELL students face in college:

> For example, when we go to class we are not same as students who are native speakers, because in our mind, when instructors talk about something, we have to understand. We have to understand it, and translate it to our language because our brain is doing ten processes at the same time.

Mai expressed frustration with instructors who try to make exam questions more difficult, a practice which she feels discriminates against ELLs:

> They like to change it to see if you are able to interpret what they are trying to say to answer it correctly. For us, when we look at the word in the sentence, we have to read it in English, and then switch, interpret into our own, and then try to understand what they are trying to ask, and then put it back into the English.

Specifically in freshman composition, many participants said they felt like the instructors need to do more to tailor the course for ELL students. Vang said:

> In Comp, it seems like the teachers just assume the students are at the same level. The thing is, for many of us, English is our second language. If you ask us to speak, yeah, we can speak, if you ask us to write, yeah, we can write, but if you ask us to do a research paper, for a lot of us, we will struggle because we're not used to that kind of prose where you have to sit down and write ten pages of English. A lot of us can't write ten pages in Hmong, so it's hard enough to write in English.

These descriptions of cognitive overload indicate that ELL students must exert far more energy to produce the same amount of writing as native-English speakers. Given the cognitive gymnastics that some ELL students must perform to translate data and produce drafts, deadlines add yet another affective filter to learning. In some cases, instructors should extend

deadlines to level the playing field for ELLs (Leki, 1992, p. 87; Harris & Silva, 1993). Audrey and Karine said that they appreciated their lab instructors for giving them two more days to complete the writing assignments. They also had an instructor who allowed them to complete their assignments in French; however, until UMD hires a more diverse faculty, most immigrant students will not be able to enjoy this kind of accommodation.

Freshman composition is often students' first exposure to academic rhetoric, and sometimes American conventions and preferences are not compatible with those of other cultures (Harris & Silva, 1993, p. 527). For example, Ramanathan & Kaplan (1996) identify the underlying "tacit" assumptions that ten widely used freshman composition textbooks make about American cultural familiarity. They argue that the "inductive approach…assumes a set of cultural norms that many non-native [English] speakers do not necessarily possess" (23). They suggest that socialization of "essayist literacy" and "free-writing" begins early for American students and can give native-speakers another advantage in composition courses. Though stifling for some native-speaking students, UMD's focus on the claim-support-conclusion five-paragraph argumentative essay may in fact provide ELLs with an effective framework for understanding American rhetorical structures. However, instructors should introduce these forms for what they are: conventions of American discourse, not universal rules for "good writing."

Creating a Fair and Non-threatening Learning Environment

Immigrant students-of-color expressed more emotion in response to my seventh question ("Do you think college writing instructors should adapt any part of the course for students whose first language is not English?") than the Caucasian international students. Most of them said that, while they want more one-on-one support from instructors outside of class, they do not want instructors to draw attention to what makes them different from other students. Sara said that while she sometimes felt frustrated that her instructor assumed she knew the class material, she was glad that he didn't single her out: "If he would

have treated me differently I would have felt that he was dealing with me that way because I am a minority. I would have taken the issue to heart." Pa was also sensitive to this possibility: "At first I was really upset because our first paper [she said] something about our English writing like it's not good, so me and my friend, there were three Hmong girls in there, and it was like she was picking on us." Mohammad gave this advice to instructors:

> You don't want to separate the students. You shouldn't. You need to treat the students the same, I know from experience, I see from the students they just don't want to be labeled, they run away from that label. Otherwise, when you do good things, people don't see the good things. So you might think you're helping the students but the students think, 'Oh no, he is discriminating!' You don't want to put yourself in that spot.

Understanding individual needs and abilities requires getting to know students, and there are several ways to do this: one-on-one conferences, an open-door policy, and assigning an autobiographical essay at the beginning of the semester. In fact, some researchers recommend that composition instructors assign these essays to students to serve as self-evaluative tools to lessen the anxiety associated with grades (Kasper & Petrello, 1998). Their study demonstrates that most of ELL students' anxiety about writing has more to do with assessment than writing itself.

Inevitably, the University values grades, and so do students. Grades provide a way for instructors to communicate expectations, measure progress, provide specific feedback, organize the class (Walvoord & Anderson, 1998). When instructors use the right approach, grades do not have to incite the anxiety associated with competition. Mai gave an excellent example:

> I have some professors who say, 'I expect all of you to get an A,' and that's good because then he's looking at us as individuals. Then you compete against yourself, and then you can help each other, you make friends,

> and you can get over your shyness. Maybe even enough to go talk to the professor!

However, grades can also terminate the writing process and end communication between the instructor and the student. Xiong said: "We didn't get any one-on-one, he was just like, 'Turn in a paper, I'll just grade you.' He just gave back marks and stuff like that. You can't really learn from marks." Xiong said that, instead, he wanted more time to complete his papers, along with one-on-one feedback on how he could improve his drafts. Donald Murray would say that Xiong has the right idea: these elements make students better writers. Instead of grading drafts, Murray holds regular meetings and peer revision workshops to allow students to develop their drafts throughout the semester. He provides limited written feedback and grades papers only after the student has determined the piece is "done" (Murray, 2004, p. 143).

When instructors grade drafts, they take away students' control of the revision process (Leki, 1992, p. 124). Once students relinquish this control, they will cease to care about the writing, and then learning stops. In fact, quantitative research[7] suggests that written corrections do not improve subsequent drafts for ELL students; instead, sustained practice in writing English is the most salient factor to predict improvement (Robb, Ross & Shortreed, 1986, p. 89). This study suggests that if instructors give any written feedback on ELL student papers, they should comment only on "global errors" (which affect meaning) and limit corrections to only one kind of "local" (grammatical) error per paper (94). This will prevent overwhelming the student with red marks, a practice which Xiong said does no good.

Reflection

Of course, such a small qualitative sample does present contradictions and inconclusive evidence, but it also provides a snapshot of a particular group's consciousness in a particular place and time. Based on the comments that I heard repeated throughout the interviews I have arrived at several broad conclusions:

> 1. Though they are often lumped into the same category of "ESL" international and immigrant students

have very different needs and backgrounds. Their motivation to learn English is not easily cut and dried between "instrumental and integrative," meaning that not all international students plan to return to their home country, and not all immigrants want to immerse themselves in mainstream U.S. culture.

2. ELL students want (and say they benefit from) one-on-one support, though they may not seek it out themselves; therefore, instructors should invite students to visit them outside of class or use other methods to facilitate regular one-on-one communication.

3. ELL students do not want to be singled out in class in front of other students, but they are motivated by positive recognition. Instructors may also consider making special arrangements with ELLs who are struggling (i.e.: deadline extensions, more accessible texts, explicit grammar exercises, etc.).

4. Classes of mixed language backgrounds may require special handling. On one hand, ELLs say they learn from native-English speakers, but they are also sensitive to critique from their peers. If they choose to use it, instructors should carefully manage peer revision sessions.

5. ELL students are easily overwhelmed by written corrections and comments. Instructors could help ELLs by focusing first on "global" errors that affect meaning, and by providing additional instruction on systemic errors.

As "gatekeepers" freshman composition instructors bear not only the responsibility of orienting students from every discipline to general academic discourse and research methods; they often need to help students to navigate important college resources, such as the library, tutoring centers, and support services. Given the relatively small class sizes in most freshman comp courses, they may also be the only instructor who knows the student's name in that first year. Though desirable,

one does not need a certificate in ESL to begin to address the needs of ELLs; a little sensitivity can go a long way. By trying to understand students' individual needs and goals, providing information about on-campus resources, maintaining a supportive attitude and an open-door policy, freshman composition instructors have a lot to offer the English Language Learner.

Notes

1. The term English-Language Learners (ELL) describes the students who are learning English in school (Commins and Miramontes, 2005, p. 171); whereas English as a Second Language (ESL) describes programs and classes that focus on language development (p. 172). Many researchers point out that both of these terms lack precision: since many students in these classes are learning English as their third or fourth language; and the ultimate goal for any program is language "acquisition," not "learning." However, given the common use of these terms in current educational research, I will use them throughout this article.

2. According to the UMD website, only 119 international students and 638 "minority" students were registered for classes for Fall, 2005. Most immigrant students (Hmong, Vietnamese, Somalian, Eritrean, and Latin American) probably fall within the minority category, though the exact numbers are impossible to quantify and would not account for ELL immigrants from Eastern Europe or northern Asia. The admissions office does not record the number of students who identify themselves as ELL, nor do all ELL students identify themselves as such; therefore, I can only make a rough estimate that ELL students comprise between 3-4% of the total student body at UMD.

3. Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	First Language	Family Home	Major
Ana	Female	Serbian	Minnesota	Graphic Design
Andre	Male	Russian	Kazakhstan	Computer Engineering
Audrey	Female	French	Montreal, Canada	Education
Coco	Female	Hmong	Minnesota	Sociology
Karen	Female	French	Montreal, Canada	Unknown
Lily	Female	French & Hmong	Unknown	Unknown
Lora	Female	Hmong	Minnesota	Mechanical Engineering
Mai	Female	Hmong	Minnesota	Pre-med
Mohammad	Male	Somali	Minnesota	Business
Nicole	Female	Unknown	Unknown	Education
Pa	Female	Hmong	Minnesota	Elementary Ed
Sara	Female	Somali	Minnesota	Pre-med
Suzannah	Female	German	Zurich, Switzerland	Economics
Vang	Male	Hmong	Minnesota	Political Science
Xiong	Male	Hmong	Minnesota	Criminology

3. Though I have tried to convey participants' natural vernacular, for the sake of clarity I have omitted the colloquial "you knows," "ums," and "likes."

4. After I finished the first full draft I sent a copy to each participant to allow them to see which words I selected from their interview and the context in which I framed them. At that time they could revise their statements, change their pseudonym, or completely withdraw from the study. I was fortunate that none opted to do this, but several did select a pseudonym that better represented their cultural background.

5. Some schools use the acronym PHLOTE for "Primary or Home Language Other Than English" (Commins & Miramontes, 2005, p. 172).

6. Robb, Ross & Shortreed (1986) studied 676 compositions by 134 Japanese college freshman over two semesters and used four different feedback methods. They ranged from overt correction to marginal tabulations which did not indicate the error or its exact location. Using one subjective and 18 objective measures of writing ability, the researchers then tabulated surface-level errors and compared the quantitative data

between the four feedback groups. They found that while the overt correction group showed improvements in surface structure in the second drafts, after a hiatus, the third and fourth compositions reverted back to the same errors. At the end of the study, the surface structure accuracy in the overt correction group was no better than the marginal tabulation group (88). The researchers concluded that written feedback has little to no effect on long-term improvement in ELL writing.

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"Meant to be read out loud: Building Bridges to Each Other, the Text, and the World Through Story Telling"

Melissa Castino Reid

"The formula is simple, and it's reduced to four words every kid in the world knows:
Tell me a story. It's that easy."
- Don Hewitt, discussing the secret of the successful show, "60 Minutes"

When I was a kid, my grandmother would read the Hoosier poet James Whitcomb Riley out loud to my brother and me. I can recall the plastic feet of my pajamas making a crunching sound as I got settled in to listen. Stories of Little Orphan Annie and the Raggedy Man filled my imagination with vivid images while the sound of my grandmother's voice gave me peace and lulled me to a good night's sleep. I can recall my father, brother and I as we read from Richard Scarry's *Illustrated Dictionary*. Each page had two columns of words; my brother and I chose a new vocabulary tower each night. I remember getting lost in the very busy, busy pictures that Scarry drew. As an adult, I also have a recollection of driving up to the North Shore, with my boyfriend (now husband) in the passenger seat as he read the opening chapters of *A Winter's Tale* by Mark Helprin, a book recently named one of the top 10 books of the last 25 years in the NY Times.

Reading out loud is an important intellectual activity that allows both the reader and the listener(s) to connect to a

shared text, but it also has a vital role in multiple educational settings. Margaret Atwood says it best: "Our first stories come to us through the air. We hear voices. […] From listening to the stories of others, we learn to tell our own" (71-79). Furthermore, reading out loud permits the reader and listener to use their imaginations, an essential tool that leads to making knowledge, improving reading comprehension, problem solving and cognitive development. In Ron Norman's article titled "Cultivating Imagination in Adult Education," he discusses the philosophy of the narrative in our lives as individuals:

> 'We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and live by narrative.' The development of the 'narrative concern' is, arguably, educationally relevant to any teaching practice. (By narrative, I don't mean fictional narrative, but rather the narrative shaping of content).

I believe students *of all ages* should be given ample opportunity to use their imaginations. Why? Because the power of the imagination leads us to both stronger problem solving skills (professionally and personally) as well as improved cognitive development in how we see ourselves and each other.

Walter R. Fisher's chapter titled "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm" provides a strong foundation of rhetorical composition theory for this assignment. Fisher believes in the notion that humans are "in actions and practice, as well as in [their] fictions, essentially storytelling animals" (375). Since this project has storytelling at its core, it allows humans to be the animals in this narrative paradigm, proposed by Fisher. Welcome to the zoo!

Keep in mind that I have not just opened the zookeeper's gates to the animals-as-storytellers; I have asked the "animals" to read stories out loud to another person of their choosing. In doing so, the assignment not only brings out both the writer's and listener's stories, but it also deepens reading comprehension and literacy through the power of the imagination; all are important parts of the composition process. For me, all of this led to the fol-

lowing question: since reading out loud and telling stories are so important, how can I incorporate both into my *writing* classes?

As a community college writing instructor in downtown Minneapolis, I challenged myself to create a writing assignment package for my students that integrated the concepts of reading out loud and/or storytelling. In a nutshell, I have asked my students to connect with a person outside of class and read a nonfiction story from our textbook out loud to them. My students are then required to ask questions of their listener and report that conversation back to me in the form of a four-page paper.

Several things prompted the creation of the assignment. First of all, I was getting tired of the age-old narrative essay. How many times must I read about my students' first drive, date, day of school, or trip to Disneyland? Secondly, I wanted to create an early assignment for my multicultural classroom that was accessible for all students. In any given class, I may have students from Somalia, the south side of Chicago or across the river in St. Paul. As I walk the halls of this school, I hear over 80 languages spoken. My composition classes are full of various races, socioeconomic backgrounds, ages, genders and their preferences, cultures and religious/spiritual representations. This [read out loud] assignment presents a blank canvas for a colorful mosaic of human experiences, and no one is left unchanged. Besides telling stories and reading them out loud, this assignment embodies a common goal in my classes: to reach all students "where they are" in terms of writing, reading comprehension, and critical thinking.

I do believe in the power of storytelling. I tell stories to my students about my journey into reading, learning, critical thinking and, most definitely, my writing process as well as stories about my family, my partnership with my husband, and teaching moments. After all, here in Minnesota, storytelling is a part of our culture as we tell tall tales of the fish that got away. Look no further than our own Garrison Keillor and his protégé Kevin Kling; for these two men, storytelling is an oral tradition that is anchored in our humanity. But the practice of sharing narratives is worldwide, and my student body at this community college reflects that global community.

Since telling stories is universal, it is a natural fit in a multicultural classroom. In the anthology *Seeding The Process Of A Multicultural Education*, Gene-Tey Shin advocates for this in a chapter titled, "Growing Stories":

> [W]e decide to continue to tell our stories, and what's more, we decide to make them as much a part of the course as the books we read. […] [O]ur stories are a part of who we are, not just as individuals outside of the school, but in our lives as students and teachers inside the school as well. […] This need strikes me as so powerful that I make the writing of personal stories part of every class I teach. We write about our families, our histories, meals which represented friendship, the first time we realized we had racial identities, what it means to be a person, and suddenly English is not an imposition on life; it is life. (14-15)

By allowing our students to read out loud, write and tell stories, we come to learn and know more about each other and ourselves. My students classify themselves as part of a family, local community or citizen of the world, and they share those findings daily in our classroom as well as with their chosen listener. When we tell our stories as equals in a diverse setting, we transform each other – teachers and students - culturally, spiritually and educationally. To achieve this transformation, I ask students to read narratives out loud to another person.

The assignment, step by step:

1. In class, we read and discuss the narrative stories found in our textbook, *St. Martin's Guide to Writing*. I let students choose from chapters called "Remembered Events," "Remembered Person" and "Profiles." Maya Angelou, Annie Dillard and Rick Bragg are just some of the authors included in these chapters. Students have a nice variety of stories from which to choose: a tomboy and her male peers throwing snowballs at passing cars; a "phenomenal woman" remembering an African American uncle who had a physical deformity; a Chinese American

daughter who defends her own disciplinarian mother's concept of love; a young man getting into a serious auto accident and walking away unscathed; and a student profiling a funeral home.

2. Students choose a story that they like from the three chapters. I want them to reflect on why and how they connect to the text. This can be done through discussion or free writing or both.

3. Students then choose a person outside of class with whom they have a collegial or close relationship. They will read out loud their chosen story from *St. Martin's Guide to Writing* to this person. (I did challenge any brave souls to read a story out loud to a complete stranger. One student did so and found her listener in a pool hall. Instead of 'trouble right here in River City,' it led to an enjoyable, well written essay about stories and chance connections between two pool playing enthusiasts.)

4. After they've selected a listener and a story, the student must create a list of at least five (or more) questions that connect to the story and begin a dialogue between writer and listener. Although I encourage them to create their own questions, I provide them with the following list of examples:

- What did the story make you think about or remind you of? Do you have a story to tell me?
- What image or metaphor sticks out the most and why?
- Why is reading so important? Did anyone ever read out loud to you? If yes, describe the experience.

5. Armed with a list a questions and a story to read out loud, students make an appointment with their reader. At the meeting of the student and listener, the story is read out loud. Afterwards, the student asks their listener the list of questions and records their answers.

Because this is such a diverse group of students, my hope is that students in my class experience any of the following things:

- The listener provides a set of compelling and engaging answers to my student's questions.
- The listener recalls a story, perhaps more than one, directly connected to the one read out loud.

- The student, either by way of hearing a story from the listener or just by reading the text, conjures up a story, or two, on their own.
- Or, all of the above happens in large or small ways.

The resulting paper should contain stories, dialogue, analysis, and process. As I have done this for two semesters (a total of four separate classes), the preliminary results have been varied, interesting and engaging. Furthermore, I can't wait to read them! Once the majority of my students get over the shock of the assignment, (*I have to do what? Read a story…out loud? To someone else?),* their fright transforms into a flurry of fun.

This comprehensive assignment package contains several positive pedagogical elements. In addition to Walter Fisher's concept of the narrative paradigm, it has unique active learning strategies: students read out loud, hold interviews and record their conversations. The assignment is also a nice precursor to the research paper (the next essay in my class) as they must put direct quotations into their essays. I'll also argue that this assignment helps the students for whom English is not their primary language. It also creates an opportunity for students to explore their identity in a variety of ways. For example, one of my African American students, Bonita, read out loud to a colleague at work the essay by Amy Wu about her mother's discipline techniques. In her paper, Bonita examined how she was brought up and compared that to Wu's experience as well as her listener's viewpoints of the parent/child relationship.

Finally, *A Learning College for the 21st Century* points out the secret that many educators already know: "Intelligence [is not] a single and simple measure of competence […] these multiple intelligences combine differently in different people, and each individual has generally developed some of the intelligences more than others" (O'Banion 85-86). Nevertheless, the bottom line for me is this: the process for both student and teacher is a whole lot of (dare I say it?) fun. Frankly, I'm always open to enlightening methods of assessment that are achievable, easier to measure, and much more transparent for both students and teachers.

The results – stories of students' assignments

The first time I tried this assignment was in my Short Story class, taught in the spring of 2005. Instead of a multiple choice, fill in the blank midterm and final, I offered this brand new project. One student, Joy, recounted an emotional exchange as she read the Margaret Atwood short story "Happy Endings" over the phone to her younger sister. Joy shared how the ten year gap between them meant they weren't close. But for a fleeting moment, while reading out loud to her on the phone, the gap between them dissolved, and the story operated as a bridge. Joy also heard a young woman, not a little girl, on the phone, especially in the mature answers to Joy's questions about love, stories and the author's challenge to all writers' conventions of characters, plot, strong beginnings, and so-called "happy" endings.

Another student, Eoin, read Haruki Murakami's "On Seeing the 100% Perfect Girl One Beautiful Spring Morning" to Rachel, a female friend. After Eoin read the story out loud, Rachel "literally accosted [him] with a myriad of insults and swear words; [Eoin knew] the girl for some time and had never shared the story with her. She had said that, knowing her background, why on earth [had Eoin] not told her about [the story] sooner." In the final analysis, Eoin reported: "I felt that reading this story both helped my understanding of the book, having someone like her who has analyzed classic writers extensively, made it easy for her to expose points I had yet to think of. It also made for an enjoyable experience because she loved the story so much." By reading Murimaki's story out loud to a friend, Eoin was forced to look at a favorite author's work through his listener's ears and eyes, seeing elements in the story he hadn't before. I realized I was onto something good with Eoin's illuminating essay.

The next time I assigned this package was this past spring of 2006. After my trial run of the assignment for the short story class, I clarified some of the outcomes so that it would fit a narrative essay often found in a standard composition course. For example, I offered more freedom to share stories that surfaced, I required a clear summary of the story they chose, and I encouraged a fun, brief, and detailed description of their listener. Then, I gave

this project to my College English I classes as their second paper of four in the semester. Here's the formula students must follow:

- Tell who your listener is by giving us a very brief bio and tell us why you chose this person. (1-2 paragraphs) The students get to use description as they "show" us their listener. I ask students to choose someone outside of class, perhaps a relative, spouse, mate or a good friend or co-worker. I want the students to interact with someone who (they think) will offer keen insights and interesting stories.
- Tell me the title and author of the story you chose to read out loud and explain why you chose it. Include a BRIEF summary of the story. (1-2 paragraphs)
- List the five or more questions that you asked your listener.
- Give a **summary and analysis** of **your conversation** of the story. Tell us what you agree/disagree with. Tell us if your listener surprised you in some way. Tell me if you surprised them in some way with some fact or quote about the writer of the story.
- If a story emerges in the conversation from either you or the listener, feel free to share it.
- The paper also must follow the standard conventions of a good intro, thesis, body and conclusion.

I also insisted on at least three direct quotations from their listener. I discovered this is a terrific way to introduce quoting an outside resource – and a live one at that! In addition, this activity engages critical thinking as the writer decides whether (or not) they agree with the listener's answers to the questions. All of these elements prepare the students for the research paper, which is assigned right after this one.

And I don't want to forget the fun of hearing, sharing, writing and/or telling a story. Kenny, a student in my evening class, read Annie Dillard's excerpt from her novel *An American Childhood* to a woman he's been dating. Kenny's admission that he learned something new about his listener dem-

onstrates a revealing aspect of this assignment: he writes of how Kellie, the listener, threw rocks at cars instead of snowballs. In response, Kenny wrote about his childhood, running through the farm fields, snatching ears of corn and lobbing them at semis as they blasted down the lonely, country highway:

> We started gathering up our ammo when we came to the end of the field. Our ammo was corn cobs broke in half. In between the end of the field and Highway 95 is a row of tall pine trees. We would have to arch our throw to get at the cars and trucks that passed on the highway. We were out of sight of the passing drivers, but we had a clear view of them as they sped past us. This was not a game of getting away with something, but it was a game of skill and timing. Somehow in the midst of all this, I felt like a grown-up. I actually felt on a level playing field, if not more superior because I felt that we had the upper hand because they couldn't see us.

These stories prompted humor, surprising connections and a stellar paper that reports the conversations between Kellie and Kenny as well as the stories they tell. Plus, the assignment drew them closer together as a couple:

> Now Kellie is aware of something about me that if I hadn't read her the story, 'An American Childhood.'… I love the idea reading to Kellie more often. It has been a bonding experience for the two of us. We both agree that if we have children of our own, we will read to them every night. Whether the story or book is good, it still is a great conversation piece. By reading to each other, our communication skills have improved and it has been a great pastime for the two of us. It has been a great way for us to get to know each other better.

Through the act of reading out loud, this kind of critical reflection shows us that my student has opened doors that might

ordinarily have remained closed had they opted for television programs.

Another student from the same evening class, Rachel, read to her mother "The Last Stop" by student writer Brian Cable. The essay profiles a funeral home with offbeat humor, realism and objectivity. As mother and daughter sat at the kitchen table, they found themselves in a deep discussion about death, cremation, and viewing the body. The exchange prompted this from Rachel's mom: "Most people, when they have deep conversations and personal sharing, they become enlightened and learn about the viewpoints they didn't realize the other person had." Here, Rachel describes how her mom didn't want this special time to end and asked her daughter to continue when they hit a lull in the conversation:

> 'Are you done with me?' says Mom, somewhat sadly.
> 'Do you wanna be done?'
> 'Not really. This is interesting.'
> 'Well, we can keep going then.' And we do.

In my Saturday morning class, another student (also named Rachel) wrote about reading the same essay, "The Last Stop," to her mom also. For this Rachel and her mom, it was a chance for both to heal from the loss of Rachel's maternal grandmother. My student concludes her essay with this line: "Reading 'Last Stop' out loud to my mother clarified the moments of my grandmother's death for me. It forced us to share more about that time as friends without the complicated mother/daughter stuff." In both these cases, Fisher's notion of narration as a vehicle of self-actualization applies, for he believes "good reasons are the stuff of stories, the means by which humans realize their nature as reason-valuing animals… [t]he philosophical ground of the narrative is ontology" (383). When both students sat down with their mothers to read the essay about the funeral home, each had profound conversations about death and dying, found deep connections with their mothers, and came to know more about themselves and each other.

Another essay that was read out loud often was Amy

Wu's essay, "Some Kind of Mother." In the story, Amy, a Chinese American daughter, writes respectfully of her strict but loving mother, even after she spanks Amy in front of family and friends just for saying out loud she didn't like her mom's cooking. One of my students, Bonita, shared how she related to this essay: "In the African American culture, around the 70's or 80's, you got beatings anywhere or anytime. My mother came to my junior high school and hit me in front of the school social worker, or my friends." Bonita read Wu's piece out loud to her friend and coworker, Doris, who defended the disciplinary action: "Amy's mother had Amy's best interest at heart, she wanted Amy to be respectful. My mother did some of the same things, she showed her love in a way that I didn't think she loved me." Both students looked at the essay with a shared experience and perspective, deepening their connection to the story and one another.

With a student like Bonita, this assignment engaged her from the start, and she concluded the paper with thoughts on the acts of reading and writing: "Reflecting on the assignment, I thought about my own reading style. How I learned to read and what I enjoy reading. I am not a reader of everything […] this assignment reminded me that […] I needed to relate to something before I write about it." So reading out loud and writing about it promotes literacy. For me, this answers the plea of late Canadian critic and Professor Northrop Frye to all instructors: "A teacher's task is to transform a passive literacy into active post literacy, with the responsibility and freedom of that choice that is part of any world we would want to live in" (18). After giving this assignment to Bonita, I believe that she will more than likely read out loud to other adults too, thereby participating in an "active post literacy" community. Reading out loud permits students to reach this point of metacognitive development through the critical act of reflection.

Kelly Gallagher argues for this in a chapter titled "Leading Students into Meaningful Reflection":

> Reflection begins with the self, and this is the level of reflection [students] are most comfortable with. When students are read-

> ing a book, they naturally ask themselves, "What does this text mean to me?" But we want them to move beyond the self and into deeper levels of reflection. […] It is this quest to recognize our commonalities, to move beyond 'trite' thinking, to develop a deeper understanding of what it means to be a human being that we seek to develop in our students. In doing so, we are preparing them for the critical issues of adulthood. (157-158)

While Gallagher wrote the book *Deeper Reading* primarily for teachers of grades 4-12, the same literacy challenges exist with my students at the community college level even though most of them are, indeed, adults. However, getting students of all ages past "the self and into deeper levels of reflection" is a worthy goal. So when I assign this read-it-out-loud project, I send my students on a journey beginning with self, moving outward to family, peers, community, country, cruising to humankind, all in one trip (Gallagher 158).

As I mentioned earlier, I work in an inner city community college where 80 different languages are spoken. While this assignment gives the *native* English speaker reasons to resist it, (e.g. *Oh Melissa, I just can't stand the sound of my voice. Who would want <u>me</u> to read anything out loud to them?)* I can only imagine what this does to the ESL students. Yes, reading English, or any language for that matter, out loud can be a frightening experience. But I would argue that since all my students get to pick who their listener is, they create "safe zones" in which to complete the assignment. Take Hamdi Omar, a student from Somalia, as she recounts her experience of reading out loud to a group of American and Somali friends: "I read the story aloud for them, but reading this story was not easy for me. At first, I felt so nervous and shaky, my hands and my face were sweating, but after I read half of the story, I became calm." This kind of shift from "shaky" to "calm" is a common realization among *all* my students. In fact, when I read out loud to my parents, I had the same experience that Hamdi did, and English is my primary language.

Here's what another ESL student, Lyna Xiong, said about her experience: "Now I notice that to read [out loud] to others helps me to understand the people's levels [of understanding] and teaches me to know how to adjust my voice. […] The more I read the more I become comfortable with others [listening]." Clearly, ESL students will benefit from this assignment, as frightening as it may seem.

Jim Cummins, a leader in secondary language acquisition and literacy development, penned the acronyms BICS and CALP, and I like these definitions:

> **Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills** - the language ability required for face-to-face communication where linguistic interactions are embedded in a situational context. **Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency** – the language ability required for academic achievement in a context related environment. ("Ask an Expert")

It is my belief that this read-out-loud project combines BICS and CALP in an effective way for all ESL/ELL students. As they read stories out-loud, they practice linguistic communication while strengthening their academic achievement in one assignment:

> The research is clear that a combination of explicit development of language awareness (in this case phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle), together with socialization or immersion of students into the world of books, works better for most students than an emphasis on either phonics alone or reading meaningful text alone. ("Interview with Jim Cummins")

So, for the student not fluent in English, reading a story out loud to a person of their own choosing will benefit them both in terms of language awareness *and* the interaction of the listener.

Applying this assignment outside of my class

This assignment has potential in writing across the cur-

riculum programs, at the college level, as well as for our 5th - 12th graders. I discovered a nursing degree program that required storytelling as a large part of its successful curriculum. Imagine a political science class reading out loud either current news articles or chapters from recommended reading lists to a family member or friend. Teachers can adopt this as a service-learning project, whereby students read stories out loud to senior citizens, veterans, or even a blind or deaf person.

And I have no doubt that this assignment would be appropriate, engaging and enlightening for students in grades 5th - 12th grade. My writing group colleague, Lois Williams, a reading specialist out of Cottage Grove, mentioned to me that her 5th grade students are paired with elderly residents in a nearby senior housing complex. The students interview their subjects, write up the interview and then go back and read the finished product out loud to the stars of the paper. What a thrill for both the writer and listener!

Another one of my colleagues, Dawn, has her 10th grade students reading "The Things They Carried," a creative nonfiction series of war stories by Tim O'Brien. If Dawn pairs her students with Vietnam Vets or even our current military personnel, recently home from Iraq, what kind of conversations, stories, and perspectives might surface? If offered, Dawn's students get an assignment that potentially leaves a lifelong impression.

Final thoughts

In an age of too much technology and distractions, I'm asking my students to turn down their ipods, switch off the television and power down the cell phone, grab a book with a family member, friend or loved one, and read stories out loud to one another. When they do this, the results are clear. Students will:

- Call upon the imagination, a profound tool for critical thinking and problem solving which opens doors to making meaning and knowledge.
- Create memorable essays for themselves and the instructor.
- Connect to a text in a profound, personal and possibly surprising way.
- Communicate and share stories inspired by the

ones read out loud.

• Discover the author's purpose, language choices, description, and storytelling and apply it to their own writing.

• Quote and respond to an outside, primary source.

The bottom line is that students enjoy composing these essays, teachers will look forward to reading them, and individual lives, both inside and outside of class, are transformed in profound and positive ways. All of this stems from answering a simple request: *Tell me a story.*

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Concurrent Revision: How Inexperienced Writers Frustrate the Writing Process

William J. Martin

Selecting a topic to write about can be a frustrating experience for many writers.[1] If anything, the advice proffered to students in writing handbooks has made me more sensitive to the problems that less experienced writers often encounter whenever they are expected to develop their essays with a minimum of outside intervention. When I decided to monitor more closely the steps my students actually took in planning their essays (beginning with the initial stage of generating brainstorming lists of potential subjects through the author's more elaborate plans for collecting, organizing, and developing information into a coherent first draft), the results, especially for those students who struggled with the challenge of developing a subject on their own, were enlightening.

For many inexperienced writers, the process of developing a subject took more time and was more involved and complex than I had previously imagined. Virtually all composition handbooks emphasize the importance of a carefully planned pre-writing strategy to help students formulate their ideas. Ideally, pre-writing strategies should provide the student with an opportunity to focus a response around his own interests within a specific subject area and, typically, to direct that response to a specific audience, very often his peers in the writing class.

With these strategies in mind, I invited my students to write an essay on some aspect of their family traditions. Before

they got started on their essays, I shared with them an article published in the local newspaper by a nationally syndicated columnist who nostalgically had recollected his own family's traditional Sunday dinners during the Great Depression. What struck readers so forcefully about the essay is the ordinariness of the experience which the author chose to write about. I could not imagine that those Sunday dinners seemed very significant when the author, then a boy living on a small farm in rural Illinois, originally experienced them. Viewed from a perspective many decades later, however, events flooded his recollection of those Sunday dinners as a significant part of his struggle during the Depression and, for himself, an essential aspect of his growing up years.

Following our discussion of this article, students compiled brainstorming lists of various family traditions which they believed might provide an interesting experience for their own essays. What follows, then, is a case study which documents one student's essay as she struggled with her initial attempts to define a topic that was meaningful to her. The initial brainstorming list, which took only a few minutes of class time to prepare, is fairly representative of the type and number of experiences compiled by her peers. (All samples of student writing are reproduced in italics and include extraneous lapses in conventional spelling and syntax.)

Brainstorming List

1. Grandma over for Xmas dinner
2. Ordering out piazza on Xmas Eve
3. Sunday dinners
4. Watching late night movies and talking
5. Turkey sandwiches on Christmas night
6. Decorating the Christmas tree together
7. The traditional first jump in the pool
8. the yearly family portrait
9. Santa Claus calling on Christmas
10. decorating Xmas cookies together
11. Easter breakfast
12. Easter dinner at Grandma's
13. Family book to the oldest
14. School shopping

15. Birthday parties relatives
16. Collecting for the telethon

The first thing to notice about the brainstorming list is that it reveals a curious circularity which is typical of the initial attempt by most writers to identify or discover a subject. This circularity reflects the active mind of a writer hovering around a subject, trying to discover its potential meaning. Of the sixteen items which comprise the list, six of them focus broadly on the same subject (Christmas), while two other items focus on a similar topic (Easter). Of the eight remaining items, each raises separately the prospect of a distinct topic unrelated to any other potential subject. Given the preponderance of items dealing with a single topic (Christmas), it appears, as expected, that the writer has successfully identified an appropriate subject to write about in the very process of generating the brainstorming list.

Nor should it be surprising, then, that the student initially selected Christmas as the subject of her personal essay, and claimed that its focus (that is, the meaning she hoped her audience would discover after reading it) would express the notion—in her own words—that "the Christmas of yesterday is no longer the Christmas of today." With at least six pieces of information relating broadly to the same subject, and with a potential focus in place to help give shape to her essay, she produced an outline which provided a sense of direction to her writing and identified potential areas for further development.

Outline

A. Decorating Xmas cookies together
   —two days before Xmas
   —all the family
   —jokes and laughter
   —no jokes, no laughter
   —only mom and me
B. Xmas Eve
   1. Decorating the Xmas tree
      —all the family
      —green tree
      —colorful tree

—just mom, dad, and me
—ornaments from years gone by
—Christmas Carols

2. Xmas Eve dinner
—pizza (ordered out) with chicken wings
—the whole family
—Christmas Carols
—cold ham sandwiches
—just mom, dad, and me
—heavy metal music

3. Wrapping presents
—parents room
—take turns
—everyone helps each other
—already wrapped
—wrapping in my own room

C. Xmas day
—up early
—up at 11:00
—grandma over for dinner
—not this year, grandma over at uncle's
—Christmas Carols
—over to boyfriends house for dinner

The outline adheres to a fairly rigid chronological development, with the events the student has chosen to write about beginning "two days before Xmas" (with the decoration of the Christmas cookies), proceeding to "Xmas Eve" (involving the decoration of the Christmas tree and traditional family dinner, a rather informal affair consisting of "pizza ordered out") and concluding on "Xmas day" (with "grandma over for dinner"). The contemplation of Grandma's visit, so typical, we must assume, of previous Christmas celebrations, strikes a discordant reminder that "this year, grandma [will be] over at uncle's." Other temporal indicators indicate that Christmas Day activities will get the author "up early," which to this student writer means "up at 11:00" in the morning!

Analyzing the writer's thoughts, we once again no-

tice some of the same circularity typical of the original brainstorming list repeated this time on the subject outline. Phrases such as "all the family," "the whole family," and "just mom, dad, and me" appear throughout several sections of the outline and underscore the familial aspect of the Christmas celebration. Several items relate to food ("pizza," "chicken wings," "cold ham sandwiches," and "Christmas cookies") or decorations ("green tree," "colorful tree," "ornaments from years gone by"), or activities ("baking cookies," "decorating the christmas tree," "wrapping presents," and "singing carols") normally associated with holiday festivities. The notation "Christmas carols" appears in three different contexts and, surprisingly, is juxtaposed in one other context with a reference to "heavy metal music," which perhaps more accurately expresses the author's real musical preference even at this time of year. Its inclusion excites a sense of curiosity among prospective readers who almost surely will want to discover how heavy metal music contributes to the author's appreciation of Christmas Eve dinner.

Some of the items listed on the outline also suggest contradictions which presumably the author will resolve in her essay. While the family decorates Christmas cookies together, for example, there is time for "jokes and laughter," but the very next notation states "no jokes, no laughter." What accounts, we wonder, for the changed atmosphere? Likewise, it would appear that decorating cookies is an activity in which "all the family" engages, but three items later there is the cryptic reminder that "only mom and me" (Dad is excluded) share at least one activity together, but which one? Wrapping presents in her "parents' room" is a family ritual, with "everyone taking turns, helping each other," though it is interesting to note that some presents are "already wrapped" (surely her own) while still other "wrapping [goes on] in my own room" because these gifts no doubt include presents for her parents.

Further analysis of the outline suggests at least two potential hazards even before the author has begun writing her essay. The outline itself is fairly non-descript. There does not seem to be a single item on it (with the possible exception of

the allusion to heavy metal music) which one would not expect to find on outlines of this subject written by any other student in class. There is nothing unique, in other words, nothing special or potentially surprising to set apart this writer's experience from that of her peers. Moreover, there does not appear to be a distinct relationship between individual items on the outline and the writer's previously stated focus, namely that "the Christmas of yesterday is no longer the Christmas of today." The stated focus implies that the writer will compare her present expectation of Christmas with her past experiences. The recollection of her childhood experiences at Christmas recalled from a more mature perspective years later could provide a powerful focus for her essay. In comparing these two perspectives, what potential meaning might the writer discover? The outline, regrettably, does not provide even the slightest clue.

In developing the initial draft of her essay, the student made three attempts at developing an appropriate lead paragraph under the title she had selected for her essay.

Modern Christmas

1. Yesterday, the snow fell softly. Each individual flake taking its time drifting from the sky to the ground. However, today the snow just fell.
2. In past years, the snow covered the snow like a quilt. Each new flake was an additional stitch in the quilt.
3. In past years, the snow drifted softly from the sky. Each flake was another stitch in the thick, white quilt which covered the earth. It was as if heaven had fallen upon the earth. Presently, though, snow just fell.

The title itself suggests that the writer is conscious of her essay's original aim or purpose; the idea that a "modern Christmas" is somehow significantly different from her past experiences provides at least a tentative focus for the opening paragraph. The contrast between past and present is indicated by key words or phrases: "yesterday," "today," "in past years," and "presently." In addition, the writer's use of description constitutes a potentially

effective approach to attract the reader's interest in her subject.

However, the recursive pattern of the three initial attempts at creating a descriptive setting in the opening paragraph also suggests that the author is dissatisfied with the expression she has given to her thoughts. She abandons her first attempt at developing an effective lead paragraph after writing only three sentences. Her second attempt involves the use of more figurative language: the simile, "the snow covered the earth like a quilt," is imaginative, but here too the thought abruptly breaks off following the assertion that "each new flake was an additional stitch in the quilt."

The third version of the lead paragraph is the most promising. It integrates the essay's implicit focus (the contrast between Christmas past and present) within the more descriptive context of the revised simile ("the earth is like a quilt"). The author combines the two separate sentences in her second lead paragraph into the single statement: "each flake was another stitch in the thick, white quilt which had covered the earth." Nevertheless, the paragraph ends with a hint of disappointment: "presently, though, snow just fell."

The next series of notations in the student's manuscript indicates that she has undertaken an entirely different approach to her essay and has added a new title.

Christmas Present

1. Tis the Season to be Jolly had fallen upon
2. The Spirit of Christmas Past invaded my dreams one cozy December night, two days before
3. Outside the snow drifted softly from the sky adding another
4. With each falling flake, another stitch was added to the thick white quilt which covered the earth. I slept soundly inside surrounded by warmth, while inside my mind the Spirit of Christmas Past invaded my dreams.

These four attempts at developing a new lead paragraph for her essay reveal that the author has switched from description to personal narration in her attempt to generate a more effective opening paragraph. Once again, however, a recursive pattern of

development undercuts the narrative flow of the essay. In essence, the clipped, unfinished sentences reveal a writer who already is mentally revising her writing even before she has had an opportunity to complete her thoughts and record them on paper.

With seven frustrating attempts at developing a lead paragraph already behind her, the student made yet another attempt to begin her essay. In formulating this latest attempt, she decided to retain her title, "Christmas Present," and the last two sentences of her previous draft (number 7).

Christmas Present

1. With each falling flake another stitch was added to the thick white quilt which covered the earth. I slept soundly inside surrounded by warmth, while the Spirit of Christmas Past invaded my dreams.
2. It could have been any year, for every year was the same.
3. A heavenly aroma which engulfed my nostrils.
4. The inflaming of my nostrils by a heavenly aroma carried
5. My nostrils awakened me to a heavenly aroma which carried me from my bed into the kitchen.

The student's handwritten manuscript indicates that she made an editorial deletion in the second sentence (leaving out the phrase "inside my mind") before she added four new sentences to round out her opening paragraph. However, three of the additional sentences contain revisions of a similar idea: that on Christmas morning the author was awakened by the aroma of her mother's cooking. Even more significant is the fact that two of these three revisions involve sentence fragments which occur in the manuscript, we must surmise, because the author was already revising her thoughts before she had fully committed them to paper.

Recursive writing of this kind is commonplace among inexperienced writers. While a more experienced writer would continue to express his thoughts and, only after they have been developed at some length, return to revise and clarify them, the less experienced writer will often attempt to revise his thoughts immediately after he commits his ideas to paper.

Invariably, the result is almost always an unfinished, fragmentary, and incomplete draft characterized by concurrent revision.

Concurrent revision constitutes a form of writer's block which effectively prevents an author from developing even the most rudimentary initial draft.[2] In this student's essay, twelve separate attempts at developing the lead paragraph to her essay ended without a single completed paragraph being written. At the same time, ironically, these failed attempts reveal several sophisticated approaches to the writing task. The switch from description to narration, the use of figurative language, and the contrast between past and present ordinarily would provide a sufficient stimulus for more experienced writers to develop an initial draft of their essay.

Moreover, experienced writers are more likely to express their thoughts without experiencing a concurrent need to revise them. Less experienced writers, in contrast, unrealistically expect their initial written expression to be close to perfection and, consequently, they tend to revise their writing at the same time their thoughts are being expressed. In the latter instance, the compulsion to revise writing the instant it is generated literally usurps the ability of the writer to express himself coherently. Writing either comes to a standstill or aimlessly circles on the same point as the writer tries to "get it right" by revising, rather than developing, his ideas.

Certainly this pattern of recursive writing is illustrated in the case study. The development of the student's ideas comes to a virtual standstill as she attempts on twelve distinct occasions to revise her thoughts about the significance of Christmas even **before** she has succeeded in developing an extensive analysis of her subject or committed any of her ideas to paper. It is also interesting to recall that the student previously had prepared an outline of her essay during a pre-writing exercise. Despite the existence of a fairly detailed sketch of the direction her essay should have taken, the author still experienced difficulty writing a draft that moves the reader beyond the opening paragraph.

One can sense in the twelve futile attempts at developing the lead paragraph of her essay a desperation that, on occasion, confronts even the best writers. With inexperienced writers,

however, the pattern of recurrent revision clearly undermines the writing process and renders impossible any attempt to develop even the most basic idea. The writing process stalls as the writer repeatedly revises a text that he has not even written yet because of the compulsion to express himself perfectly in his initial draft. The irony is that, in any instance involving a pattern of concurrent revision, the writer is so busy thinking about **how** to express himself that he never manages to convey **what** he intended to say in the first place. In other words, writing never proceeds beyond the most rudimentary context because of the repeated attempts of the inexperienced writer to delay developing the text while he revises what little writing he has managed to commit to paper.

The result is obvious and predictable: confronted with a draft that goes nowhere, the writer becomes frustrated with the writing task and his own failure to communicate his ideas effectively. More long-lasting and damaging to his self-confidence as a writer is the tendency to lapse into a pattern of concurrent revision **whenever** a situation demands written communication. Needless to say, students who lapse into a pattern of concurrent revision whenever they attempt to generate written texts need to become aware of their tendency toward premature revision.

During the first of two writing conferences I had with this student, we discussed the recurrent pattern of her writing that was suggested by her twelve attempts at developing an opening paragraph. When I asked her why she tended to break off her thoughts before she had completely expressed herself, she replied that she wanted to make sure that her story sounded right. "I keep writing over and over," she explained, "until I think I've come up with the right words, the right way of saying things." When I suggested that it was her desire to achieve perfection with her first draft that probably led her to constantly revise her thoughts, she appeared surprised at first, but then admitted that she had always struggled with writing assignments because she never was satisfied with the way she expressed herself.

I surmised that this student's distaste for writing could be traced to her constant need to revise her thoughts and the subsequent frustration she experienced when she discovered

that she was not making much progress in completing the writing assignment. At this point I recommended that she try once again to complete a draft of her essay, but I cautioned her that once she began to write, she shouldn't stop to revise her ideas or worry about how she expressed herself. Then, in one of those delightful twists that often occur in writing conferences, the student asked me if she could change her subject. "After so many false starts," she pleaded, "I'm tired of this topic."

We turned our attention to her original brainstorming list of sixteen topics. The last item on her list, "Collecting for the Telethon," caught her attention, and she agreed to begin a new essay on this topic. I wanted to see her initial draft by next class, however, and I again cautioned her against writing her essay and revising it concurrently. "Revision comes later," I explained, "once you've developed your initial draft."

During our second writing conference, the student brought me what at first appeared to be three unpromising attempts at developing this new essay. The first passage consisted of a single sentence ("*In the heat of early September, eight feet pounded the scorching hot pavement*") which she had scratched out in her notebook before she reverted to her accustomed habit of revising what she had already written. Her second attempt was a full paragraph, however. *"Every year, up until I was fourteen, I would find myself, along with my two sisters and the girl next door, pounding the scorching hot pavement in the heat of early September. In our hands we carried metal cans with a picture of Jerry Lewis and his kids on them. We listened joyfully to the music being created by the jingling of the coins. All day we would knock on doors. Sometimes our knuckles would start to bleed. By the end of the day, we would find ourselves standing outside of the grocery store by our house. The final event would be the counting of the money by my mother."*

Dissatisfied with what she had written thus far, the student then crossed out this passage and began writing her third attempt at an opening paragraph for her new essay. *"Every year, in the heat of early September, my sisters, the girl next door, and I would set out on the Saturday afternoon of Labor*

Day Weekend carrying metal cans. On the cans were written the words, 'Help Fight Muscular Dystrophy' and 'Support the Jerry Lewis Telethon.' The first contributions deposited in the cans always came from our own pockets, our allowance."

After reading all three passages, I asked the student if she recalled the advice I had given her during our first writing conference. Although she could accurately repeat the advice I had shared with her, I noted that she still seemed preoccupied with revising her essay as she was writing it. In her mind, writing and revising had become concurrent activities. I once again reinforced the importance of separating these two aspects of the writing process. "You are trying to write your essay and revise it at the same time," I explained. "That's what is slowing you down and preventing you from completing your essay." I invited her to tell me the rest of her story about collecting money for the Jerry Lewis Telethon and ended the conference by sharing some simple advice with her. "Once you start relating your story, don't stop to revise any of it until you come to the end of your story.

Whether the student was genuinely pleased with my advice, or whether she was merely relieved that I had overlooked the fact that she had not brought a completed essay with her to class that day, I'll never know. However, patience is an unspoken and underestimated part of the writing process. The next time I saw this student, she handed me the initial draft of her telethon essay—a satisfied look on her face, I'd like to think, knowing that she had written something of which she could be proud. (A complete draft of this essay is reproduced in Appendix A.)

My experience in working with students whose writing demonstrates a pattern of concurrent revision has shown me that a single conference sometimes is sufficient to remedy the problem or, at the least, alert the student to the pattern of recurrent revision which characterizes his writing process. Once students have learned to recognize patterns of concurrent revision in their own writing, they are less likely to allow premature revision to frustrate their attempt at developing an extended draft of their ideas.

Textual analysis of the fragmented samples of writing in this case study indicates that the failure to develop even the most

rudimentary initial draft of an essay can often be attributed to problems that inexperienced writers face with concurrent revision. Furthermore, an important pedagogical implication of the case study suggests that even well-planned pre-writing strategies may not be effective in overcoming this type of writer's block. After all, the student in the case study had defined a clear focus for her essay and had developed a fairly detailed outline to suggest how she could develop her ideas. The problem of concurrent revision complicates the writing process because it occurs almost immediately after the student has begun to generate a written text. It compresses two distinct phases of the writing process (development and revision) into a single mental activity that, by its very nature, precludes effective communication. In essence, the initial draft never develops or takes shape because it is continually being revised by a writer who is so preoccupied with expressing himself correctly that he loses sight of his original focus.

Notes:

1. Unfortunately, the advice given to students about writing can appear confusing, if not openly contradictory, to inexperienced writers. What is a student to make of the advice of one editor who tells him, "Pick a subject you know something about," when one page later in the same textbook the student is admonished to "write about something you do not know about (Constance Gefvert, *The Confident Writer* [New York: Norton, 1988], 23-24)? Similarly, will students become disheartened when one author advises them to "look first at your own experience" (Edward Dornan, *The Brief English Handbook* [Glenview: Scott Foresman, 1990], 278), when just as confidently another editor asserts, "Identify a topic from someone else's experience" (Robert Marzano, *The Writing Process* [New York: Van Norstrand Company, 1981], 34)? How does a student reconcile the advice, "Never start writing until you have thought about your topic a while" (Charles Bazerman, *Writing Skills Handbook* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988], 95), with the recommendation to "select a topic quickly rather than wait for inspiration" (Dornan 278)? Are we really helping students to write more

effectively when we tell them to "make sure that [their] topic offers something special" (Robert Perrin, *The Beacon Handbook* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988], 13), or that, once they have reached an impasse, they should "try wearing comfortable clothing"(http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/block.html)?

2. Teachers, researchers and writing specialists have addressed the problem of writer's block from a variety of perspectives, most often suggesting strategies to overcome it. Toby Fulwiler identifies seven such strategies (from brainstorming and free-writing through clustering and dialogue) that may help a writer to develop the text of an essay more completely. Hence, Fulwiler's treatment is typical of the advice suggested in most writing textbooks. See *The Working Writer* (Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2001), especially Chapter 7, "Strategies for Starting," (65-70). Concurrent revision, on the other hand, identifies an aspect of the writing process that is distinct from each of these pre-writing strategies. It identifies a stage in the writing process when writing comes to a halt because of a tendency of the writer to want to revise his writing almost as soon as he begins writing. Peter Elbow comes to a similar conclusion in *Writing with Power* (Oxford University Press, 1998). See Chapter One, "The Dangerous Method: Trying to Write it Right the First Time," especially pages 39-45.

Appendix

The following text replicates the first draft of the essay submitted by the student following our second writing conference. She left this initial draft untitled, and passages that are underlined below were crossed out in her original manuscript. The manuscript makes clear that the writer intended to delete these passages, though in some cases she introduced similar phrases later in her text. The underlined passages indicate that the student was still preoccupied with revising her text as she generated it, but to a significantly lesser degree than her earlier efforts. Unlike her previous essay, which involved fifteen failed attempts at generating an initial draft, her second writing experience afforded her an opportunity of completing a work-

able draft that could be developed through subsequent revision.

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Every year, from age six to twelve, on the Saturday afternoon of Labor Day Weekend, I would find myself walking on the scorching hot sidewalk in the heat of early September. Accompanying me would be my sisters and the girl next door. Our hands held metal cans. On the cans was a picture of Jerry Lewis and the words, "Help Fight Muscular Dystrophy." We would walk until blisters appeared on our feet and the treading of our brand new Nikes was worn completely off. Our knuckles would begin to bleed after knocking on so many doors. But, the music created by the jingling of the coins motivated us to Soon, sweat would pour off our brows. However, our minds weren't on the heat. though. Instead, they were on the filling of the cans.

We never quit until the cans were full as night fell. Our walk wouldn't end until the cans were full. Usually, the filling would take until night fall. At that time, our weary bodies would trudge on home. The only thought in my head was of how much money we had collected. (Did we collect more than last year? Did we collect enough to make a difference?) As we approached the front step, my parents would be standing in the doorway wearing upon their faces smiles from ear to ear. The cans would be handed over to my mother. While we waited. Their daughters were doing an unselfish deed on their own and they were bursting with pride.

While we waited for the total While I laid in bed waiting to hear the results from today's efforts, my eyelids became very heavy. I fought tried as hard as I could to fight off sleep. Within about half an hour, my mother entered my the room and announced, "The four of you have collected seven hundred and eighty five dollars . . ." Upon hearing those words, sleep over took me. I slept soundly unaware that

At the time, I was unaware that we would no longer collect for the telethon. We would no longer collect for the telethon next At that I slept soundly with a smile across my face. At that time, I was unaware that next year we would find ourselves shopping in the mall instead of walking the sidewalks.

At age thirteen, there seemed to be more important things in life than collecting money. So we spent our Saturday Labor Day shopping for cloths, talking about boys, and finding new ways to wear our hair. It wouldn't be until I was seventeen that I would realize the importance of our past endeavors.

When I turned seventeen, I volunteered some of my free time at the local hospital. I wore a red and white striped dress and a little white cap. My job consisted of changing bedding, delivering and receiving bedpans, bringing meals, and spending time with the children. There was a little boy who I was particularly fond of. His name was Michael. and he had eyes bluer than the sky.

Michael was a small boy no older than mine. He had eyes bluer than the sky, hair of gold, and a smile that would melt even the coldest heart. He was suffering from Duchenne's muscular dystrophy. By age five the disease had affected his leg and pelvic muscles, causing toe-walking, lordosis (abnormal curvature of the spine), and his scapulae flared out (or "winged") when he raised his arms. By age nine, the disease had completely taken over his leg and pelvic muscles. He had been confined to a wheelchair for six months. Six months before I met him, the disease had confined him to a wheelchair. He was confined to a wheelchair.

We spent many hours together playing board games, strolling pushing him through the courtyard of the hospital, and talking about almost anything. One day he said to me, "Chris, there are two things that I want to be when I grow up."

"What's that?" I asked.

"I want to be a doctor and a pilot."

"Why?"

"I want to be a doctor so that I can help other kids with muscular dystrophy. I want to be a pilot because I want to soar through the clouds like the birds. Do you think I can do it?" It was his turn to ask a question.

"I know you can," was my reply. As those words escaped from my mouth, my heart sank. According to the doctors, Michael's condition was worsening. The disease was rapidly weakening his cardiac muscles. and he probably had He would never live to become a doctor or a pilot.

When I left the room later that afternoon, a lump appeared in my throat. "Why him, God, why him?" Tears swelled in my eyes as I thought, "Why him, God, why him?"

As the months passed, I became closer to Michael became the little brother that I never had. He helped me to see the little things that life had to offer. I had never really looked at a flower, watched the birds soar, or listen to the crickets until I met him. This little boy changed the way I looked at life and made my problems seem obsolete. I only wished that there was something, anything that I I could do something for him

Three days before Labor Day Weekend of that year
I bought him a Three days

A week before Labor Day Weekend of that year, I bought him a model airplane kit. His eyes sparkled and his face lit right up. He worked busily. I had never seen him so happy.

Later that day his happiness was interrupted Later that day, his happiness was interrupted by a coughing attack. The disease was destroying his respiratory system. He looked at me with sad eyes. "Chris," he said weakly, "I want to say good-bye."

"This isn't good-bye," I replied.

"I'll be back from Ohio in two days and we'll work on your airplane."

"I'm going to miss you," his voice quivered. He sat up quickly and hugged me real tight. Tears streamed down his face. and his voice quivered

"Hey, calm down. I'll be back," I said reassuringly. At that time, he loosened his grip hold and laid back down. Within minutes he was asleep.

I went back three days later only to find his room empty. On his bed laid a finished model airplane. I took it and headed for home. On his bed laid the finished model airplane. Gently, I picked it up and headed for home. Gently I picked it up. Then I headed home.

Michael's funeral was on the Saturday afternoon of Labor Day Weekend. However, I would not I did not attend. Instead, I found myself walking on the scorching hot pavement in the heat of early September. In my hand, I held a metal can.

Using Thoreau's *Walden* to Teach Writing and Rhetoric

Richard Dillman

Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* is an excellent text for teaching many of the complexities of writing in undergraduate courses. *Walden* is richly rhetorical, stylistically sophisticated, and contains examples of some of the finest nonfiction prose ever published in America. The composition of *Walden* is also pertinent to writing instruction since part of it followed a composing process that moved from journal entries to publicly delivered lectures and finally to heavily revised prose. Thoreau revised *Walden* numerous times, and he tested out many of his ideas in his fourteen volume journal and in lyceum lectures.

I intend here to explore the diverse ways that instructors can use *Walden* to study the elements of writing nonfiction prose. I have used *Walden* as a text in writing courses of varied types including required freshman English, honors literature and composition, and advanced courses on expository or rhetorical writing. I will discuss teaching strategies that can be applied in freshman level writing courses, advanced writing courses, and in courses that emphasize writing about literature.

Walden is also a useful text for studying the successful application of rhetorical techniques, strategies, and concepts. Instructors can provide students with a list of rhetorical terms that they will need to fully study Thoreau's rhetoric (see Appendix). *Walden* will also confront readers with rhetorical sentence forms

that are neglected or treated only superficially in grammar or rhetoric handbooks. The first two chapters of *Walden*, for example, are rhetorically intense largely because Thoreau uses aphorisms, paradoxes, and proverbs—three rhetorical forms that have oral roots—to shape his readers' responses. After being introduced to these concepts, students can be asked to identify several of each type, and explain how they operate and what they mean. This exercise will open up a rich vein of material for class discussion. I often ask each student to select at least three examples of Thoreau's sententious phrasing and to identify the rhetorical form of each. Here is a list of sententious statements that illustrate Thoreau's use of the aphorism, paradox, and proverb form:

> The Mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation. (8)
>
> But lo! Men have become the tools of their tools. (37)
>
> I have learned that the swiftest traveler is he that goes afoot. (530)
>
> Our life is frittered away by detail. (91)
>
> Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. (98)
>
> Men say that a stitch in time saves nine, and so they make a thousand stitches to save nine tomorrow. (93)

Cumulative or additive sentences are common in the natural history sections of *Walden*. This is a sentence form unfamiliar to most students but very common in modern and contemporary American prose. The instructor can illustrate their use in such chapters as "Spring," and "Conclusion," for example. Instructors can require students to identify examples of cumulative sentences, and students should be required to write some of their own to at least experience the rhythm of this sentence form that Thoreau uses so effectively to create graphic and dynamic imagery of the natural world. Here are two particularly effective examples of Thoreau's cumulative sentences from "Spring:"

> We need the tonic of wildness,—to wade sometimes
> in marshes where the bittern and meadowhen lurk,
> and hear the booming of the snipe;
> to smell the whispering sedge where only some
> wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the
> mink crawls with its belly close to the ground. (317)

> We must be refreshed with the sight of inexhaustible
> vigor, vast and titanic features, the sea-coast with its
> wrecks, the wilderness with its living
> and its decaying trees, the thunder cloud, and the rain
> which lasts three weeks and produces freshets. (318)

The theory of the cumulative sentence as well as methods for teaching it can be found in Francis Christensen's *Notes Towards a New Rhetoric*. The fundamental principles of the cumulative sentence as identified by Christensen—levels of generality, direction of movement, texture, and addition—can also be taught through the analysis of Thoreau's rhetorical practice (Christensen 23-44). Introducing the complete rhetorical structure for the cumulative sentence at this time would help students' understanding of Thoreau's rhetoric and provide them with a new sentence form to use in their own writing.

Thoreau shapes his audience's responses in numerous ways beyond the sentence level. He carefully constructs his rhetorical persona in ways connected to his themes and rhetorical purposes. In the first two chapters of *Walden*, he projects the persona of a practical Yankee who is frugal, shrewd, meticulous, hard-working, conservative, conversant with the Bible, mechanically skilled, self-reliant, and a jack-of-all-trades. This rhetorical personality can build his own house, grow his own food, negotiate bargains, quote philosophers, and keep precise records of expenditures in balance-sheet accounting form. Students can find facts, images, patterns, and passages to help identify the features of this persona or find support for other personae used in other sections of the text like "Brute Neighbors" or "Conclusion." Students often identify his use of bal-

ance sheet accounting, his description of building his cabin, his statements on simplicity and agriculture as support for the practical Yankee persona. Analyzing his use of balance sheet accounting in *Walden's* first two chapters provides a useful exercise for students. What is the purpose of his attention to financial details? Why is he so meticulous? Why does he itemize down to the half penny? Who cares how much he spent on hair and chalk? These are all critical questions that students might ask as they investigate the creation of his rhetorical persona.

Thoreau uses many rhetorical questions throughout *Walden*. Sometimes he uses them intensely, including several in a single paragraph. Here students can analyze his use of rhetorical questions, making judgments about their effectiveness, and determining when they are used excessively. Certainly many novice writers over-use rhetorical questions, often developing their arguments through questions instead of careful explication and reasoning. Thoreau's prose offers a chance to examine one author's use of rhetorical questions in a rich cultural and rhetorical context and to link them to the specific genres and subgenres of *Walden*.

Several chapters of *Walden* also provide opportunities for studying the rhetorical use of analogies and metaphors. While *Walden* is densely metaphorical, and Thoreau often uses carefully developed analogies, "The Ponds" chapter provides one of the richest laboratories for the study of metaphoric prose, persuading readers to understand the ponds from diverse perspectives. Instructors may ask students to identify as many figurative ways of presenting the ponds as possible in this chapter. They can do this assignment at home, and a list of metaphoric perspectives on the ponds can be brought to class for discussion. Or students can work in groups to identify Thoreau's pond images. These activities will lead to very productive discussions as students present their findings. Sometimes they identify as many as thirty-five different metaphoric images of which the following examples are representative: "*Walden* is a perfect forest mirror"; the ponds are "great crystals"; they are "lakes of light"; and *Walden* is "earth's eye" (178-232).

Examining these metaphoric interpretations of the ponds

will lead to discussions of sensory language, imagery, and a variety of figures, such as metaphor, simile, personification, and synecdoche. In addition, this discussion should carry over to examination of two important sections of "Brute Neighbors": "The Battle of the Ants" (228-32) and the "Contest with the Loon" (233-36). Students can be asked to write interpretations of both of these set pieces. Their interpretations of "The Battle of the Ants" often produce interesting discussions of Thoreau's use of analogies between the ant world and the human world as well as of his rhetorical techniques. Interpretations tend to stress the larger meanings suggested by Thoreau's microcosm—the Civil War, a commentary on warfare, connections between ants and people, as well as the Darwinian notion of survival of the fittest. Discussion of "The Contest with the Loon" leads students to examine Thoreau's use of clever metaphors to depict the behavior of this majestic, mysterious bird. This piece of natural history writing often leads, of course, to discussions of Thoreau's philosophy of natural history.

Any rhetorical or stylistic study of *Walden* must involve the larger rhetorical patterns, movements, and design. Here students must explore his strategies of organization, his sequences, and his arrangement. They can explore the arrangement of chapters, his set pieces, paragraphs, or any large units of discourse. They can also examine how much the text is tied to the movement of the seasons. For example, they can apply Kenneth Burke's theory of qualitative progression in this analysis (Burke 124-25). How does Thoreau use qualitative form in specific chapters of *Walden*? Students notice almost unanimously that Thoreau uses several diverse genres throughout the text. Asking them to identify these genres and provide textual examples or them is instructive. They often find themselves shifting reading strategies as they encounter different genres in *Walden*. Here is a brief list of some forms of writing associated with literary nonfiction that students often find in *Walden*: exposition, argument, persuasion, narration, poetic prose, natural history writing, nature writing, cultural criticism, memoir, autobiography, philosophical writing, meditation, the essay, inspira-

tional prose, parables, and exempla as part of the sermon form.

In the writing courses that I teach, students write expository, analytical, and interpretive papers. The length and complexity of papers will vary according to the course and its level of difficulty. Papers on *Walden* must, of course, be documented according to the MLA format, and they will be evaluated for such things as thoroughness of development, effective use of evidence, and coherence and clarity. Students can address a topic across the whole text of *Walden* or in some cases emphasize only a few chapters. Writing about Thoreau's complex portrayal of the ponds in "The Ponds" and "The Pond in Winter" or about Thoreau's rhetoric in chapters one and two are examples of highly focused papers on small sections of the text. One very useful assignment involves thoroughly analyzing Thoreau's rhetorical practices in a specific chapter of the text. This paper usually flows out of a group report in which students analyze the rhetoric of a single chapter. Hence the topic has been analyzed and discussed prior to writing the required paper. This is an effective way to help immerse students in the analysis of his style and rhetoric in a manageable and highly focused manner.

Students are encouraged to select their own topics with whatever teacher guidance they may need. I will often limit freshman writing students to a handful of manageable topics. For one freshman course on writing about the humanities, students could write on one of the following topics using *Walden*: Thoreau's portrayal of the natural world, self-discovery, portrayal of the ponds, his critique of materialism and or conformity, or his symbolic uses of nature. For more advanced students or for research papers on *Walden* or Thoreau's essays, students can select their own topics or choose from a large selection of suggested topics. Here is a representative list of topic areas that can be narrowed to manageable size and scope:

- Thoreau's economic philosophy
- Thoreau's ideas on individualism
- Thoreau on nature and ecology
- Thoreau on natural history
- Thoreau on morality and ethics

- Thoreau on conformity
- Thoreau's use of symbolic details
- Thoreau's use of the myth of seasons
- Thoreau on materialism
- Thoreau's critique of American society
- Thoreau's optimistic vision

The point of these longer assignments is for students to design their own project and to engage deeply with the text to find evidence in *Walden* to support their explications and interpretations. I want them to examine Thoreau's language, to identify important passages in the text, and to use concrete details whenever possible to support their ideas. They must engage with the ambiguities and contradictions of *Walden* as well as the complexity of Thoreau's thoughts and with his rhetorical practice. These assignments often produce excellent papers.

Basing part of a writing course on *Walden* can be a rich experience for students and teachers alike. Engaging with *Walden* obviously provides an intellectual challenge. Puzzling over Thoreau's rhetorical strategies can help teach students about effective rhetoric. Writing activities and the study of Thoreau's rhetoric will also generate lively discussions of Thoreau's techniques and ideas. Blending the study of rhetoric with the study of Thoreau's ideas builds a humanistic context for the study of rhetorical writing. Students, through controlled writing and rhetorical exercises, engage with literary history and with important themes and philosophies. They will also engage with themes pertinent to their own level of psychological development, such as identity, individualism, the power of conformity, and the disadvantages of excessive materialism.

Most importantly, they will experience rhetoric in action; rhetorical practice that is historically situated as well as effective in modern times. They will come to understand how an accomplished author uses the techniques traditionally studied in prescriptive handbooks on rhetoric and composition. They will also study a wide range of discourse forms in *Walden* in instructive and challenging ways.

Appendix

List of Rhetorical Terms Useful for Studying *Walden*

- Abstraction Ladder
- Antithesis
- Analogy
- Aphorism
- Asyndetic Parataxis
- Balance in Sentences
- Cumulative Sentences
- Didactic
- Exemplum
- Hyperbole
- Imagery
- Journal Writing/Free Writing
- Mechanical Form
- Microcosm
- Organic Form
- Parable
- Parallelism
- Periodic Sentence
- Persona/Voice
- Personification
- Polysyndeton
- Paradox
- Proverb
- Qualitative Form
- Rhetorical Questions
- Sensory Language
- Sententia
- Simile
- Synecdoche

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MCTE Classroom Grant Pays for Poetry Booklets

Heather Megarry

"Today was actually a fun day to be on lunch duty," one of my colleagues said, stopping me in the hallway between classes one day last winter. "There were kids sitting around reading poetry while they ate. The other kids were wandering around getting their friends to sign their books. Those poetry books your classes made are great!"

Another teacher stopped me a few days later after she had read the poetry book herself: "You know, this kid is a complete goof-off in my science class, but I'm just blown away by his poem. I'm glad you did this project because now I have something nice to talk with him about tomorrow!"

With help from the COMPAS Writers and Artists in the Schools Program www.compas.org/pages/waits.html and funding from MCTE, my students wrote and published a booklet of poetry. In the process, they learned about sensory images and figurative language, they gained confidence in their writing, and began the important process of self-representation. This last goal is, I believe, important for all students, but is perhaps particularly important for my students, who are mostly immigrant, African, Muslim and poor. American mass media perpetuates many negative images of people in these demographic categories and writing original poetry about themselves and their lives became a way for my students to assert their own power over representation.

COMPAS Program comes to my school:

At the 2005 MCTE Spring Conference I attended a session about the COMPAS Writers and Artists in the Schools Program. COMPAS brings professional artists and writers into classrooms for week-long residencies. I knew about the program from the perspective of having been a 7th grader in the early 1980's when a COMPAS poet came to our classroom. It wasn't until 2005, however, that I brought a COMPAS poet to my own classroom. For twelve years I had taught at a large suburban high school where there were fifteen teachers in the English department, and asking for a thousand dollars for only four classes for one week was pretty much out of the question. But a career change to a small charter school (English department of one!) seemed like a great time to reconnect with COMPAS.

My school, Ubah Medical Academy, is a high school of 180 students located in North Minneapolis. The school was created by members of the East African (mainly Somali and Oromo) communities in the Twin Cities. We have students who have lived in the United States almost all of their lives, and we have students who have come to the U. S. in the past year. Even from the "newcomer" population, there's a range of experience: some are essentially entering the first formal education they've ever had, others were educated in refugee camps, and others went to expensive schools in Kenya or other parts of the world. Like any school, ours is full of students with stories to tell and voices that should be nurtured.

In August I contacted COMPAS requesting their brochure. Early in the fall I asked our school directors for financial approval of the residency, which was readily granted. Then I "shopped" through the brochure, reading the personal statements of the writers, and sent in my request for a residency. The folks at COMPAS then contacted my "first choice" poet and put the two of us in e-mail contact.

Ms. Mai Neng Moua became "our poet" for the week. I thought that her experience as a child refugee from Laos and her interest in nurturing the voices of Hmong poets in the United States would match up well with my students' in-

terests and experiences. She had written about her childhood shyness in her personal statement, bringing to mind several of my students, especially those newest to the U. S. I was also eager to have my students work with a Hmong woman because very few of them had ever spoken to a Hmong person before.

The Academic Objectives:

When Mai Neng and I first met to discuss the residency, we talked about what my students needed. I identified two particular areas of weakness in my students' writing that we felt a poetry week could address: lack of specific detail, and a hesitancy to use figurative language. I also explained that many students in the classes would be taking the MCA II test in Written Composition in January (a state graduation requirement). As ELL students, writing conventions are always a perpetual challenge, one that can sometimes prevent them from passing the test. However, the MCA is scored holistically with writing conventions as one of several criteria, so I tell my students that their best chance for passing is to have particularly strong ideas, vocabulary and detail to balance out the probable misspellings and occasional lapses of standard grammar or sentence construction. Any work Mai Neng could accomplish with getting my students to feel more comfortable with sensory images and concrete details in poetry, I believed, would only help them with higher scores on the MCA test.

The Residency:

In retrospect, it is hard to believe how much was accomplished in only one week of the poetry residency. Mai Neng built rapport with the students quickly and had them reading and writing poetry every day. Each day she had a new poetry prompt and model poems that she read with the students. She gave them time to write in class, circulating around the room answering questions and encouraging students. She collected the poems at the end of the hour, allowing students who wanted to work on them at home to take their work. The next day she always had a few poems selected from the group to read to the class. Then she handed the rest of the poems back and proceeded to the next prompt. By Friday, every student had written four different poems.

Friday classes at our school are short in order to accommodate Friday prayers in the afternoon, so Mai Neng used that day in class to talk about reading poems out loud. In class, students were encouraged to choose a poem they had written. They each had to read their poem loudly and slowly.

Friday afternoon during activity period, I hosted our school's first "open mic" poetry reading and my classroom was packed with students who chose to read and listen to each other's poetry instead of playing soccer or socializing. To spruce up the event, I brought cookies and bottled water and the students took turns going to the front of the room and reading their work. Clearly, Mai Neng and the COMPAS program were a big hit with my students.

MCTE Classroom Grant and Publication:

I didn't want the week to just be an isolated experience for the students in my class. I wrote for a classroom grant from MCTE to help pay for the publication of the student poems. With the money we received from MCTE, we published a 104 page, spiral bound, 8.5"x5.5" booklet of poetry that we distributed to the students, faculty and other members of the Somali community. The students selected and typed their own poems for inclusion in the booklet and voted to arrange the poems alphabetically by the poet's last name.

Once the booklet was completed, we had a "book launch and signing." In each class, students spent time reading and reacting to the poems and signing each other's books.

The Conclusion:

The classroom grant from MCTE not only allowed students a real publishing opportunity, but also placed high interest poetry in the homes of my students. In this community there is a great reverence for books and a document like the one we produced is taken surprisingly seriously. The students themselves poured over the poems as if it were a yearbook, and parents, siblings and extended family members are also reading these poems. I hope that the booklet has inspired some interesting cross-generational conversation and helped adults in the community to see the diversity that exists in our young people.

And, yes, the students who were able to participate in the COMPAS program did quite well on their MCA II tests, too!

Below I have selected three student poems from each day of the residency: "The Broken Country", "Muddy Streets" and "New York (Lost, Lost Memories)" are place poems using the six senses.

The Broken Country

by Iman Warsame

One night
I dreamed about Somalia
It was green and beautiful
But there was a red river over there
"That is blood," my mom said

I heard children crying
"Why?" I asked
I turned left, I saw men shooting
I turned right, I saw children lying
On the ground

I ran to them
They turned into roses
I touched them
They were so soft
"Rest roses," I said

I turned back
My mom held my hand
"Let's go to that village," she said
I smelled the rain falling to wash the dirt
"Shook Shook" I heard the sound of the rain
falling on the poor roofs

"Somalia," I said
the broken country
"Somalia," I said
The country that was beautiful once

Somalia, the country I have never seen
But dream about

I felt alone. I prayed to God to save Somalia

The Muddy Streets

by Abdi Jama

When I remember the muddy streets of Nairobi,
I see guys carrying garbage bags three times their size.
After I see the homeless guy,
I see a mother with her children sitting in front
of a tiny steel house selling charcoal in empty paint cans.
As I crouch to buy a can of charcoal,
I touch it to see if it is soft, and
I let my hands get black.
Next to them is a man
who gets paid to iron clothing with a charcoal-heated iron.
I give the man a shirt to iron.
I come back after thirty minutes with fifteen shillings and take my shirt.
Across the muddy street is a large dump site
where trash reaches three stories high.
I really don‘t know why these streets seemed so healthy,
but I wish I could go back.

New York (Lost, Lost Memories)

by Said Mohamed

A *yo n[redacted]a* is just a way to say hi
When you think New York
you think Donald Trump or 50 Cent
You also think cars and taxis
But when I think of New York
I think of 4 years of boarding school
I can still hear voices of kids
all boys and no toys
I smell the food that’s cooked with gallons of oil by Moby
I can still taste the nasty aftertaste of *aloo goosh*
and most of all I feel the pain of punishment
but mostly I can still see all my homeboys
and the crazy missions we used to do.

They were my ying and my yang but now here,
More than 500 miles away, they're lost memories.

The next three poems are "Where I'm From Poems". The students were concentrating on identifying many factors that make them who they are and expressing those influences in concrete images.

I Am From

by Abyan Farah

I am from Somalia
Learning to love all my people
I'm from the bloody wars between different tribes
I'm from cleaning my house for that fresh scent
I'm from getting yelled at by my family every time I do
    something wrong
I'm from leaving my country to go to another country
    for my safety and to get an education
I'm from going to school in order to learn something new
I'm from chilling with my friends
    and telling each other jokes
I'm from going to the movies to check out the latest,
    hottest movie
I'm from being quiet, not so loud.
I'm from dancing each day, inventing new moves
I'm from dressing nice, smelling good, looking fine,
    and always staying fresh.
I'm from leaning back while I relax and enjoy my life.
I'm from Abyan a smart, nice, beautiful, confused girl.
I'm from my mom.
I didn't spend lots of time with her, but I miss her very,
    very much
I'm waiting for the day I see her again in heaven *inshallah*.
if god is willing.

From Nairobi

by Ijaabo Ali

I'm from where people
Greet each other by simple *asalama aleekum*
which means "peace be upon you."
I'm from Kenya community where people pray five
times every day. I'm from the beautiful land of Kenya.
I'm from the lovely city of Nairobi where my grandmother
used to take me walking every sunrise. I'm from a place
where people eat *mukate* and *blue band* as breakfast
and eat *sukuma* and *ugali* as a lunch.
I'm from the friendly noises like African music instrument
and neighborhoods.
I'm from where I grew up.
I'm from our small house.
I'm from my great grandfathers.
I'm from every great storyteller;
I'm from every caring family.
I'm from my dad who is such a sweetheart. I'm from my
mother who always anticipates with all that she has
to make us the most respectful and independent kids.
I'm from my sisters and brothers
who are carefree about me.
I'm from my dedicated teachers.
I'm from my encouraging friends.
I'm from every devoted family.
I'm from this crazy earth.

I Am From

by Niyah Muhammad

I am from my culture,
Some African-American, some
Native American.
I can't be sure how much.
I am from the food I love,
Candy, spaghetti, and fried

Rice.
I am from a family of 11
Children, all of them younger
Except one, my older sister.
I am from my favorite day of
The year, Eid.
I am from my numerous
Friends of many different
Races. I am from Minneapolis,
Minnesota, where I will stay.
I am from my dream of growing
Up, going to college, and having
A family.
I am from throwing snowballs
At my brother's face in the winter.
I am from the wind I hear in the
Trees at night that keep me from
Sleeping. I am from my favorite
Color, green.
I am from hating George Bush
For what he's doing to Iraq.
I am from my parents and
Grandparents.

"Embarrassment," "Excitement," and "Anger" are Emotion Poems. The students were trying to capture the essence of an emotion using concrete images.

Embarrassment

by Ilyas A. Berento Ahmed

You are the one who doesn't talk to anyone
The one who stands alone
The one who thinks he is ugly
The one who doesn't try anything new
Who only does it in his heart
The one that is poor

The one that thinks everybody is going to laugh at him
Who thinks he is a joke
Who somebody else does the talking for him
Who thinks everyone is better than him
The one who is never going to break the wall between him and nature
Whose face gets red
Who laughs
Who hides his face
Who runs away
Who sweats
Who never practices

Excitement

by Kanwal Mehmud

You are the clock that doesn't want to tick,
but goes off every five seconds.
You are the bright yellow car that just crossed the red light,
A child right before a favorite fieldtrip.
Excitement, you are the butterflies inside my stomach
before a spelling bee.
You are the racecar that starts without waiting for the whistle to blow,
A lion that roars at the top of a mountain,
The sun that rises at three in the morning.
You are the drums drumming two hours before a parade.
You are a rooster cock-a-doodling before sun-up.
You are the cake whose icing has been licked off
before the party began.
Excitement, you are the writer with a mind filled with stories
but have no paper around to write them.

Anger

by Ismail Yusuf

You are the feeling that does not go away,
The not wanting to talk,
The color red,

A trip to the dentist.
Anger, you are the clinched knuckles,
The pain in my heart,
A gray cloud in the sky.
Anger, you are the chip on my shoulder,
The confusion in my head,
The death of joy,
The beating of my tongue.
Anger, you are the grinding of my teeth.

Contributors

Michael LoMonico is the Senior Consultant for National Education at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. He oversees the National Festivals Project Outreach, presenting teacher-training workshops around the country. He also directs the NEH-sponsored "Teaching Shakespeare" institutes and develops initiatives for web-based education. He is the author of *Shakespeare* 101, the founding editor of Shakespeare magazine, and teaches at SUNY-Stony Brook in the Professional Education program.

Elizabeth McCullough earned her Master's Degree from Minnesota State University, Mankato in July 2006. Her special interest is Irish literature, in particular literature about the "Troubles". During her stay at MSU, she worked as editorial assistant for four years at TESOL Journal under previous editor Steve Stoynoff.

Peter Henry has been a teacher for twenty years, mostly in secondary education at De La Salle and in the Osseo District. He is now working with Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College in Cloquet teaching in their urban Outreach Program on Franklin Avenue in Minneapolis in classes that are entirely Native American. He holds a B.A. from Carleton College, graduating in 1983 with Honors while majoring in Comparative Literature. He also holds a Masters of Arts

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Avesa Rockwell teaches composition at the University of Minnesota Duluth. She received her Master's Degree in English Studies in May 2006, shortly after she presented the article published in this issue of *MEJ* at the MCTE Spring Conference. Before graduate school Avesa coordinated the San Francisco Arts Commission's WritersCorps, an artist-in-residency program serving urban youth-in-need, where she discovered the astounding expressive talents of young immigrants from around the world. She plans to continue to work to improve the educational opportunities for English Language Learners in the upper midwest.

William Martin, an associate professor in the English Department at Niagara University, received his Ph.D. from the University of Notre Dame. Besides teaching courses in Major British Writers, Romantic and Victorian Poetry, and the Development of the English Novel, he serves as national adjudicator for the Fireside Scholarship, an essay-based scholarship competition sponsored by the Fireside Press. He was selected Teacher of the Year at Niagara in 1997.

Mary Godwin is a Ph.D. student of Theory and Cultural Studies at Purdue University, where her current interests include contemportary American literature, postmodern theory, and an emphasis on 21st century digital literature. Her research toward her dissertation investigates the composition of place as experience in literature and literary environments "born digital." She is currently developing methods to incorporate digital literature in English classroom instruction. Mary has taught first-year composition at Purdue for three years in addition to supervising English education majors completing their student teaching requirements there. Most recently, she received campus-wide recognition as the 2006 recipient of the "Helping Students Learn Award" and a $6000 cash and research stipend for her work with

mechanical engineering students toward writing improvement.

Richard Dillman is a professor of English at St. Cloud State University, where he is a specialist in American literature. An author of numerous articles on Thoreau, American transcendentalism, and Willa Cather, a former editor of *The Minnesota English Journal* (1985-89), and former assistant editor of *The Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, he has edited and compiled *Thoreau's Comments on the Art of Writing* and *The Major Essays of Henry David Thoreau*. He has also taught at the University of Oregon and Western Washington University.

Elizabeth Berg Leer, Assistant Professor of Education, has been teaching Principles of Education and Teaching of Communication Arts and Literature at St. Olaf College for the past two years. She also supervises student teachers and serves as the Director of Teacher Education. Elizabeth earned an M.A. in English from Northern Illinois University and a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction—English Education from the University of Minnesota. Her research interests include the teaching of adolescent and multicultural literature and multicultural teacher education.

Michael MacBride is a graduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato, where he is pursuing his M.A. in Literature and teaches English Composition 101. His thesis compares *Don Quixote* and *Huckleberry Finn* in terms of subversive humor, and he intends to pursue a Ph.D. after completing the program.

Melissa Castino Reid is currently an English instructor at Minneapolis Community and Technical College. She is seeking entrance into graduate school at the University of Minnesota.

Scott Hall teaches Honors British literature and poetry at Irondale High School in New Brighton and is a past chair of Irondale's English Department. He also has been teaching composition and children's literature at Anoka Ramsey Community College since 2001. His interests include Tolkien, Vietnam memoirs, multicultural literature, folklore/folk songs, Johnny Cash, Nick Cave, Elvis Costello, and his Harley Davidson.

Heather Megarry is a high school English teacher with a Master's Degree in English from the University of St.

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William D. Dyer has been teaching humanities, literature, and composition courses at Minnesota State University, Mankato, since 1981. A Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, his research interests include Latin American literature, Dickens, Shakespeare, writing across the curriculum, and collaborative learning. He serves on the board of the National Association for Humanities Education.

Call For Papers for *MEJ*'s Next Issue

As we did at the end of the last issue, John Banschbach and I ***want to encourage all of you who are reading the Fall 2006 number of*** *MEJ* to consider yourselves part of our continuing dialogue with language, literature, reading, and composition—dialogue that engages and shares and enriches *your* pedagogy and research. And, to aid you in expressing and shaping *your* interests in and concerns about the materials you bring to the classroom, the students you bring them to, and your invention of strategies for engaging those students in those materials, we would like you to consider one of the topics listed below as your focus. Please understand that these topics are merely suggestions. Should your teaching context or circumstances cause you to identify a topic not on our brief list, we invite you to pursue it and send us the results. We want to read and interact with your work, whether that work has sprung from a teaching context in the elementary, middle, or high school, either public or private; community college; technical college; public university; or private college. As you peruse the list, do not hesitate to contact us for clarification on any of the topics or for advice about responding to an item we haven't listed that you would like to respond to. We welcome the opportunity to work with you. Please think about

June 1, 2007 as a deadline, and think about the **Spring MCTE Spring Conference in April 2007** as avenue for presenting it.

Topics:

1. Young adult literature (multicultural, American, and/or British—traditionally structured or non-linear)

2. Teaching and representing Shakespeare for high school and college students

3. World literatures (Anglophone/commonwealth; African; Caribbean; Latin American; Chicano; Native American; Asian/American; East Indian)

4. Assessment at any level (we're not just thinking about rubrics that work, but the kinds of anonymous interventions that can be used to determine whether our students are learning what we intend for them to learn)

5. Literature of the Americas (any kind of literature to any number of audiences, related to Canada, the U.S., the Caribbean, and Mexico through Tierra del Fuego)

6. Un-banning the banned books (experiences and methodologies related to teaching them)

7. Assignment packages that work (i.e., prompts and materials situated around the development of an important assignment tied to a particular course and an audience for that course; a "tool box" of materials and rubrics and writing assists and prompts and strategies that will assist members of that audience with their struggle to complete successfully that assignment; and an assessment strategy that will enable some effective testing of whether the goals and objectives connected to the assignment have been reached—this is for teachers at any level)

8. Writing across the curriculum, issues and strategies

9. Writing-intensive courses (definitions, challenges, approaches)

10. Electronic distance learning (dealing with audience problems, delivery issues)
11. The "capstone" experience, from portfolio to research paper (problems of mentoring and assessing are connected here)
12. Teaching the world: Humanities at any teaching level
13. Collaborative learning: assignments and teaching strategies that work
14. Technology in the English/language arts classroom
15. The relevance of the Western Canon (expanding/re-envisioning the canon)
16. Standardized testing and its impact on English/language arts curriculum
17. The world wide web and research paper writing
18. Poetry and its relevance
19. English language learners: how can we best serve their needs in the reading and composition classroom
20. Grammar and its place in today's English classes
21. Feedback on student writing and issues pertaining to responding
22. Practices in the teaching of English language arts
23. Research in and out of the classroom
24. "Audience" related issues
25. Teaching tips
26. Issues of diversity (representing race and gender)

We look forward to hearing from you.

Don't wait for the Spring Conference to renew your membership!

MCTE membership runs from October to October of each year, so new and renewing members should send in the attached form and payment today.
Don't miss a single issue of MCTE News!

Please make check or money order payable to MCTE. Print this page, fill out the form, and send both the completed form and payment in a stamped envelope to:

Rob Gardner, Executive Secretary
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TEACHING LEVEL:
- ❍ elementary
- ❍ middle/junior high
- ❍ high school
- ❍ two-year college
- ❍ four-year college