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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHERS IMPROVISING CHANGE:  
WHOSE THEMES? WHOSE VARIATIONS?

BY

KATHERINE JANE SMITH



A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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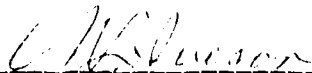
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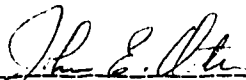
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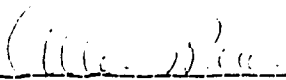
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## Abstract

Change has been a major force for junior high language arts teachers to contend with in recent years -- change of philosophy, of curriculum, of clientele, and of teaching strategies. In this study, I have interviewed and observed six teachers of junior high language arts whose beliefs and approaches have suggested their abilities to cope with change. Through the information obtained in interviews and observations, I have distilled seven recurring themes that may resonate with the experiences of other educators and provide a starting point for adopting change in their own programs.

I set the tonality of the thesis by introducing my own teaching realities as a junior high language arts teacher. I then examine current research that suggests changing beliefs and approaches to the teaching of language arts and research that examines the nature of teacher change.

Using twelve questions provided in advance to begin discussion, interviews were conducted with each of the six participants, followed by observations in each of their classrooms. I used this information to describe them in a school context and analyzed it into seven themes that could be heard from each of their voices. These themes include the importance of 1) developing relationships in teaching, 2) maintaining a balance between classroom structure and flexibility, 3) knowing a variety of problem-solving strategies, 4) wanting to make a difference in teaching, 5) remaining life-long learners, 6) developing articulate teaching voices, and 7) broadly defining the role of a teacher.

These themes identify seven key areas of language arts teaching realities that suggest attributes of teachers who have been successful in coping with change to curriculum, clientele, teaching strategies and beliefs, and offer possible directions for teachers who wish to adopt alternative strategies and beliefs into their own teaching situations.

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# CHAPTER I

## COMPOSING THE MELODY

### Musical Moments

James has just finished his novel presentation -- a fashion show in which he models for us the styles worn by the main characters in his novel--Mimi, Chuck, and Florence. This is the final presentation of the class, and everyone applauds wildly amidst giggles and snickers. His performance and insightful comments about the characters are so good that we ask him to repeat it for the next class.

\*\*\*

After class one day, Ben lugs a ceiling tile into my classroom -- freshly painted with peace signs and hippie slogans. He wants to display it on the ceiling in the front of my classroom, so we get a stepladder and perilously climb the ladder to replace the regular white tile with his creation. Ben's tile is still there in that room.

\*\*\*

We study culture in grade seven social studies and, in order to share some of our cultural inheritances with classmates, we all bring in recipes and ethnic dishes to sample -- pyroggies, haggis, rice, chocolate chip cookies.... Neil, who is from Scotland and shares the haggis with us, dares me to try it. So at 10:00 a.m. I carefully, with thirty sets of eyes on me, spoon this concoction of meat and spices and sheep's stomach into my mouth -- and survive.

\*\*\*

I've just finished reading Lucy Calkin's book Living between the lines and am struck by the idea of text-sets that she presents. Text-sets consist of a collection of texts (short stories, poems, articles, lyrics...) based on a theme that has been chosen by the students. The students create their own thematic units, select the materials to support the theme, and decide on the activities they will complete to present their theme to the class. This is a great idea, I think, and just the thing to interest the students. The next class we begin, and I'm right. The students are excited about the idea and immediately begin to talk in their groups about ideas for themes. They soon need to visit the library; and, although I have limited the texts to printed materials, I am quickly convinced by some of the more energetic students to expand the possibilities to movies, songs, posters. Throughout the unit I witness commitment and diligence and enjoyment as the students pull their work together for their presentations. The final products are exciting and unique -- I am overwhelmed by the talents and potential they exhibit as they show off their work.

\*\*\*

It's the Friday evening before Christmas, just after 6:30 p.m., and I'm just sitting down to supper when the phone rings. "Is Mrs. Smith there?"

"Speaking."

"This is Chad. Could you come and watch our play?"

"Well, I will if I can, Chad. When is it?"

"At seven o'clock.... Ben's in it, and Ryan too."

They are all former students of mine, and we had worked on previous musical performances together. I forget about supper and arrive just in time. The play being presented "Play It Again, Sam" is one of four that is being performed that night and hungry as I am, I stayed for them all. I saw many former students that night, successful and proud of their work, and as I drove home in the dark, I marveled at the incredible Christmas gift I have just been given.

\*\*\*

I reflect on these and other joyful melodies I hear as I continue to teach junior high language arts. I have always looked forward to going to school and trying new ideas with the students I have had the pleasure of knowing, to hearing their views and reading their writing. They challenge me; but they are always interesting and teaching for me is, more often than not, fun.

### Dissonance

I can only really understand teaching from my own experiences and it is with puzzlement that I hear teachers lament the boredom of their classes and the annoying exuberance of their students. "I've taught this lesson so many times that in the middle of it I find myself wondering what to cook for dinner." "Jason refuses to settle down and complete his chapter notes." "I can't meet during my lunch hour -- I need a rest." I wonder why these teachers continue to remain, unhappily, teaching junior high school. I am frustrated by the lack of energy and caring that they demonstrate, and I am concerned about their commitment to the teaching profession and to their students.

These frustrations with teachers around me cause me to consider the nature of teachers' change. Why is it, I wonder, that some teachers are excited by new ideas, willing to improvise and adapt, while others seem content to continue with the same lesson plans and the same performances throughout their careers? Although these teachers do not seem to enjoy their teaching practices, they do not seem willing or able to change.

My concern is especially with language arts teachers, my particular area of interest and expertise. Unhappily, I have observed some teaching practices that alienate students from language and from literature, that cause students to dislike reading and writing. I have seen students inundated with "comprehension" questions, worksheets that focus on isolated skills, and activities intended to keep students busy and quiet. These classes seem to me to be joyless, passive, and frustratingly dull. In a time of new understandings and new approaches to teaching language arts, I am concerned with the lack of change and development of some language arts teachers.

## Transposition

There has been in recent years an abundance of new ideas and innovative thoughts about language arts teaching. During the past two decades, many language arts educators have published books that suggest alternative strategies. James Britton's Language and Learning, published in 1970, has given language arts teachers reason to examine the ways in which language is used and the different functions of language. He suggests that writers begin with expressive language, the language of first thought and conversation, before moving to the language of artistic expression (poetic) or to language that calls for action (transactional). Britton's ideas about language have influenced many other writers and researchers in their explorations of language arts teaching.

Nancie Atwell's In the middle (1987) is a book that has allowed many junior high teachers to visualize alternative strategies for involving students in their own reading and writing process, and it supports the recently authorized Alberta Junior High Language Arts Curriculum Guide (1987) which suggests the importance of teaching language arts in an integrated way. In the middle has introduced to me a workshop approach to teaching language arts, an approach that encourages the students' choice and voice in their reading and writing. The workshop approach also emphasizes process in reading and writing rather than emphasizing only the product. In a very believable and accessible way, Atwell's book offers junior high teachers an exciting alternative to the former approaches to language arts teaching -- lecture, round-robin reading, end-of-chapter questions, essays, and multiple choice tests. And for me, it has encouraged a closer examination of current language arts theorists.

Since Atwell's In the middle, which promotes the movement of whole language ideas and approaches from elementary to junior high schools, many other books have been published to support workshop approaches. In addition, the concepts of reader response, conferencing, journaling, and alternative evaluation strategies have been presented by various language arts educators and researchers.

These alternative approaches to teaching language arts have prompted my investigation of new materials to support the new curriculum and the ideas of student choice and involvement. The philosophy of the 1987 Alberta Junior High Language Arts Curriculum clearly identifies fundamental principles that relate to the nature of language, to children's development, and to language learning. These principles result in implications which provide the framework for the junior high language arts program which include the following concepts: 1) the language arts program should emphasize lifelong applications of language arts skills; 2) language functions throughout the entire curriculum and mediates thought processes; 3) language expansion occurs primarily through active involvement in language situations; 4) talk and writing help students to clarify and share ideas and experiences; and 5) literature is an integral part of language learning. (Alberta Education, 1987, p. 3-4) The curriculum guide supports and encourages small group activities, exploratory talk and process approaches to reading and writing, enabling teachers to use a variety of teaching materials and strategies in their classes. (Alberta Education, 1987, p. 5)

With language arts colleagues at my junior high school, I have begun to look at a wider range of young adult fiction, anthologies, videos, evaluation strategies and at cross-curricular and collaborative student projects that support the philosophy of the junior high curriculum guide. Together we have organized professional development inservices that encourage teachers to rethink their approaches to teaching language arts and to participate

in conferences and workshops. We secure funds for release time to develop shared thematic units and have obtained the administration's financial support for student anthologies and displays.

Throughout the past eight years that I have spent exploring new directions and theories in language arts education, and reading a variety of teacher-researchers' narratives and theories, I have alternately become excited and frustrated by the challenges and directions my readings have suggested. My excitement has come, largely, from my interaction with students and colleagues who have made discoveries with and for me as we have learned together. We have explored and experimented with journal writing, discussion groups, and action research activities.

My frustrations have come from the lack of connection between theory as I have read and discovered it and classroom practice as I have observed it. I wonder why some teachers have resisted or ignored new ideas and approaches that have been suggested repeatedly through research writings, professional development activities, workshops, and informal talk. I am frustrated that these teachers settle for the same teacher-directed approach year after year, dismissing any alternative approaches as being too difficult to implement or as being merely fads.

It is my frustration with teachers' difficulty in considering alternative approaches to teaching language arts that has brought me to my research question. The question deals with a consideration of how theory can be more easily and effectively connected to practice, and how teachers can more willingly and openly reflect on their own theories and practices. I wonder what factors, situations, or circumstances cause some language arts teachers to continue to change and develop their personal teaching theories throughout their careers and others to remain firmly situated in one teaching style.

At the same time that I have observed many teachers around me "stuck" in one particular methodology or tradition, unable or unwilling to change, I have also seen many teachers becoming reflective practitioners, exploring new theories, attempting different strategies, and examining new materials for themselves and for their students. What is the critical difference between teachers who embrace change and those who resist it?

In this study I am attempting to explore what enables some teachers to change their personal and professional theories as they move through their teaching careers. How does "critical re-theorizing of teaching" occur for these teachers? Under what conditions, at what stages, and through what motivation, are teachers able to question their practices, remain in touch with theoretical developments and implement changes in their classroom teaching?

Also, I have read and reread writings in language arts education that describe innovative practices, that report current research related to junior high teaching and learning, and that present a theoretical framework for language learning in adolescents. Voices from the field of educational change, especially in language arts, provide insights from other researchers and theorists that are relevant to the research question. Ideas from language arts and change literature, presented in Chapter Two, offer harmonies to the solo voices of the individual teachers and to their collective voices in chorus.

### **Key: The Research Question**

What is it that motivates junior high language arts teachers to adopt innovative teaching methods?

In answering my research question, I hope to discover what classrooms that reflect change look like, what they sound like, how they feel. To discover the looks, sounds, and feelings of these classrooms, I have chosen the form of informal interview to talk with six participant teachers in order to best listen and to hear their voices. In addition, I have chosen to watch such classrooms at work, to sit in the middle of their teaching environments and hear the voices of teaching and learning resonate as these teachers talk to me of their teaching, their successes, and their frustrations. I hope to hear their individual voices blend and harmonize as I hear what they say, and understand how they choose to articulate their unique melodies. I want to listen to both the tunes and the silences between the tunes, the smoothness and rough uncertainties of their melodies.

### **Potential Antiphonies**

In my study, I have chosen to listen to six teachers who, I believe, articulate change and innovative methods as they teach. I feel that it will be more productive to focus on the positive rather than the negative aspects of change, and have chosen teachers whose methods reflect change rather than those who do not. The six unique pictures that I am attempting to create of teachers embracing change I hope will offer encouragement and support for continuous innovation and development. The common themes, qualities, and experiences suggested as a result of my interactions with these teachers may help to inform the practice of other teachers who are considering changes in their own programs and beliefs about language arts teaching but have not yet implemented changes in their teaching practices. As well, the conversations I have shared with the participants can inform school systems of possible curriculum directions and support needed; and the dialogues and observations can offer suggestions to teacher educators about concerns and considerations for student teachers and teachers new to the profession. It is the teachers who have been disinterested or disheartened by attempts to change with whom I wish to begin a dialogue.

### **A Note About Style**

In an attempt to place attention on voice and on harmony I use a metaphor of musical sound throughout my writing. This metaphor places emphasis on the aspects of my research that I believe to be most valuable and important, and allows for the melodious voices of teachers to be heard. I listen to the resonances of the participants' voices as they speak of teaching and of change, and listen to the polyphonic melodies and interludes in their classrooms. Teachers and students' voices need to be used and strengthened, in order for them to discover and harmonize their ideas and themes. And if that is the case, it is equally important that teachers and students are able to listen, with sensitive and attuned ears, to the voices that are speaking.

My own experiences as a junior high language arts teacher have grown into themes that sound at times both dissonant and harmonic. Although my themes are well-known and easily recognizable to me, I attempt not to play these personal melodies when listening to

the voices of other language arts teachers who participate in this study. I want to clearly identify their melodic lines before intertwining them into polyphonies with the melodic experiences of the others and myself, to enable their solo voices to sound clearly and in tune. The themes that I have experienced, my readings, writings, and interactions with other educators, will provide a harmonic accompaniment at the end of this composition.

The participants of my study will be recognized by name throughout this work, and will be able to hear their own voices as I represent them here. They share in the creation of their melodies by reading the aspects of the work that they have played for me, and suggesting where my notation lacks the resonance of their voices. Each teacher participant will have the opportunity to replay my interpretation of our conversations and classroom interactions before the final recording is made.

I am choosing to write this exploration of teacher change in language arts in the present tense for a practical reason. I hope that the present tense allows me to better present a series of pictures that are in process, that are themselves changing as I write. The present tense is also a philosophical choice. I believe that all of teaching is in the present, in the moment. Teachers are the link between the past and the future in their classrooms and are sensitive to how connections are made. Sounds, once made, join the past in their resonance and at the same time send out waves that predict future sounds to come.

### **Recapitulation**

Teaching language arts to junior high school students offers many exciting opportunities for rich and creative learning experiences, for both students and teachers. The chance to develop conversations with students through response journals and conferences can create positive and understanding relationships, and develop strong student voices. Students can develop their ideas in meaningful and creative ways and connect their learning across the curriculum.

With the potential to empower students through language and literature, I wonder why teachers would choose to stifle creativity and life, of their students and their own, with meaningless dull activities. It is with this question in mind that I attempt to find out what does motivate junior high teachers to adopt alternative procedures in their classrooms.

In attempting to investigate this question I will begin to harmonize with a variety of researchers' voices as they talk about teacher change in language arts.

## CHAPTER II

### HARMONIZING: ADDING VOICES

#### Voices of Language Arts

The basic philosophies and theories for effective language arts teaching have changed dramatically in the past two decades, and imply changes in teaching practice as well. Change to teaching philosophies that are grounded in many years of training and practice is not easily managed. Traditional teacher-centred approaches of lecture, individual student work, and rigorous examination offer control and security for some teachers. Spelling, vocabulary, and grammar exercises offer neat, definitive answers and grading that is easy to manage. Essay topics based on one theme or topic, while perhaps being dull and predictable reading, do not present dilemmas for the teacher about marking criteria.

However, while traditional approaches to language arts teaching may be more comfortable, the more recent approaches offer variety, insight and enthusiastic voice. Alternative strategies offer teachers the chance to become involved with their students' learning and to become learners along with their students.

In order for teachers to have a facility with change in their practices they need to have the knowledge and understanding of a variety of alternative strategies. I believe that they need to have a choice of activities and approaches in order to select what is effective for the students and to give their students a choice in how they will learn and perform. The more that teachers are aware of different strategies and intonations, the more comfortable they will feel in experimenting with alternatives. Unique and flexible language arts teaching is the result.

More than any other book, Atwell's *In the middle* (1987) has shaped my teaching and my thinking about teaching. It has shown me in practical terms how alternative strategies can be implemented in junior high language arts classes and has encouraged me to think about reshaping my teaching beliefs and practices. I have been led to read other keystone works that have influenced Atwell's own ideas, such as those of James Britton, Donald Graves, Donald Murray, and Janet Emig. Their work has in turn pulled me further into writings about language arts research, and I have become interested in the prominent work of Louise Rosenblatt, James Moffett, and Lev Vygotsky.

Each of these writers, generative of the new understanding of language arts, has led to further connections, both with tuneful writings new to me and with familiar melodies that I have previously encountered. The work focusing on oral language acquisition (for example, Wells, 1986) has led me to make connections between language and thinking, which in turn has led to concerns about reading and about writing.

The influential literature of the past twenty years that deals with language arts teaching emphasizes the importance of narrative as a valid and valuable method of gaining insightful information from teachers and from students. Newman (1990) and Perl and



Wilson (1986) are two examples of research conducted through teacher narratives. Strong and active voice is encouraged in the approaches to dealing with language arts learning such as reader response, as seen in the work of Thomson (1987), Probst (1988) and Purves and Beach (1972). Fulwiler (1987) and Parsons (1990a) offer strong support for the use of journal writing, and Romano (1987), Parry and Hornsby (1985), and Atwell (1987) clearly outline both the advantages and the practical applications of implementing workshops into junior high language arts classes. The encouragement of individual voices speaking clearly and thoughtfully is central to the philosophical basis of the key literature that has influenced recent directions in language arts teaching.

It is the Alberta Junior High Language Arts Curriculum Guide that first focuses my attention on possible alternative strategies for presenting language and literature. I have not been particularly enamoured with the sender-receiver-decoder model of communication that occupies the attention of many earlier language textbooks, nor with the traditional approach to literature of presenting short stories or novel excerpts followed by end-of-chapter questions testing a literal comprehension of the text. The possibility of focusing on listening, viewing, and speaking as well as reading and writing intrigues me, and the potential for integrating these strands resonates with the approaches that have made sense to me as I work with junior high students and materials.

### Writing Workshops

A dominant and influential voice in suggesting changes to the approaches that language arts teachers use is that of Nancie Atwell. In the middle (1987) focuses on workshop approaches to writing and reading in junior high school. Atwell gives not only the philosophical basis for implementing workshops in junior high language arts, but also clearly lays out structures and specific organizational strategies that help teachers establish their own formats. It is the organizational clarity that is particularly useful to teachers, helping them establish workable routines in their classrooms. I first discover Atwell's ideas in a university course in 1988, shortly after it was published. After reading In the middle, I enthusiastically take her ideas into my own classroom. As I work with workshop ideas, I begin to adapt and shape them to my own situation.

Writing workshops start with students selecting their own topics and genres and deciding how to say what is important for them to say. Through mini-lessons and conferences, the language arts teacher supports the students' writing efforts, guiding and suggesting without dictating. The writing process is emphasized in the workshop, with content being the starting point. Students are encouraged to write about ideas that are of personal importance and interest to them before shaping and refining the work. Through peer and teacher conferences, the students choose whether to revise and edit their work or whether to begin a new piece of writing. Good writing takes practice and meaningful ideas to write about. Two books that provide both ideas and practice for writers are Writing down the bones (Goldberg, 1986) and Writing the natural way (Rico, 1983). These books, like Murray's A writer teaches writing (1985), are comprised of many ideas and strategies for writing pieces that are of importance to the students. The ideas presented by Goldberg, Rico, and Murray enable students to make connections between writing activities and their own personal interests, adding meaning and enjoyment to their writing.

## **Reading Workshops**

Reading workshops, as well, encourage students to make personal choices in the literature they select. Atwell suggests establishing a "dining room table" atmosphere where readers can discuss their texts in real and meaningful ways. An important aspect of the reader's workshop is the personal response that each reader brings to a text, the starting point for discussions. Reader responses encourage students to develop their voices and to critically, creatively think about their reading. Louise Rosenblatt has written, in The reader, the text, the poem (1978), her influential theories on reader response. She suggests that readers read for one of two purposes, to gain information (efferent reading) or for pleasure (aesthetic reading). Readers need to understand the purpose of their reading in order to more easily accomplish their assignments or goals, especially in classroom situations. They need to be encouraged to think critically about their reading, to ask questions, and to make links with other reading and ideas.

Interpretation of a text, in Rosenblatt's view, is largely determined by the reader. The text, or in Rosenblatt's terms, the "poem," is no longer the possession of the writer but becomes open to reasonable interpretation on the part of each different reader. This view of reading, then, suggests multiple diverse readings.

## **Journals**

One way of accommodating and discussing the interpretations between two readers (teacher-student, student-student) is through response journals. Response journals, used in a dialogic fashion, create opportunities for conversations between individuals that do not exist in traditional teacher-centred lecture situations. I come to know my students much better because I can hear their voices through their responses and relate to them as a fellow reader and writer rather than only as a teacher.

Journals, as discussed in Fulwiler's The journal book (1987), have many possible uses, not the least of which is allowing students to discover their own individual voices and to explore new ideas and connections. Journals integrate reading, writing, speaking, viewing, and listening aspects of the language arts program and can simplify and streamline a comprehensive approach to personal response. Response journals can be used in a variety of flexible ways to evaluate individual progress, to explore personal responses, to develop small-group discussions, to track independent reading, to guide student/teacher conferences, to maintain personal dialogues, and to develop a source book of ideas. (Parsons, 1990a)

The language of journals, or of reader responses, is in Britton's term "expressive" language, the place we all begin in articulating and formulating our ideas for an outside audience. Dickerson (1987, p.129) quotes Thoreau as calling a journal

a record of experiences and growth, not a preserve of things well done or said.... The charm of the journal must consist in a certain greenness, though freshness, and not in maturity. Here I cannot afford to be remembering what I said or did, but what I am and aspire to become.

Not only are journals valuable exploratory tools, but they are also good depositories of ideas for further developmental writing and can be used later in writing workshop situations. Two areas identified by Dickerson (1987) in "Exploring the Inner Landscape:

The Journal in Writing Class" as being most significant for students writing progress are 1) the journal as stimulus of ideas and material for pieces of writing-in-progress, and 2) the journal as stimulus to examine the inner landscape undergoing intellectual and emotional growth.

This second area connects to the "new frontiers" that Lucy Calkins writes about in Living between the lines (1991), the kind of writing and reading that make connections between our present and our past lives, and that really matters. She encourages readers and writers to uncover texts that take us on significant journeys, that provide meaning to our lives. She suggests that students need to recognize the potential power of language to see "that there is power and music in their voices and in their language." ( p. 284) The real importance of writing is not in developing the skills of writing, but in "searching for the exact true word to say things we've never said," to "call forth life." One of the goals of reading-writing workshops should be to help students build rich storehouses of language, to introduce them to many varied uses of language both oral and written.

At a time when I was beginning to question the process approaches to learning about language, asking "So what?" to the exclamations of teachers that students could write short stories and poetry more fluently than ever before, Calkins' book Living between the lines is published and addresses the issues that concern me about using language in meaningful ways.

## **Talk**

Spoken language can provide a further dimension to the power of language -- the sound and rhythm of words. Many texts are meant to be read aloud -- children's stories, poems, dialogues. We learn to use language first by listening and trying to speak, and the more exposure we have to language the more facility we will have to express and extend ourselves. Several theorists, such as Vygotsky, Britton, and Wells, suggest that language acquisition is inextricably bound up with thought. Thought plays a vital role in language acquisition, and language is key in creating and extending thought. It is through this extended thought that we begin to make sense of the world and our unique place in it:

As we engage in talk, we literally tell the stories of our lives as we live them, constructing the realities of our beings through conversation .... All talk, be it purposeful or random in nature, helps us understand the human race in all its variety, and is therefore an educational experience. (Booth and Thornley-Hall, 1991, p. 7)

Conversation is a powerful tool in connecting and developing ideas. The more talk is made a part of learning situations, whether it be to generate memories and ideas or to discuss stories and poems, the more potential there is for meaningful connections in learning. "Ideas planted in the garden of conversation produce the best fruit," (Chinese proverb) and often grow out of real dialogue. The importance of the conferencing aspect of the writing process is that it provides time for the writer's work to be heard and received by an interested learner. "Humanely conducted conferences," states Tom Romano in Clearing the way (1987, p. 86) "begin relationships of trust, understanding, and support, which nurture and seal positive bonds between teacher and student." Conferencing is more than just a step in the writing process -- it is an art. "A good deal of conference time is spent eliciting information from the writer, asking various questions about the writing." (Romano, 1987, p. 91) The most useful questions are those the reader genuinely needs answered (Hansen, 1983) and if the listener can distinguish these, it

shows that he or she truly understands and cares about the writer's work. Listening is a deliberate act, suggest Donald Graves, (Romano, 1987, p. 100) rather than a natural one, and implies genuine caring and attention on the part of the teacher.

The process of talk encourages not only the sharing of ideas but also active listening, a partnership. It is vital that students "develop a fluent oral language base before they learn to read and write and yet the skills involved in talking and listening are rarely taught. Nonetheless, students naturally use talk all the time, for informal activities such as conversations, sharing opinions, and solving problems and for formal activities including interviewing, role-playing and reporting." (Wason-Ellam, 1991, p. 9)

Students working collaboratively on projects and presentations can be encouraged to develop productive and important talk. From loose fragments of conversation, ideas form and join together. "The process of collaboration invites students to become more facile language users and more confident in their interpersonal relations." (Morton, 1988, p.33) Students learn to develop their own voices and to take control of their learning in enjoyable ways if they are given opportunities to talk together. They can learn from each other through planning, drafting, and revising their work together. All of these activities involve purposeful talk to accomplish specific goals, and develop life-long skills in communicating and working collaboratively with others. When my students have had opportunities to create videotaped presentations, they have spent many hours discussing the organization and filming strategies, rehearsing, and filming. They have presented serious drama, newscasts, and commercials, and have developed their skills through collaboration and constructive talk with each other.

### **Whole Language**

The whole language movement supports the concept of learning about language for real, meaningful purposes. A challenge in attempting to implement theories of whole language and workshops has been to shape the concepts created for elementary schools into workable chunks for junior high schools. Working with a timetable that segments the day into forty-five minute blocks, I find it difficult to build in the type of flexible approaches to conferencing, mini-lessons, and publishing that are described by Donald Graves and Jane Hansen. Even the structures Atwell describes for her junior high classes imply much more flexibility and time with her students than I have with my own students. My reality of one forty-five minute class per day with each language arts class demands some adaptation to Atwell's structures.

Two books that greatly help me to make adaptations to Atwell's structure and to set up positive writing and reading environments for my students are Tom Romano's book Clearing the way: Working with teenage writers (1987) and Donald Murray's A writer teaches writing (1985). Both books helped me to clearly establish in my own mind the possibilities for implementing writing programs in junior high schools. Clearing the way presents the writing of students who speak with the same voices as my own students. Romano clarifies and restates ideas about teaching reading and writing in meaningful ways, and his use of examples helps me to better understand how conferences with students can guide and instruct their writing. Murray's book offers many practical examples for encouraging students' writing, from the point of view of an experienced writer and teacher. The examples laid out in the book enable me to picture and to shape experiences for my own students that suggest writing in which students have a vested interest.

In addition to these books, many others written for the elementary level support the ideas of Atwell, Graves, Murray, and Romano. Parry and Hornsby's Write on: A conference approach to writing (1985) and Read on: A conference approach to reading (1986), enable me to develop clear organizational strategies for reading and writing workshops in my junior high classrooms. As with Atwell's (1987, p. 91) "Status of the Class Conference Sheet", the chart laying out activities to extend comprehension (Parry and Hornsby, 1985) provides a structure and guideline for the students' choices in selecting and presenting their reading and writing ideas.

The "whole language" movement at the elementary level encourages teachers to view writing and reading as active, creative, constructive processes, and to incorporate aspects of reading, writing, viewing, speaking, and listening into language learning. Whole language also suggests that "the act of processing language involves more than the communicating or recording of experience. Through language, we construct our sense of reality by clarifying, discovering, assessing, reflecting on, resolving and refining what we really think and feel about experience." (Parsons, 1990b) Language is learned best when it is whole and in natural context, suggests Ken Goodman. Texts must be real and writers must have something to say and a sense of their audience. (Goodman, 1986)

### Young Adult Literature

The sense of audience in real texts is an important aspect of a developing genre known as young adult fiction. Monseau and Salvner, in Reading their world: The young adult novel in the classroom (1992), suggest that we need to give our students the opportunity to acquire new knowledge by relating it to what they already know. Young adult literature can link students to new literary worlds in accessible and understandable ways, providing a transition from the literary world of the adolescent to that of the adult. (Monseau and Salvner, 1992) Young adult fiction can provide other links as well, to other curricular areas, to issues of gender and censorship and to writing from other cultures. Donelson and Nilsen's comprehensive book literature for today's young adults (1989), although having a distinct American focus, offers hundreds of young adult book titles, of many genres and styles, that encourage language arts teachers to develop junior high reading programs based on this recent literature.

The recently developed Alberta Junior High Novels and Non-Fiction List (1990) offers a range of recommended novels that provide a wider variety of young adult literature than had previously been used in junior high classes. The list attempts to include a variety of authors and subject matter that represents multiculturalism, gender, and other societal issues; however, as suggested in Johnston's thesis dealing with selection of junior high materials (1992) the list is still limiting in the number of titles suggested and in the fact that the titles are divided into grade levels. With the number of young adult titles available to adolescent readers increasing every year, writing with "skill and grace and [employing] vivid imagery in their creation of engrossing stories with characters of depth and universality" (Johnston, 1992, p. 6) it is unnecessary that students and teachers must have their choices limited. Many teachers are finding alternative strategies for encouraging wide and varied reading on the part of their students, reading that includes young adult titles as well as more traditional "classic" titles.

As changing philosophies and attitudes about literature choices and approaches to dealing with the literature are developed and supported in research, students and teachers are able to choose more widely of their literature selections and ways they approach the novels. Classroom arrangements change from regimented rows facing the front of the room to

clusters and circles (Atwell, 1987; Romano, 1987) in order to enable students to discuss and share ideas about their reading. The students, rather than the teacher, become the centre of the learning environment.

### **Evaluation**

As the centre within the classroom shifts, and students develop more confident and expressive voices, other aspects of the learning environment change as well. Assessment and evaluation strategies change, to reflect the philosophy of the current curriculum guide and of language arts educators. Traditional evaluation strategies (formal essay assignments, and comprehensive exams that focus on the students' knowledge and understanding of literary works, and on grammatical constructs) no longer support the new directions of junior high language arts instruction. As stated in the Alberta Junior High School Language Arts Curriculum Guide (1987), "the curriculum advocates using language rather than learning about it" (p. 5) and goes on to suggest that "evaluation procedures should provide for as much active involvement of the students as possible" and "should involve the active use of the skills being taught." (p. 75) As Zemelman and Daniels suggest in their book *A community of writers* (1988, p. 207), the red pen approach, showing language teachers' obsession with perfection of mechanics, "effectively pushes meaning out of the centre and enshrines correctness as the reason for writing." They criticize such an approach by saying, "we have taken what is potentially the most personal, energizing and richly meaningful subject in the whole curriculum and sucked the meaning out of it."

In order for strategies to reflect and support the direction of classroom instruction in language arts, a variety of alternative assessment ideas have been developed. Teachers take on different roles at different stages of evaluating their students' work. The range of roles include those of listener, fellow-learner, guide, coach, expert, editor, and judge. Zemelman and Daniels (1988, p.222-3) state that "teachers may need to gather information and react to it in many different ways at various stages of the writing process ... evaluation doesn't mean just one thing, but different things at different times."

Evaluation is messy. There are no clear-cut answers for evaluation, an aspect of language arts that is vital to the growth and development of young users of language. However, several strategies have been suggested that support the new directions in language arts learning. The use of reader response mentioned earlier can provide teachers with rich information about their students' development and progress. Thomson (1987) has suggested a developmental model for assessing response to literature that moves from unreflective interest in the action of the story, through various levels to the most complex level of developing a recognition of textual ideology and understanding of oneself and one's own reading processes. This type of model gives teachers guidelines in order to assess the development of their own students' responses.

Other guidelines for the assessment of written work are evaluation scales and holistic marking guides. These descriptive scales enable students and teachers to evaluate written work based on clearly identified criteria and can be adapted to a variety of situations. Writing folders and portfolios can be evaluated using evaluation scales, which encourage student involvement in the evaluation process. In *Assessing English* (1983) Johnson states that the results of research suggest that when language arts teachers avoid grades and marks, and involve students in assessing their own work, then the students are more motivated to improve their writing than are students who continuously receive grades and marks. Students need choice, not only in what they read and write and how they present

their learning, but also in which of their work will be assessed, and in what ways. Teachers can learn from student texts, and as Zebrowski states in his article "A Hero In the Classroom," (1989), they create themselves anew each time they read a student text. As teachers join their students in learning from writing, they realize that it is less important what they make of student writing than that they make something of it -- something principled. Teachers realize that student texts are intrinsically worthy of being valued, as well as evaluated. The "Evaluating Students; Learning and Communication Processes Program" currently being developed by Alberta Education (1993) is an example of an evaluation implement that encourages teachers to view students' language development through six processes -- exploring, narrating, imagining, empathizing, abstracting, and monitoring -- in a diagnostic and collaborative way, including students in their learning. When students are encouraged to take on more responsible roles in their writing than they have been able to take in the past, and when the emphasis is placed on the process of inquiry rather than on the product itself, students become empowered. (Lawson, 1989)

### Voices of Teacher Change

Fullan suggests that it is important to first ask "What is change?" Teachers need to decide what needs changing as well as how to change. (Fullan, 1982, p. x) The integration of the general knowledge of change and the specific knowledge is important in the final analysis. Each individual teacher must decide on a course of action for herself or himself, must know when to reject certain change possibilities, when and how to pursue others, and how to cope with policies and programs imposed on them.

Teachers able and willing to consider changes to their approaches to instruction must be able to examine their personal theories with open and inquiring minds. In an article entitled "Theories of Writing Instruction: Having Them, Using Them, Changing Them," Parker (1988) asks

What do teachers' personal theories look like? What sort of relationships exists between teachers' personal private theories of writing instruction (or reading, or grammar, or whatever) and the impersonal, public theories proposed by scholars? When teachers change their personal theories what does the change process look like, and how might such change be influenced by various kinds of preservice and inservice experiences or programs?

There has been a great deal of interest and research in various aspects of teacher change during the past decade. Lieberman (1984, p.1) notes Waller's comment about teacher change: "Whatever contributes to understanding also contributes to reconstruction." But teacher change is messy and idiosyncratic suggests Newman in Finding our own way (1990). This is due in part to the complexity of the nature of change itself, but also due to the nature of teaching, which is "fraught with endemic uncertainties," the greatest uncertainty being the one that "surrounds the connection between teaching and learning." (Lieberman and Miller, 1984, p. 2)

Change is a highly personal experience. "Each and every one of the teachers who will be affected by change must have the opportunity to work through this experience in a way in which the rewards at least equal the cost." (Fullan, 1982, p. 113) The process of learning and of change must be experienced by all teachers, not just a token "team" of teacher curriculum developers.

## **Frustrations in Teaching**

Strong feelings develop in teachers, feelings of both frustration and of satisfaction and joy. If feelings of frustration and impotence overwhelm the positive feeling in teachers' lives, the chances for positive change are decreased. Frustration arises in part from lack of a standard by which teachers can measure their professional competence, from lack of peer support and interaction, and from goals that are vague and conflicting. As Fullan comments, "the teacher's craft...is marked by the absence of concrete models for emulation, unclear lines of influence, multiple and controversial criteria, ambiguity about assessment timing, and instability in the product." (Fullan, 1982, p. 108) Teachers often have a general lack of confidence and a pervasive feeling of vulnerability, which is only intensified by the frustrations mentioned. The only control they can gain is in their classrooms -- it becomes essential to gain and maintain dominance in the classroom for their survival. When teachers lose control, they fear that they lose everything. (Lieberman and Miller, 1984)

Junior high school teachers are caught between the child-focused teaching of elementary schools and the subject-focused teaching of high schools. Although in Alberta teachers are educated as "secondary teachers" they quickly realize that junior high is a very different place from a senior high school. And although junior high teachers often feel bound to concentrate on subject specialization, they are forced to also deal with the reality of adolescent behaviour. Often junior high teachers are teaching subjects they never imagined teaching, due to core programs, timetable convenience, or changing enrollments. An ever-present concern for many junior high teachers is the reality of dealing with two hundred different students in the course of every week, and the realization that individual interactions take a great deal of time and energy. And there is still the continual fear of losing control, a constant reality given these teaching situations. (Lieberman and Miller, 1984)

A central dilemma for junior high teachers is deciding where to place their emphasis in working with adolescents. They must continually ask themselves whether they are teachers primarily concerned with academic content or with the care of their students' overall well-being? Both decisions can cause frustrations, because of external as well as personal pressures. School systems are continually demanding proof of the "excellence" of both student and teacher performance. (Alberta Education, 1992). Social systems are continually demanding that schools take on a greater role in socializing students. Teachers are having to decide which of these roles they can successfully manage, and sometimes in order to "survive" they continue to do what is most familiar, often lecturing and assigning individual student work. (Lieberman and Miller, 1984)

"All teachers need a place to relax," (Lieberman and Miller, 1984, p.47) yet in viewing the typical junior high teacher's timetable it is not uncommon to see teachers "on duty" from the moment students arrive in the morning until long after they leave. Supervision duties rotate teachers through morning, noon hour, and after school schedules; most junior high teachers do not have preparation periods every day; and breaks between classes, when the teachers are responsible for monitoring the halls, range from two to five minutes. There is, literally, no time even to go to the bathroom. (Some junior high schools have inserted a ten-minute break mid-morning, providing relaxation and socialization for teachers and students. Others have tried to offer choice through team teaching and flexible student timetables, enabling students and teachers to choose the time they need to take a break.) Many timetables add to the frustrations of teachers working in junior high schools. Lack of time is a perennial problem for teachers, and the



feeling that their work is never finished. Generally, time for change is a critical missing factor in the schedules of most teachers. (Fullan, 1982)

### What Teachers Need in Order to Change

The process of change in teachers is an individual one, and many researchers have found the best way to inquire about teacher change is to ask them directly and to hear their individual and unique stories. Generalized analysis has value "[but] can only be understood and can only inspire reformed practice -- so long as it is grounded in the complex experience of particular persons." (Kazmierczak and Murphy, 1992, p. 224) School business is always interwoven with personal feeling, and it is important to challenge the "tidiness of systemic analysis by insisting on the tangle of [teachers' personal] experience." (Kazmierczak and Murphy, 1992, p. 225)

Through many research studies of teachers' thinking, it seems evident that teachers generally have "pervasive personal theories of teaching" (Pope and Denicolo, 1984) and that these personal theories do not always match with public theories. Elbaz (1981) has examined the nature of teachers' practical knowledge and identified five categories within that knowledge: 1) subject matter, 2) pedagogical choice, 3) cognition, 4) students as learners, and 5) the school as a social environment. Munby's investigation of teacher beliefs (1983) identified five categories of teacher belief: 1) teacher goals, 2) management, 3) teacher needs, 4) student needs, and 5) facilitation of learning. However, these areas of knowledge and belief are often not clearly articulated by the teachers that hold them. And to the extent that a person's constructs are "unarticulated and unexamined, or are impermeable, that person is locked into particular ways of acting and interpreting the world." (Diamond, 1991, p. 23) Teachers tend to work in isolation and are not likely to recognize or develop needed changes that they might identify if they were engaged in reflection and exchange. (Fullan, 1982) On the other hand, if a person's constructs are permeable, and if they are articulated and examined, teachers may undertake a "liberating reconstruction of their perspective." (Diamond, 1991, p. 30)

Newman's book Finding our own way (1990) consists of twenty-four teachers telling stories of their explorations into change, raising important questions of the hows and whys of literary education, re-examining the fundamental theories and metaphors of education. These teachers consider their personal theories through reflection of their own classroom experiences and practices. The process of teacher change, as well as being an individual one, is also a risky one, requiring teachers to reexamine their own deeply held convictions about learning and teaching, and to try on new theoretical lenses that help them to see that "the tried was not always true." (Newman, 1990, p. xv) Courage is necessary to embark upon journeys of change and to confront the inevitable challenges and obstacles that will appear.

Newman provides a set of principles that she feels must be adopted in order to make fundamental changes to language arts classrooms: 1) language learning is a social activity; 2) language learning is a global enterprise; and 3) learning involves risk. These principles "provide a framework for creating a learning context that offers continuous demonstrations about how meaning is constructed by an interpretive community, about how reading and writing are collaborative activities, and about how oral and written language are tools for learning. These principles allow teachers and students to be learners together. These principles make teaching a theoretical endeavour." (Newman, 1990, p.2)

The challenge for teachers is in living these principles in their classrooms, not just in changing surface features of classrooms to resemble those of Nancie Atwell or Tom Romano. "It requires that we engage in an ongoing re-examination of our beliefs and assumptions about learning and teaching ... that teachers become open to learning both with and from students." (Newman, 1990, p.2)

The process of changing from a traditional transmission way of teaching to one that incorporates Newman's previously stated principles is complex. Jaggar, in "Teacher as Learner: Implications for Staff Development" (Pinnell and Matlin, 1989) suggests sources of knowledge and ways of learning that are common to many teachers. Her model identifies four sources of knowledge for teachers (theory and research, practice, observation, and social dialogue) and four ways of learning (watching and listening, thinking and reflection, sensing and feeling, and doing) that mesh with each other as teachers both immerse themselves in and distance themselves from their classroom situations.

A distillation of several research studies (Farnan et al, 1992; Vacca and Manna, 1985; Boiarsky, 1985; Schon, 1985; Courtland, 1992) supports Jaggar's model in suggesting common elements in the process of change. These critical factors include knowledge, a sense of ownership, and collaboration. Once an awareness of the need or desire for change has been reached, teachers must 1) become aware of a new method or theory, 2) acquire both concepts and knowledge of the method, and skills needed to implement it, 3) receive feedback concerning the use of the method, and 4) receive coaching and support from credible people during implementation of the new method. (Boiarsky, 1985)

Change in practice depends on change in beliefs, and change in beliefs comes about through teachers reflecting on their own practice. Schon (1983) suggests five characteristics of a reflective practitioner: 1) recognition that students have relevant and important knowledge, 2) acknowledgment of one's own lack of knowledge/certainty in all areas, 3) ability to seek out connections to students' thoughts and feelings, 4) allowance of students' respect for teachers' knowledge that emerges from their discovering of it in the classroom, and 5) engendering ownership and autonomy. Van Manen (1991) suggests that pedagogical tact is a further necessary characteristic of a reflective practitioner -- an attribute that involves intuitiveness that enables the teacher to sense the right thing to do, to know how far to enter into a situation or to hold back, and how to interpret student behaviors such as shyness, hostility and rudeness. In *Through teachers' eyes* (1986), Perl and Wilson conducted long-term action research projects of teaching writing involving teachers actively reflecting on their practice. After two years of working with an outside researcher, these teachers are finally able to more clearly examine and alter their previous beliefs and practices.

Knowledge of research is valuable for teachers, "because it provides a background of ideas against which we can compare our own knowledge and experiences." (Jaggar, 1989, p. 74) However, in order to understand not only what the research says but also what it means, teachers must make personal connections to their own teaching practices and beliefs. In arguing for teacher reflection, Amarel (cited in Jaggar, 1980) states that experience provides only the raw material for thought, but will not nourish teaching practice by itself. Teachers should not be left alone; nor should they leave each other alone. (Fullan, 1982) And as Dewey has pointed out, "We do not actually learn from experience as much as we learn from reflecting on that experience." (cited in Jaggar, 1989, p. 76) When informed reflection is combined with observation, it becomes inquiry, that is, careful study that leads to sound judgments about students and to continual learning for teachers. Teachers need opportunities to converse about the meaning of

change, moving from the concrete to the abstract, from practical procedures and activities to a discussion of underlying principles, rather than the other way around. (Fullan, 1982)

Teachers must finally return to the importance and power of language to clarify and confirm their beliefs and practices. "Language makes it possible for us to think about what we know and to take conscious responsibility for it, reshaping it for new purposes and taking a critical attitude to it." (Barnes, 1978, p. 156) Teachers can help each other to change and to develop through "honest professional dialogue during which they talk, listen, and challenge one another's ideas in an atmosphere of respect and support." (Jaggar, 1989, p. 77)

### Why Teachers Change

Teachers need reasons to change. The process of effective and meaningful change comes from the inside out, not the outside in. Teachers who have visions and ideas about a better way of teaching language arts, a personal interest in reading and writing, and a desire to maintain interest and joy in their teaching will be more likely to develop new directions and approaches. Teachers will not change simply by being given information or being told about theory and research and new approaches. Although information is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition for change. (Jaggar, 1989) Most teachers do not take the initiative to promote changes beyond their own classrooms because of cultural conditions and concerns of practicality. There are many factors inhibiting teacher change, such as traditionalism, inertia, vulnerability, absence of motivation, educational bureaucracy, inadequate resources, and lack of clarity about the process of change, but few factors that support change (Cameron, 1989). These factors such as the growth of information and pressures from outside professional education, are often not internally generated, but are imposed on teachers from external sources.

For change to occur in language arts classrooms, teachers need to be provided with a climate that will support and encourage their development. That climate, the literature reviewed tells us, involves:

- 1) **Time:** Time is needed to observe students and each other, to read, to reflect on practices, to discuss new ideas and theories, to attend workshops, and to plan alternative activities. Change is a gradual process that involves altering our beliefs, our thoughts, and our practices in the classroom.
- 2) **Freedom:** Freedom is needed to take risks and to experiment with new ideas, materials, techniques, and approaches. Change is a constructive process. The more teachers can control and initiate their own change processes, the more likely they are to acquire new strategies and skills.
- 3) **Collaboration:** Teachers need to collaborate with colleagues and other professionals to make sense of new theories and to implement new strategies. Change also requires support and encouragement from administrators and curriculum specialists.
- 4) **Reflection:** Teachers need to reflect about their observations and practice. Change comes about when teachers have the ability to make decisions about their own teaching practices and can act on those decisions. (Jaggar, 1989) "Significant educational change consists of change in beliefs, teaching style, and materials, and can only come about through a process of personal development in a context of socialization." (Fullan, 1982, p. 121)

### Recapitulation

Change in teaching practice is an important focus of much recent educational research. In trying to determine how and why teachers can move beyond their previous student teaching experiences and adopt further innovative approaches to language arts teaching, researchers have been more concerned with listening to the voices of teachers involved in the practice of teaching. Researchers have been encouraged to work in partnership with practicing teachers to conduct classroom inquiry and to collaboratively develop new strategies and ideas. The Masters' studies of Talbot (1988) and Mathieu (1989), two of the participants of this study, are examples of such partnerships. Teachers are researching their own practice, and are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and ideas, and to combine their voices with the voices of colleagues to further develop and change their beliefs and practices.

Classroom research suggests a variety of conditions that encourage teachers to consider change to their teaching beliefs and practices. A climate that encourages risk-taking, collaboration, and reflection supports language arts teachers in implementing and experimenting with new educational approaches. It is teachers who have been encouraged by this type of climate or who have developed this type of climate for themselves that I hope to include in my investigation of the motivations of junior high language arts teachers in adopting innovative teaching methods.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **ARRANGEMENT: IN A MAJOR KEY**

I am interested in hearing junior high language arts teachers talk about their approaches to teaching literature and language in their classrooms, teachers who are recognized in their educational communities as having implemented a variety of different approaches. By listening to the stories and experiences of teachers who have developed classroom situations that reflect alternative theories and practices supported by recent research and professional literature, I hope to suggest to other teachers possibilities for change in their own classrooms.

I have decided to work with teachers at the junior high level, because that is where I hear the strongest teacher voices advocating changes -- voices that speak of implementing group discussions, cooperative and collaborative work, peer conferences, and active student involvement.

I have selected six junior high school teachers who I know are on the "cutting edge" of language arts teaching and who are attuned to the developments and ideas presented recently by researchers and writers. I have chosen these particular six teachers through my own knowledge of teachers and their practices and through the suggestions of university faculty and language arts consultants who are attuned to alternative approaches in junior high classrooms. An important aspect of this study is that the participant teachers have not been chosen randomly, but have been chosen because they have attempted to implement a variety of innovative approaches to language arts teaching. Their selection has been based on the criteria listed below. Each of the six teachers has agreed enthusiastically to becoming a participant in my exploration which involves an interview with me and a visit by me to their classrooms.

Although these teachers have not been selected randomly, I feel that it is important to note that they are not being composed and developed in this study as perfect or flawless teachers. They each identify for themselves areas of uncertainty, areas in which they need to develop further. Lacking confidence, fear of failure, and misjudging time needed to complete assignments are some of the concerns that the participants mention. Each of these six teachers has experienced unsuccessful classes, problems working with colleagues, and each sometimes relies on colleagues and consultants for support and professional development. However, despite the problems that they identify, each of the participants continues to look for new ideas, new connections, and new directions for themselves and for their students.

#### **Potential Interview Questions**

The questions that form the basis for the interviews have grown from a variety of sources, from my own experiences, from listening to other teachers discuss their experiences, and from suggestions by colleagues. The questions weave together as our interview dialogue begins. The development of one question leads into a discussion of another question. The

questions often become the bridges that lead from one aspect of the discussion of the participants' experiences and changes to another.

The following list of questions has been distributed to the teacher participants before our interviews, and forms the foundation of our discussions:

- 1) Describe your educational experiences and background (number of years teaching, number of years of education, where, how many schools taught at ...).
- 2) What people come to mind that you would describe as role models, or mentors, or people you have looked up to in your educational past?
- 3) Describe your role in the classroom. Do you have an educational metaphor for yourself or a metaphor of an ideal?
- 4) What is your view of knowledge/content? How should it be used?
- 5) What have been highlights or steppingstones in your education?
- 6) What kinds of support have you received in your learning journey -- school, system, colleagues, family, etc.?
- 7) What constraints or hindrances/frustrations have you encountered in your development?
- 8) What attitudes help you in your teaching role?
- 9) What do you wish for, or would like to see, in your teaching situation/occupation?
- 10) What kinds of materials (can name specifics if you wish) do you use in your classroom? Why do you use these? Why not others?
- 11) What is the best source of new ideas for you?
- 12) How do you support your colleagues in your work together?

The participants discuss each of these questions in the interviews. I use the data from the taped interviews, along with the data I obtain through my observations of the participants' classrooms, to write the descriptions of the musicians and themes found in Chapters Four and Five. The participants have the opportunity to respond to my written interpretations after they have been composed. The participants' responses to my compositions are a valuable source of data that help to shape the descriptions and interpretations. Each person also verifies that I hear his or her melody; and, together, they hear my composed themes, adding or emphasizing harmonies in my composition.

### **The Interviews and Classroom Visits: Hearing the Melodies in Context**

Once I have identified the six teacher participants for my investigation, I contact each one by a letter that includes the potential interview questions, and I follow up with a telephone call. During the telephone conversation we establish a meeting time and place for the interview, one that is convenient for the individual participants. At the end of each interview I plan a visit to the participants' classroom at a time that is convenient and comfortable for the teacher involved. The main purpose of the classroom visits is to enable me to hear the many polyphonic lines of each of the participant teacher's situations more clearly and to describe how the theories they note in our interviews are interpreted into practice. I want to be able to create melodies of what these classrooms look like and sound like and feel like, and then I want to relate what I hear and see in the classroom to the comments made during the interviews. I find, with some of the participants, a concern about my intentions and expectations in these classroom visits. I am introduced to the students in a variety of ways, as a researcher, a friend, a colleague. Some of the introductions include comments such as, "Don't worry, she's here to observe me, not you," and "She's watching how I teach." These perceptions, I feel, indicate that my presence has caused some stress to the participant teachers, and I attempt to alleviate that,

by my facial expressions, body language, and the focus of my observations as early as I can during my visit.

One of the first activities that I engage in with each classroom visit is to create a map of the room -- the physical lay-out, the furniture, and the fixtures. This activity proves useful for two reasons: 1) it jogs my memory as I return to my notes and enables me to refer to specific aspects of each classroom and 2) it is a visible activity and indicates to the teachers the type of information that interests me during my visits. The teachers quickly seem to forget about my presence in their classrooms as I continue to record information about what I see and hear, as they become absorbed with their students.

Prepared with my tape recorder, notepad, and interview questions, I make the half hour drive south of Edmonton to an older elementary-junior high school, a two story blue structure surrounded by open fields, to interview one of the participants, Bryan Rees. I am not sure how the interview will go and I am a bit nervous, but soon feel more comfortable as Bryan warmly welcomes me into his classroom and I begin the interview. As he talks, I make brief notes that contain the main points of his comments and answers to be later compared and combined with the complete transcribed versions of the audiotaped interviews. My ears are not as sensitive as my eyes; and, although I can recall clearly the sounds of the voices, I feel it is important to be able to check my perceived impressions and answers of the participants.

The preset questions are all addressed in the interview which takes more than an hour to complete. The school is empty and quiet. As I leave Bryan, I establish a date for my visit to observe his class. He is eager to have me observe his noon-hour paired reading project and invites me to sit through the lunch hour to watch this activity before observing his afternoon classes. After speaking with Bryan I find myself eager to both listen to the resulting taped interview and to interview the next participant. This interview has created for me some connections to my own teaching experiences and I wish to hear how the responses of the other teachers resonate with Bryan's responses.

When I visit Bryan Rees' classroom I have the opportunity to observe the paired reading activity, followed by a grade nine Basic Core math class, composed of students who are having difficulty in succeeding in the regular classroom, and a grade eight language arts class. The math class is an algebra review class in which there is collaborative discussion and sharing. Bryan has suggested to me that he hopes to increase the students' confidence in their abilities as much as to instruct them in mathematics concepts. The language arts class spends the period working on creating short stories in partners as Bryan confers with each pair in turn. The last fifteen minutes of the class are spent by the students in silent reading and the writing of personal responses to their reading.

I visit Bill Talbot's home to conduct my second interview. We sit at his kitchen table with the tape recorder running, and I again begin with the interview question about his professional and educational background. I am surprised that this interview feels so different from the previous one with Bryan, and realize that I will have to change the rhythm and pacing of the interview questions to suit the participant's particular style. Bill's answers are very focused and I have to encourage him to embellish, especially when he talks about his own professional accomplishments. Again, I take notes as Bill talks, which I hope will emphasize the main points he makes throughout the audiotaped interview. My interview with Bill is completed in about forty-five minutes, with one brief interruption from an overhead jet. Before I leave, we decide upon a date for my observation visit, a Tuesday morning where he has three grade nine language arts classes, at an innovative and newly opened junior high school.

The three grade nine writing workshop classes I observe are focused on revising and editing their best writing of the year. The students spend some of their class time in conferring with peers or with Bill and some of the time in writing and revising on their own. I find it interesting to note the similarities between the writing workshop in Bill's class and those described by Atwell (1987), Romano (1987), and Murray (1985). Some students choose to use computers to write. Bill's time is divided between reading and commenting on the students' work and managing the students' progress and behavior. As in Bryan's class, there is no time where Bill is not actively engaged with his students.

I drive to St. Albert to interview Wendy Mathieu. She has invited me to her home after a school day to conduct the interview. After two hours, I am surprised to find we are still talking. The interview has lasted one and a half hours, and is rich in personal and professional comment. Wendy is able to clearly articulate her views and connect her experiences to the questions I pose in the interview, and I find the interview has developed a natural flow. Again, we establish a date for my classroom visit before I leave. As Wendy's class establishes each day's timetable with her, I am not certain what melodies I will be hearing. However, I look forward to visiting her junior high school in north Edmonton, where the innovative programs being offered have gained wide recognition with the educational community and the public.

At Wendy's school, each teacher or "learning coach" is responsible for teaching their mixed years seven to nine students in most of the subject areas. The first hour and a half in Wendy's class on this particular day is spent in completing individual and group science activities on electromagnetics. Wendy moves among the groups, advising and checking on their progress and conferring with students at her desk. Much of the time the students work independently and look to their peers for assistance. Following the science activity, Wendy's class has challenged another class to a softball game. After a brief review of the teams and the rules with Wendy, the students take bats, balls, and gloves out to the field with an enthusiasm reminiscent of elementary school students. The softball game is supervised by the teaching intern, which gives Wendy time to work with her two ESL students who have remained in the classroom.

I return to south Edmonton for my interview with Janice Matthews in her classroom at a newly opened junior high school in south Edmonton. We both sit in chairs at her desk and I position the tape recorder so it is not obtrusive but able to clearly record Janice's voice. I have not met Janice before this visit, so we take a little time to get acquainted before I turn on the tape recorder. As with the previous interviews I take notes as well as audiotaping the conversation. Janice is easy to interview and enthusiastic in responding to questions. An hour quickly passes before we have dealt with all of the interview questions. It is obvious that she has taken some time to consider the questions I provided her with earlier and has jotted down answers that she refers to from time to time. When setting up an observation day, Janice is somewhat reluctant to suggest a day where she teaches her "problem" grade eight class, but I suggest that it will provide an interesting contrast to her homeroom grade seven class with whom she is more comfortable and will provide me with valuable data. She then quickly agrees to allow me to visit on an afternoon when she teaches both of these classes.

When I visit Janice's grade eight language arts class that she has inherited only weeks before during a school reorganization, and her grade seven homeroom class that she sees for several subjects, she warns me that her approaches will be very different in each of the classes and that she will be much more directive with the grade eight class. When I visit, this class is engaged in a research assignment and much of the class is spent in students sharing part of their writing with the class. Janice both encourages student participation and subdues the off-task behaviors of some of the students. The grade seven



class is, as she has suggested, very different. In a workshop situation, the students are working individually to complete a magazine project that presents and critiques a novel they have read independently during the term. Using young adult fiction in the language arts classroom encourages students to enthusiastically discuss a variety of titles and authors. In this class Janice's main role is to enable students to complete their work by locating materials, offering practical suggestions, and assisting with printing computer work. At no time does she sit down at her desk.

I visit Inge Bohn in her junior high classroom in Sherwood Park. This year she has an 80% teaching load and has two spare periods early in the morning. She offers to be interviewed during that time and then have me stay to observe her classes throughout the rest of the morning and afternoon. We arrange two student desks so that we are facing each other and I set up the tape recorder between us. The interview is interrupted after forty-five minutes by a class scheduled for her classroom, so we relocate in the language arts storage room to complete the interview. This interview is informal and chatty because Inge has, until this year, been my colleague and I personally know many of the students and situations she describes. After an hour the interview questions have been discussed and Inge leaves to prepare for her classes while I wait in the staff room to observe.

Like Janice, Inge is concerned about having me observe one of her classes. She has struggled with her grade nine Basic Core language arts class all year and does not feel she has achieved much success with them. During my visit they are involved in reading a short story which will be followed by a videotape of the same story. The students follow up the reading and viewing with a discussion that compares the story version to the video version, an activity that Inge feels will be instructive as well as enjoyable for these students. The next class I observe is a grade eight class novel study. The students are reading *False Face*, a novel selected by Inge from Alberta Education's junior high novel list, and are focusing on learning about native cultures. Inge encourage the students to connect their reading to current events and their own personal knowledge and perceptions of native cultures. Following lunch is a grade eight language arts class that is engaged in a writing workshop activity. Like Bill's class, the students here are concerned with revising and editing a final piece of writing for the year.

My final interview is with Darrell Davis. He has been heavily involved in coaching and has been hard-pressed for spare time, but graciously invites me to his school, a junior high school in north-east Edmonton, once coaching is finished. Darrell is briefly concerned with the tape recorder I place on the desk between us, in an empty office, and I try to move it out of his view. A phone call to Darrell causes me to stop the tape recorder briefly and, once resumed, our interview lasts about forty-five minutes. Because this is my first meeting with Darrell, the interview tends to be more formal than are some of the others. At the end of the interview, Darrell offers to contact me to set up a classroom observation that he feels will be appropriate for me to watch. It is on my way out, after I have turned off the tape recorder, that I obtain some of my most valuable information from Darrell. He has drawn a diagram of an "educational rut," and maps out a variety of strategies he uses to avoid this rut. Before leaving, I quickly jot down these added insights that he has shared with me.

When I visit Darrell's grade eight language arts class, the students are viewing two film clips of *The Mummy* and *King Kong* that are a part of the thematic unit from the *Contexts 2* Anthology entitled "Chuckles and Chills." Before the students watch the films, Darrell gives introductory comments and sets the viewing tone for the class. Following the films, students are given a choice of questions to which they respond in

their journals. Darrell circulates around the room as the students write, giving suggestions and encouraging them to expand their entries.

### **Interpreting the Interviews**

The written versions of the interviews have provided me with over fifty pages of data to which I continually refer as I write. An additional fifty pages is provided by my observation notes. I have collected the transcribed interviews, the notes, and other documentation such as handouts and information sheets, in six folders that I keep, one for each participant.

As I interview and visit each of the six teachers, I attempt to listen to their comments and observe their classroom situations. I hope to discover common themes that will suggest how these teachers approach change, themes that will speak with clear and recognizable voices to other teachers in language arts classrooms.

Sensitive and in-tune listening are important for each of the interview situations. I realize during my first interview with Bryan that the participants are more than willing to answer the questions, but are not always clear about the direction and focus to take. I am the composer, and it is partly my responsibility to interpret the score for these teacher-musicians, partly to listen to their improvisations and variations. As the participants are answering the questions, I try to both listen to the words and the timbre of the answers and at the same time to formulate the next direction for the interview to take. I attempt to avoid stilted interviews in which we move from question #1 to #2 to #3..., and aim for a more lyrical conversational interview in which each response links to the previous one.

I make a sincere attempt to deformalize the interview situations and to create a conversation between two colleagues. I begin with genuine questions about their day's work, with personal comments, and light-hearted conversation. We talk about a student teacher we have had in common, or a conference we have jointly attended, or concerns related to language arts teaching. With the two participants that I had not previously met, I want to share a bit of my own background with them so that they are aware of my purposes and my interests. I wish to make it clear that we are co-learners, that I sincerely appreciate the time and risk they are taking, that I also identify myself as a teacher, and that my intentions are not to pass judgment but to learn from my visits and discussions.

Two things become increasingly clear to me, as I progress through the series of six interviews. First, I cannot possibly predict how the interviews will unfold. Second, I am continually surprised by directions that questions take our conversation and by the dynamics of our interactions. Each conversation is played in a different key, with a different style and a different arrangement. Each interview is a different composition, created by unique experiences on the part of the participants and myself, on the time of the day and the location of the interview, and by the connections we are able to make through our talk.

Throughout the interviews I am also conscious of the fact that these are interviews and not informal conversations; I am here as a researcher to gain insights about the participants' teaching growth and development rather than to tell them about my own. I am aware, as only teachers are aware, of the valuable time I am asking them to share with me, for my benefit, and do not want to unnecessarily inflict upon them stories of my own teaching experience. So, I am mostly non-conversational -- an interviewer rather than a participant in a conversation.

As I proceed through the interviews, I am also aware that the interviews change because I am changing. As Johnston (1992) finds in her recent study on teachers' changing perspectives regarding literature selection, each interview gives me insights and ideas that I did not have in the previous interview. These insights and ideas cause me to shape the subsequent interviews differently, ask questions differently, make new connections, and take new directions with the questions. So, even though the set of interview questions creates a framework that is similar for each situation, they allow for individual difference and development.

The melodies that I collect from the six teacher participants, while rich and harmonious, are clearly only a small sample of a much greater work. I am attempting in this thesis to listen and observe and create accessible picture-possibilities for change and growth of teachers in language arts classrooms. I do not intend to analyze critically the nature of language arts teaching, or the process of change of the individual teachers; nor do I attempt to critique their methods or practices. As I visit the participants' classrooms, I record as objectively as possible how the room looks and sounds. As well, I record the impressions I become aware of as I sit in the classes. I record such observations as the teacher's position in the room, types of directions given to the students, activities that the students are asked to engage in, teacher interactions with students, the physical layout of the room, and how the space in the room is used. It is important to note, however, that I am not an unbiased recorder of information and that these participants have been selected, by me, because I believe they have evidenced change and growth in their teaching approaches and philosophies. I am also aware that I am getting but a small sample, a brief melodic strain of a much larger musical work, and I cannot therefore make broad generalizations based on my observations and interviews.

### Assumptions

My study is based upon several major assumptions regarding the teaching of language arts and the importance of change throughout a teacher's career. I assume first that there is merit and validity to the theories and teaching approaches suggested in the more recent literature in my subject area of language arts, such as reader response, journal writing, skill development in context, and cross-curricular language use. These approaches all shift the centre of the classroom away from the teacher and one set body of knowledge towards the students and their learning. I assume that the students' active involvement in their learning develops more meaningful and life-long experiences.

Secondly, I assume that teachers need to build change into their careers, in a variety of forms, if they are to become better teachers and that both teachers and students learn from the changes that are implemented. Change can come from teaching at different grade levels, at different schools, and in different subject areas. It can come from working with different materials, different colleagues, and with different strategies and activities. Change can come from physical movement to a different room or a change in the room arrangement, or from assuming different roles within the school such as curriculum leader, coach, or student advisor. Regardless of the forms that change can take, my assumption is that one or more of these changes is important to the health and development of teachers throughout their careers.

I also believe that change in teaching approaches, materials, and philosophy is most loudly and obviously necessary in junior high classrooms. Junior high students, aged twelve to fifteen, are very vocal and demanding, in need of immediate attention, and in

consistent interest gratification. It is difficult to continue, at this age level, with teaching practices that do not successfully meet the students' needs and involve them in their own learning. Therefore, the incentive to continually reconstruct perspectives on teaching and learning is the greatest at the junior high school level.

A final assumption that I make is that the teacher participants have read and reflected on the focus interview questions that I have previously sent to them. Their answers, because they have had time to consider, will be different than if they were answering in a more spontaneous type of situation and will reflect more clearly thought-out responses.

These assumptions shape and focus my study on changes specific to junior high language arts teachers and their classes.

### **Delimitations: The Frame**

Shape is also provided for this study by the framework of delimitations. As the composer chooses the form, key, and instrumentation of the music being created, I have chosen to delimit this study in several ways. Six teachers, selected for their interest in alternative approaches to teaching language arts, participate in interviews and their teaching situations are described. These teachers are predominantly involved in language arts instruction and have spent a large part of their teaching years in junior high schools. Their teaching experiences have been mainly in Edmonton area urban schools of moderate to large student populations (300-700).

The information for this study has been gathered through interviews with each of the six teacher participants and observations in each of their classrooms. My interviews span a relatively short period of time. The interview and observations have been conducted within a two-week period at the end of May, which enables the teachers to reflect on the majority of their present school year as well as on their previous years' experience and development and to a certain extent on the upcoming year as well. The study focuses on one particular point in the participants' careers, but the interview questions encourage them to listen to both resonances of their past teaching experiences and the reverberations into future melodies.

I have also delimited my study to the potential for change in language arts teaching. The literature in the area of teacher change is voluminous. Instead, to make my study more manageable, I have focused, in both my reading preparation for my study and in my conduct of the study, on a single subject area --language arts.

### **Limitations: The Boundaries**

The frame that I have established, while outlining the shape of the study, also limits the investigation. All of the participant teachers are from one general location, urban schools in the Edmonton area, and the themes identified by these participants may or may not apply to other situations in other areas. There are a limited number of participants (six junior high school teachers) and I am the only interviewer/observer. I have also structured my participants' responses with a list of questions, generic as they might seem. Thus, the data is being collected and interpreted by only one person, and I am an admittedly involved and biased interpreter. It is clear, as mentioned previously, that only a small piece of the musical composition is being heard, from a selection of "personal

favourites," both mine and theirs. In addition, the participant teachers are expressing their views during the month of May, a very stressful time of year. This timing, the frenetic rhythm of the school year, may change the overall sound of my composition.

Although I am interested in the aspects of change that have eluded some teachers, I have chosen only to talk with teachers who have demonstrated aptitude for change. Because I have included only a sample of teachers who have demonstrated involvement with new theories and professional development, and I realize that my study will tend to create a pure tonality that is not representative of all junior high language arts teaching across a wide range of schools.

A final limitation to the frame of my composition is an intention to name the participants rather than to use pseudonyms. All of the six participants must agree to allow their true names to be used in my study for me to use any of their names. They are invited to read the pertinent sections of the thesis (Chapter Four and Chapter Five) before making a decision regarding the use of their names. Although I believe this arrangement of the composition to be an empowering approach for the participants, it requires me to be selective with words and phrases in order to avoid misinterpretation of any of the participants' voices. I choose to focus on positive aspects of the teaching I observe for two reasons. First, I have selectively chosen those teachers I expect to be taking risks and attempting new approaches in their classrooms. Second, I will look for those aspects of teaching experience that promote positive change, rather than those that impede change.

### **Recapitulation**

The selection of participants for this exploration has been a major factor in the composition and arrangement of the data. Their voices have produced the intertwined melodies and themes I present in the following sections of this work. Although the questions I pose offer a support, a grounded bass, for the participants' voices, they do not provide a major hindrance for new directions in the conversations.

## CHAPTER IV

### MUSICIANS AND THEIR ARRANGEMENTS

For several years I have been committed to the notion that language and language arts are central to the learning of all students. This belief is one reason I choose to focus on language arts teachers for my study. I have chosen the junior high level for several reasons. First, I have myself been a junior high language arts teacher for eight years, and my questions and investigation arise from those experiences. Second, I believe that many innovations in learning and teaching have been developed in junior high classrooms, especially in the language arts area -- workshops, journals, portfolios -- in short, exploration of ideas through language. Junior high students demand variety, voice and active expression, which can be given to them through their own personal involvement with learning using language. Third, junior high is a bridge between students as children and students as adolescents. This bridging demands creative and varied approaches to guiding junior high students on their learning journeys.

The six participants whose voices are heard in this investigation have been chosen for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. I want to focus on teachers who teach a concentration of language arts courses and who work in junior high schools. I also want to hear the voices of teachers who are experimenting with innovative approaches to the instruction of language arts in their classrooms and who are interested in learning about new ideas. Their backgrounds vary, as shown in Table 1.

I have known some of the teacher participants before the start of this investigation. Others have been suggested to me by language arts consultants and faculty at the University of Alberta. In selecting my participants, I have tried to consider the following: 1) experiences with different school systems, 2) varying lengths of teaching experience, 3) varying amounts of professional development and other professional experiences, 4) varying amounts of formal education, 5) varying degrees of change in their classrooms, 6) varying personal backgrounds, 7) varying degrees of my own personal connection with the participants, and 8) gender balance.

The information in Table 1 shows the participants' variety of experience, educational backgrounds, and the amount of formal education they have received. Additionally, each of these teachers has been heard to express and seen to display in their classrooms the desire to learn and to explore new strategies with their students through the language arts curriculum. These six teachers make up the voices in my study.

**Table 1**  
**Composition of Participants in Study**

Teacher	Years Teaching Experience	Subject Area Specialization	Level of Education
Bill Talbot	19	English	M.Ed. (Elementary) B. Ed. (Secondary)
Wendy Mathieu	7	English	M.Ed. (Secondary) B. Ed. (Secondary)
Bryan Rees	10	English /Social Studies	B. Ed. (Elementary) B. A.
Janice Matthews	6	Special Education	B. Ed. (Elementary)
Inge Bohn	13	English	B. Ed. (Secondary)
Darrell Davis	12	Social Studies	B. Ed. (Secondary)

Through an interview with each of the six participants, followed by an observation in their teaching situations, I am able to listen to the teachers discuss their development throughout their careers and watch them demonstrate these developments in their classrooms. The interviews are taped, which enables me to go back and listen again and record what each of the participants says. A series of questions that I have prepared and given to the participants in advance of our dialogue gives the conversations a direction. These questions also hopefully allow the participants freedom to improvise on the questions and to reorder questions as issues arise in the natural flow of conversation.

Following the interview situations, sometimes a week or two later and sometimes immediately following, I visit each of the teachers' classrooms and take notes about what I see and hear. My observations include the physical layout of the room, the work displayed, the teacher's stance and interaction with the students, and the type and method of lesson presentation that occurs. I draw from these two sources of data, as well as assignments and activities that teachers have shared with me, in composing descriptions of each of the participant teachers. An additional data source is the responses made to a draft of Chapters Three, Four, and Five by the teachers.

### Bryan Rees

I am talking to Bryan Rees, sitting at the back of his classroom on the class couch -- a comfortably worn-in couch that encourages students and visitors to relax. I am coming to know Bryan better through our ongoing dialogue, although I had initially met him in his role as cooperating teacher earlier in the year. Teaching is Bryan's second career, one he carefully selected and worked for. He chose teaching as a career after many successful years with the railroad that offered him a wide variety of traveling and learning experiences.

However, at one point in his life, in coming to terms with his mother's death, he reviewed what he saw as the first half of his life and asked, "Am I happy with my life?" The answer

was no, and he realized that what he would like to do with the second half was to teach. With the support and encouragement of his wife, he prepared to quit his job and enter university.

Bryan smiles easily and often, and seems to look forward to seeing his students. He stands at the door to his class and invites them in. He knows his students, not only in the classroom but in their other lives, and has often been known to invite individual students to his home. He has a fundamental belief in doing good for people and is using his own mistakes to learn and to grow. Bryan himself was expelled from high school, and the shock of that pushed him to work hard to move himself up in his railroad job. He uses his own personal experiences to connect with his students and to encourage them to grow and to learn.

Bryan's class is in a corner of the school on the second floor, away from the administrative offices, and it has large open windows that reveal a panorama of the school fields and farmers' fields beyond. The room is liberally decorated with recent movie posters and life-sized stand-up posters and proudly sports a complete set of new desks and chairs. Bryan tells me that he had an idea about how to replace his old desks with new detached ones, so he approached his principal and commented that he had been noticing that every year the school needed to order a few new desks to replace the old ones, and that perhaps they could order the detachable ones so that after a few years he'd have a complete class set of the new kind. As luck would have it, there was an increase in student population, and a whole class set needed to be ordered at once, so Bryan got his new desks in one fell swoop, and has used them to his advantage in the class, as seen in Figure 1.

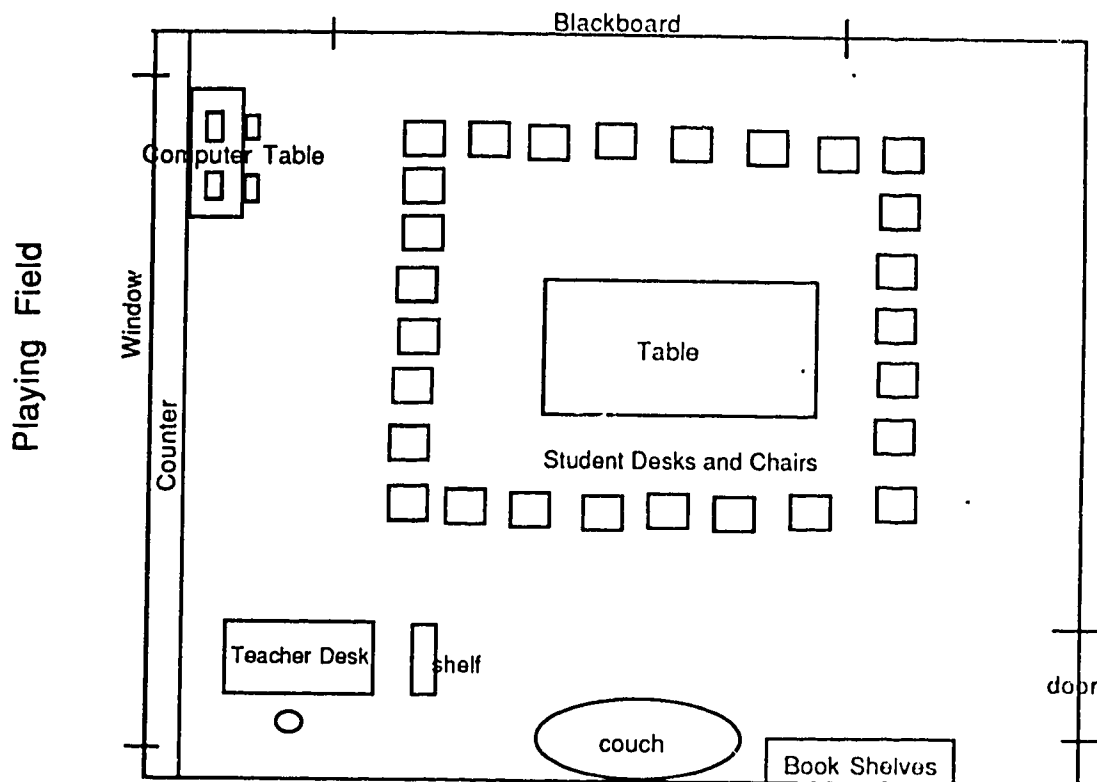
After completing his B. Ed. degree, Bryan began his teaching career at an elementary school in the city before moving to the junior high school where he now teaches both special education and regular language arts classes. He is language arts department head and also teaches social studies and mathematics. He sees himself as an advocate for his students, a role model and a friend, but comments that it is sometimes hard for his students to distinguish between his roles and to act appropriately in various situations. The development of a trusting relationship between himself and his students is central to Bryan's vision of his teaching role, allowing students to feel safe, comfortable, and worthy. At the same time, students also need to have expectations placed on them that they must live up to, expectations that Bryan establishes with and for his students.

Long before Bryan embarked on his teaching career he was developing himself as a learner, taking courses offered through the company he worked for and talking with his wife, who is also a teacher. He continually takes university courses to satisfy personal and professional curiosities, and he participates regularly in meetings with other language arts teachers and consultants to share and to learn.

Reading has been an aspect of language arts that has been a specific interest of Bryan's, and he has attended many inservice sessions in that area. This year he has initiated a paired reading program for his students, and speaks proudly of its success. The objective of the program is to have weaker readers paired with stronger readers who have volunteered to assist their partner to develop stronger reading skills. As I observe, I see seven pairs of readers at work through the lunch hour, both partners involved in reading together. They read aloud in hushed tones and work intensely for ten minutes every lunch hour before going off to finish their lunch or to socialize.



### The Floor Plan of Bryan's Class



**Figure 1**

Following this noon-hour activity that Bryan sponsors and supervises in his classroom, he greets his basic core grade nine class for math and assists them with solving mathematical equations. They work in partners to assist each other, and there is a lot of talk as the pairs struggle to find the answers. They are then given the opportunity to explain to the class the process they used. Bryan's patient acceptance of answers and redirections, as well as enthusiastic and positive comments about their responses, "Good stuff!", keeps the students working. He offers them work they can complete successfully and suggestions about how they can find solutions. He senses when they are getting frustrated, and offers them a "chocolate bar" problem as a brief diversion. The reward for solving the word problem is a chocolate bar, and the students return to their work with renewed effort. Bryan also senses when students are having problems. "Timmy, you're letting worry get the best of you -- stress you out. By the time thirty minutes is up, you're going to be asking, 'Can't he give me anything harder than this?'" Lots of conversation and explanation of the steps of the problem-solving procedure, as well as visual representations on the chalkboard, are used.

Although this is a math lesson, Bryan's main focus is to continue building the students' confidence and self-esteem, to make his classroom a safe and comfortable place. He also uses language continually to clarify the mathematical concepts being presented.

Just before the bell rings, Bryan gives the students one last problem. After a minute, he asks, "Have you got the answer, Tanya?" "Yea," she responds, "But I'm not tellin' you!" The class and Bryan laugh, and Skye, who has been having difficulties all along, gets the question right. Bryan slaps her hand in a "high five," and as the bell rings the students leave smiling.

The final class of the day is a regular grade eight language arts class of twenty students. They generally begin with fifteen minutes of silent reading and writing in response journals, but today for my benefit they move that activity to the end of the period. Bryan begins the class by taking a seat in a student desk, and reviewing their previous class work on story writing, which has included conflict and point of view. From the discussion, the students move into small groups where they are writing collaborative stories. Circulating around the room, Bryan chats with each group about their progress, helping them decide upon a mutually agreeable topic, asking them to think about the reader, suggesting ideas for including in their writing. The students talk energetically in their groups about their stories and get constant feedback from Bryan - "Ooooh, that's good! That's getting the reader involved in the first sentence."

At the end of the day, Bryan talks with me about his exhaustion, especially working with the Basic Core students that he has taught for three years in succession. The constant patience and encouragement is mentally and physically draining; and, although he sees his students as family, he is thinking of moving to an age level that is less demanding and stressful, perhaps elementary or high school. But when students arrive at the end of the day to discuss an upcoming trip to Nordegg, he is again ready to joke with them and explain the rock climbing activities in caring, assuring tones.

### **Bill Talbot**

I have been kindly invited into Bill's home to ask my questions, and as we sit at his kitchen table, we chat casually about June in junior high school. I have known Bill as a colleague for several years and have worked with him on various language arts projects. Bill has had several different experiences in connection with Edmonton Public School Board, but has always in his nineteen years experience been in some way connected to teaching junior high language arts. As a language arts teacher and department coordinator at a modern new junior high school he continues to maintain a high level of involvement in language arts teaching and learning.

Bill has had a varied teaching career and has worked in several capacities that have encouraged a broad outlook on language arts teaching. He began teaching at a junior high where there were several first year teachers who offered a great deal of collegial support. During his first years, Bill was asked to work on a summer curriculum writing project which enabled him to work with different people that expanded his ideas of what it means to teach.

After four years of full-time teaching, Bill moved to a half-time consulting position, in which he taught junior high language arts half time and also acted as a language arts

consultant for Edmonton Public School Board. He finds this combination good because things that he learned could be tried out in his own teaching. During his consulting years, Bill was also working with and influenced by Margaret Stevenson, then supervisor of language arts for the Edmonton Public School Board, who facilitated many inservices with English/language arts educators such as James Britton.

The influences of Britton and other contemporary language arts educators are evident in Bill's classes where workshop and process approaches are key aspects of the classroom structure. He greets his students as they enter the classroom, and outlines the work to be accomplished during the class period. Students are in the revision stage of their writing, and Bill encourages them to "make it say what you want it to say" and to make it their very best work because they will be sharing their writing with their peers.

Because of the school's physical organization, there are several spaces for the students to work. (see Figure 2.) The classroom itself has desks and chairs placed in a square with the students all facing into the centre (in a similar arrangement to those in Bryan's class.)

There are two round tables that some students choose to work at, and spaces in the foyer outside the classroom as well. Many of the computers in the school are found in the open areas outside the classrooms and some students have chosen to work there as well. Throughout the classes there is continual quiet talk as Bill circulates from one student to another checking on their progress. When he leaves the room, his brief absences are not acknowledged by any changes in student behaviour -- the students continue to work on their writing.

Bill discusses his understanding of his role in the classroom, that he needs to either be trying to get out of the students' way or trying to guide them into something. He moves between the role of leading or guiding (pedagogy) and the role of instructing or educating, the act of leading into new knowledge and understanding (van Manen, 1991). These understandings are seen as he interacts with the students. As he conferences with his students about their writing, his comments help to shape the students' thoughts in a Vygotskian manner -- "Okay, one thing you could consider ...", "Try to think of a way to ..." without prescribing a course of action. Bill often sits beside the student he is working with, or stands in close proximity to the student as he reads and responds to the work. Sometimes he wanders across the room as he is reading, to casually check on other students' progress.

Students feel comfortable talking to Bill about their writing and many call upon his expertise at regular intervals. He is careful to maintain a reasonable noise level, and his own voice is calm and quiet. "How about you going outside to read that?" he requests of a group of noisy students, and the request is received positively by the students. They complete their work quickly in the foyer and then return to class. Sometimes his comments to the students are of a more personal nature, focusing on their specific interests, or joking about missing library books, "Perhaps it is in the bottom of your messy locker."

Bill believes strongly in students developing their own intentions, but at the same time balancing those intentions with his influence as the language arts teacher. One instance Bill remembers that exemplifies this balance is a situation that he set up to encourage a student to do a lot of thinking about his own writing. In particular, the student focused on a poem he had written, which was the direct result of the teaching situation. The poem probably would never have been created if the teacher had not set it up for him, so it is important to nudge students without forcing them into something that is not their intention.

### The Floor Plan of Bill's Class

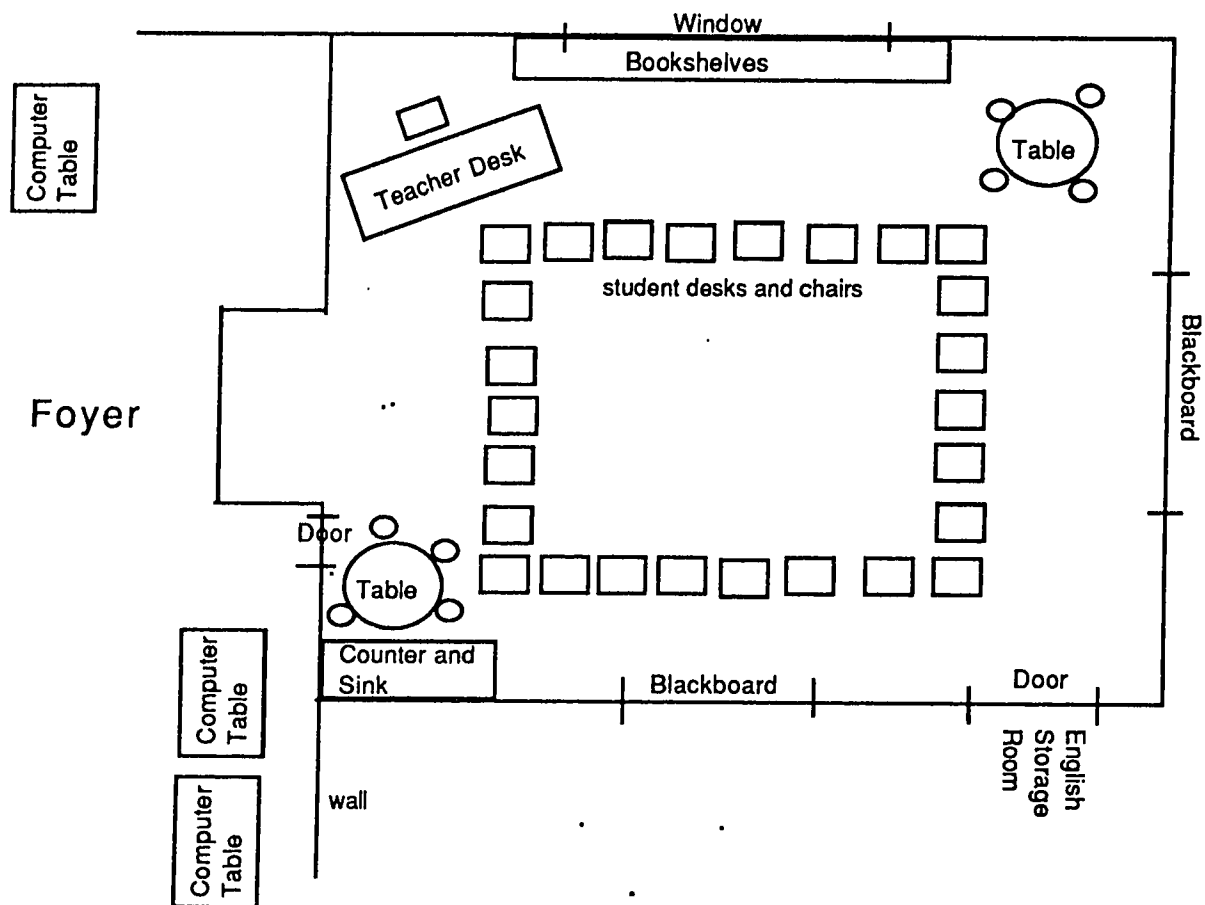


Figure 2

Although a great deal of Bill's time is taken up in organizing extra-curricular activities such as Leadworks (a student writing conference), professional development inservices, and the coordination of language arts within the school, he is reluctant to turn down opportunities to help the students. He believes that he is best able to influence students in the classroom, in his interactions with his students.

Bill attempts to establish an attitude in his classes that values reading and writing, similar to Atwell's (1987) "dining room table" attitude, and which will enable students to see these activities as being admirable and worthwhile activities to engage in. He values their choices as readers and encourages a wide range of reading material. The students' own writing anthologies are also used as valuable sources of reading material and there are many editions available to the students on the classroom bookshelves. There is also a classroom library and student work displayed throughout the room that promotes favourite titles.

Students are given the opportunity and responsibility in Bill's classes to become involved in creating their own marks or grades. He has created evaluation scales with descriptors that identify the expectations and their progress in relation to those expectations. (See Appendix A)

During his work at the University of Alberta, both as a graduate student and as a Practicum Associate, as well as during his term as language arts consultant, Bill has had many opportunities to observe in a wide range of classrooms. To these opportunities he attributes many of the beginnings of ideas he has developed and refined in his classroom. Hearing about or seeing new ideas has prompted him to go back and try them out in his own classrooms.

Bill has come to develop strong beliefs about teaching language arts, and sees his role and responsibility as a teacher as trying to influence the directions that language arts teaching goes in a school and in a system -- not by telling people how to teach, but by talking and sharing with them. Fullan's (1982) research supports Bill's beliefs that, by involving teachers and setting up situations where they are exposed to ideas, they can make up their own minds about the directions in which they wish to go.

Bill sees the leading edge as a desirable place to be in teaching, keeping in touch with ideas and people and events. One way of being on that edge, he suggests, is being willing to try new things; but, beyond that, being willing to share and spread information. He supports his beliefs with action both within his classroom and in the community of language arts teachers beyond.

### **Wendy Mathieu**

I am greeted by Wendy at the door of her home on a sunny afternoon following, for Wendy, the school's annual track and field day, a day she has obviously enjoyed. Since the beginning of her teaching career, and before, Wendy has been involved with students in a number of diverse capacities. Beginning her teaching experiences in Grande Prairie, Wendy taught Grade Five for a year before moving to a job that involved junior high language arts and high school English as well as primary music and physical education, grade nine social studies, grades seven and eight health and a special projects option. She

also coordinated the intramural program for the school and managed to include nature walks, orienteering and skating in the program.

When she moved to Peace River, a very different assignment awaited her in a small Catholic grades 4 - 12 school. She taught mainly at the secondary level but within that level had a wide range of teaching experiences including English 10/20/30 and English 13/23/33, as well as Occupations 10, Religion 15/35, and Social Studies 10/30. The courses not involving diploma exams were a welcome change for Wendy; they involved more activity and student participation. In addition to the variety of courses, Wendy found herself involved with coaching which led also into a counseling role within the school.

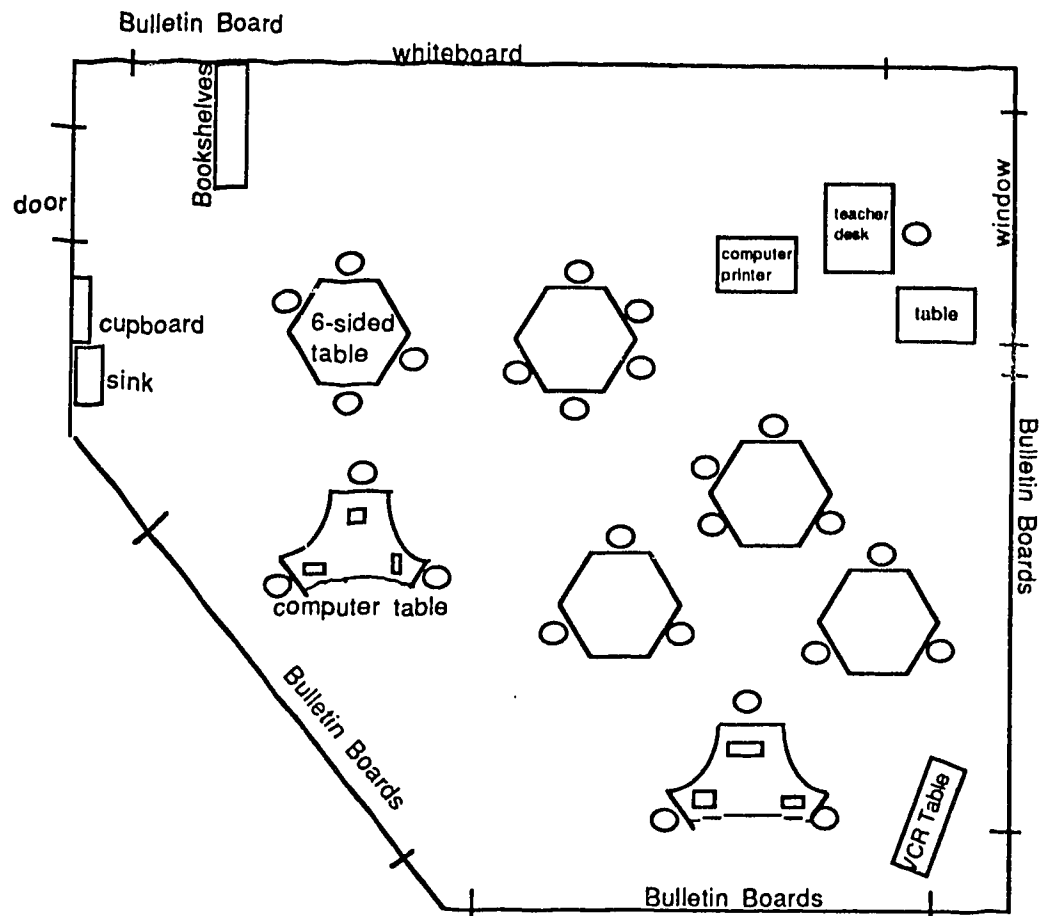
After four varied years of teaching, Wendy moved to Edmonton where she worked for two years on a Masters' degree, followed by two years of teaching high school English in Morinville and then a return to the university to work as a Practicum Associate for another two years. Her life, she jokes, seems to go in two year cycles. Joking aside, however, she had made conscious choices to seek out challenges through changes in her job.

Wendy seriously considered changing careers after four years and gave consideration to the legal profession. She was, however, encouraged to remain in teaching because she learned that she was seen by the school community as a strong teacher and because teaching, it was suggested to her, offers perpetual hope and the continual possibility for change. So when Wendy returned to university, it was in the Education faculty. She wanted to learn more about teaching language arts and to allow herself the scope and broad perspective for changes within the teaching profession.

Today Wendy is encountering many areas of change and broadening perspectives as she teaches her students at a highly innovative junior high school in north Edmonton. Her class, the one she works with throughout the school day, is composed of twenty-five students, boys and girls in grades (or years) seven to nine. She has two students who do not speak any English, students with a variety of cultural backgrounds and a teaching intern with whom she works in the class.

The students sit at six-sided tables, as seen in Figure 3, five or six students per table, and keep most of their important belongings in large lidded cardboard boxes. The school is now one year old, and still looks new -- except for the students' cardboard boxes. Technology abounds -- teacher computer with E-mail access between classes, six student computers, a VCR, a laser printer, and a telephone are regular tools used by the students.

### The Floor Plan of Wendy's Class



**Figure 3**

Wendy's varied background and teaching experiences are now very useful as she balances students' needs, curriculum, and technology within the classroom.

The daily classroom routine involves negotiating the day's timetable with the students. It begins with Wendy's list:

8:40	Attendance/Info Hand in 3 checkpoints on electromagnetics Self-correct Review Unit - if complete Complete Sample Test
9:55	Rm 7 vs Rm 11 Softball
11:10	Silent Reading/Response Journals
11:45	Floor Hockey (this item had been squeezed in by students)
12:30	French Interviews - see schedule Work on "Gender and Ads" Work on Electromagnetics - sample test - correct - study for tomorrow's test
2:00	Geometry and Measurement Test

This timetable fills up the students' day, but can also be altered depending on student input and collaboration, such as the 11:45 item, other events and opportunities that may arise.

As indicated by the timetable, the first few minutes of class are spent in organization. Wendy checks with some students about their previous day's track and field successes, asks one student to get rid of his Coke, discusses "good sportspersonship" in the upcoming baseball game and then moves into the focus for study -- electromagnetics.

The students work together at their tables to complete the assignments, and occasionally ask Wendy for help. She acts as facilitator in directing them to sources of information. She circulates frequently, redirecting and reminding them about deadlines, asking specific content questions or commenting in a more general way. Class sets of textbooks are not available, so one of the students' responsibilities is to share the resources. It is clear that students are expected and encouraged to learn from one another, and from a variety of resources as well as from the teacher, who has been renamed in this school as "learning coach."

Students are learning, in Wendy's classes, much more than a bagful of information. They are learning how to find out, how to apply, and how to assess what they learn. They are discovering not only how webbing can help them to write, but also how it can organize their reading, and how it can help them collect information. The connections, for Wendy, between language and other curricular areas, become closer and closer, and she helps her students make the connections as well. She asks, "What is it about learning that I like so much, and how can I help kids to like it, too?"

Part of the answer she sees as having the strategies and the confidence to experiment and to take risks. Another part of the answer is to allow students a voice in their own learning, to be able to make choices about their learning styles and areas. Some aspects of school education are important for lifelong learning beyond the classroom walls. As Calkins (1991) suggests, education in school can be connected to community experiences and personal lives. Wendy feels that everyone should experience writing a play, operating a video camera and making a video, writing a position paper, watching TV critically, having a sense of wonder about the scientific world; and, everyone should have a say in how they learn these things.



A balance is achieved by allowing students a voice in class and also by encouraging (and rewarding) risk-taking in their learning. The teacher's job is to provide freedom within a structure that sets up high expectations and pushes students to reach out for more. When Wendy leaves the class to check on other students, the class seems unaware and continues on as before. The structure has been established and the students are able to handle the freedom given to them whether she is in the room or not.

Language is used freely in this class to further understanding, creativity and critical thinking. Students are encouraged to talk, and to read, and to write, and to make connections between their learnings. They are encouraged to take words that are printed on a page and arrange them in ways that evoke strong emotions in other readers. They're encouraged to read novels not only for the story but also for the history and the humanity that are interwoven throughout the text.

Presentation is an important emphasis in Wendy's classroom. Students are expected not only to develop good ideas, but also to take pride in the way those ideas are presented to others. Wendy encourages students to do their best and sets high expectations for behaviour and for performance. This encouragement is exemplified in the bulletin boards around the room, which are the students' responsibility. They are creative, well-planned, and effectively displayed.

Students develop confidence in their abilities in Wendy's classroom, in the same ways that she has developed confidence in her own abilities -- through having a comfortable environment in which to learn and to grow, positive role-models, and varied opportunities for success. Wendy choreographs her students' experiences, and then moves out of the way to let them perform. She says to them, through her actions and her words, "I trust in you, I believe in you, I know you have the ability," and then lets them prove it.

### Janice Matthews

Janice greets me at the front office with a friendly smile and a firm handshake. This is my first meeting with her and I am already caught up with her energy and vibrancy. The junior high school where she teaches is in its first year of operation, and Janice has acted as a lead teacher (responsible for organizing the team of teachers she works with) throughout the year. She is certainly leading as we walk briskly down the hall to her classroom and sit at her desk.

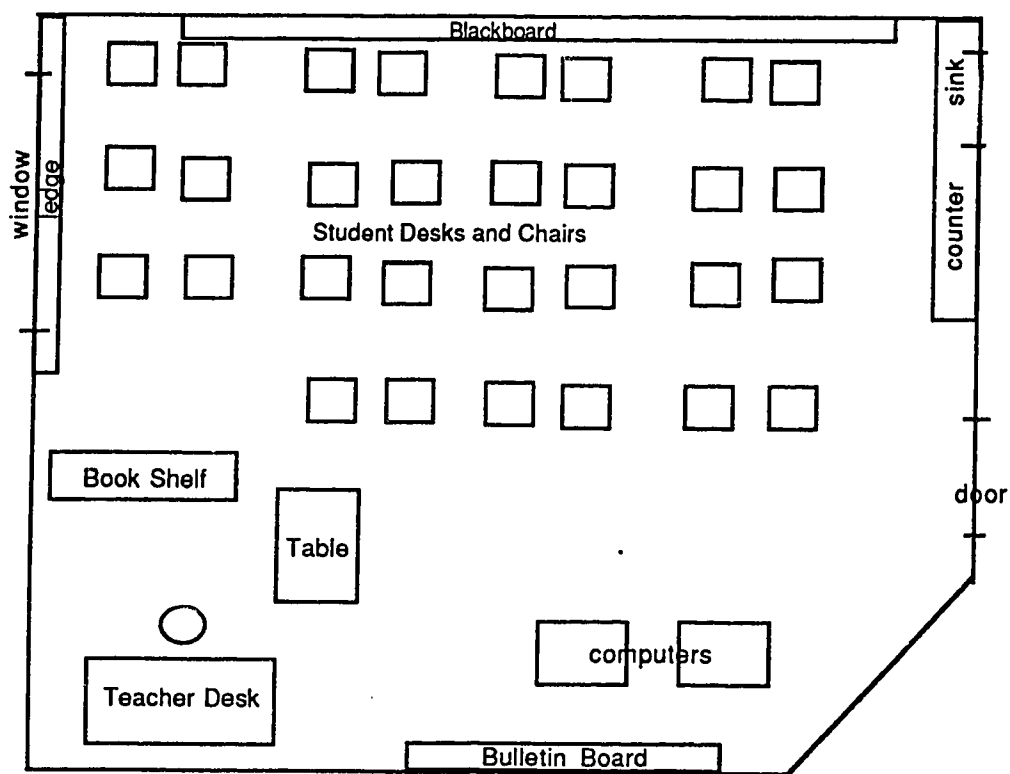
She comes to her present position from a more traditional elementary-junior high school where she has taught for six years. Her special education background has enabled her to work both with Basic Core programs at her previous placement and now in a more integrated setting.

Janice shares with me that there are a variety of students in her classes, including students with mental and physical disabilities, English as a Second Language students, behavior disordered students, and academically gifted students. She works mainly with her year-seven class, teaching them all four core subjects, but has recently (within the last three months of the school year) taken on a year-eight language arts class that has presented some discipline problems. The approaches used for the two groups are noticeably different, the year-eight group being given much more overt structure and guidance throughout the lesson I observe and others, according to Janice.

The classroom, Figure 4, reflects the influence of modern technology with the presence of computers and a telephone. Curriculum integration is also evidenced by student posters and projects dealing with social studies, science, and language arts topics displayed on the walls. A science experiment is on the window ledge, a variety of posters on the walls, and a sign-up sheet for writing workshop posted at the front of the class. Students sit in desks that are organized in paired rows.

The philosophies of the administration at her school are very much in line with Janice's own philosophies, although she has had to convince the administration that she would be able to adapt from a more traditional setting to this one before she was given the job. Adapting has not been a problem for Janice as she is readily able to embrace change. She describes herself as being like a wind, blowing through students' lives and hoping to make a positive impression, hoping to make a difference.

**The Floor Plan of Janice's Class**



**Figure 4**

Janice's energy and enthusiasm help to support her team of teachers as well as her students. She is genuinely interested in her colleagues' accomplishments and ideas, and is willing to share her own as well. Given encouragement, colleagues will initiate discussion about their classes, "Guess what I did in science today, and it worked great!" rather than having to be prompted, "Well, \_\_\_\_\_, tell us what you did in Science today." All it takes, in Janice's experience, is for colleagues to be interested and positive.

The staff that Janice works with has a positive attitude about change and incorporate ideas from elementary schools, ideas about new approaches and assignments, and ideas about integration. Janice's own special education background has enabled her to change her vision of a junior high school and to teach successfully in this integrated setting. She does not see herself as a particularly patient person, and is eager to try new directions as quickly as she can, an attribute that is valued at this school.

The recently taken-over year-eight class has proven to be a challenge for Janice, both academically and behaviorally, and Janice carefully directs the class activities. The students are still trying to challenge her authority, but most challenges are deflected with humour or overlooked entirely. Comments like "I hate novels," and "Novels suck," are ignored as students are directed to begin silent reading. They comply in a short space of time, and the class quickly becomes quiet.

Following the silent reading time, the class continues work on their research assignments. Today's lesson deals with writing effective beginnings. Several students are asked to read the introductions to their research assignments aloud while the rest of the students listen critically. They are then invited to offer suggestions and comments. Janice models feedback as well, "This sounds like a middle sentence. Remember, the first sentence is an attention grabber," and "That's a great first sentence. Read it again because it's so good."

The discussion then shifts to the writing of conclusions, and Janice reminds students of the function of an effective conclusion. A plan of action is then identified for the students, steps one, two and three, and the students proceed with their writing. This assignment, like most assignments that Janice gives, does not focus on content, but on the development of skills and attitudes in the students so that they can discover content for themselves, and will want to learn. She is concerned with teaching students how to work in groups, how to find information and how to process the information, rather than memorizing facts.

The next class Janice teaches in the afternoon is her year-seven class. The class is working on a novel study project that is in the format of a magazine (See Appendix B). The students are nearing completion and there is a great deal of enthusiastic discussion about the assignment on the part of both the students and the teacher.

In this class Janice's presence is not as obvious -- she facilitates the students' learning, circulates from student to student discussing their progress with them, and on several occasions finds supplies (rubber cement, scissors, magazines) as the students request them. One student works at the computer editing his articles. This is an active classroom. Students are working independently, asking help of their peers and the teacher, making suggestions and comments. Janice obviously enjoys the students and verbally interacting with them. She values their questions, their new ideas, and their humour, but also their effort and the quality of their work. She gives examples of the type of work she expects, and reminds students of due dates for their work.

Janice has a vision for education and for her own classroom, one that she is developing with her students and her colleagues. This vision includes teamwork, integration and

students taking responsibility for their own learning. Janice is attempting to implement her vision through the use of workshops and process skills in her classes.

### Darrell Davis

I am interviewing Darrell in an empty office just off the school's general office, within earshot of the hubbub of a busy operation. We sit across a desk from each other with the tape recorder in the middle. This is our first meeting. I sense that he's not too sure what kinds of information I am looking for. He has looked over the questions I had sent to him and asks for a little clarification about some of the terms I have used before we start -- he would like to know what I mean by "learning journey," for example. I try to elaborate on what I had in mind before we proceed.

Darrell's teaching experiences have been varied before coming to his current placement at a north Edmonton junior high school eight years ago, and include short-term situations at several junior high and senior high schools in Edmonton Public School System, where he taught mainly social studies. Since moving to this school he has focused on the language arts area and is now language arts department head. A love of the subject area keeps him going, and makes all the difference in keeping teachers vital, he feels. He has some reservations about the move away from subject area specialists at the junior high level that has been recently seen in several junior high schools in the surrounding area, feeling that he would not be as inspired to teach mathematics and science in the same way that he is inspired when he teaches language arts.

In the past two years Darrell's language arts students have used response journals to record their thoughts and ideas arising from class activities. During the grade eight class I observed, Darrell's students view two film clips from The Mummy and King Kong. As Darrell is preparing the film projector at the beginning of the class, he gives the students pertinent background information about the films and establishes expected viewing attitudes and behaviour. "Try not to laugh," he suggests as he introduces 'King Kong', and points out the date of the film's production (1930s). The students are eager to watch and quickly settle as the 16mm film projector starts up. On two occasions Darrell has to stop the projector to adjust the "bounce"--these film clips have not yet been converted to the more user-friendly VCR format. It's important for Darrell that his students are able to focus on the content of the visual assignments and not be distracted by technical difficulties. After viewing the film clips, the students are directed to select a question from the five presented on the board. In a response of no less than half a page Darrell asks them to discuss one of the following questions:

- 1) Which film clip did you like best? Why?
- 2) Which monster did you feel was most scary?
- 3) Are you afraid of King Kong or do you feel sorry for him?
- 4) Does the age of a movie have any impact on the film's impact?
- 5) Discuss the statement made at the end of the film 'King Kong' -- "Twas beauty that killed the beast."

The students retrieve their journals from their assigned filing cabinet drawer at the side of the room, as seen in Figure 5, return to their desks, and proceed to write for the next ten minutes.

The Floor Plan of Darrell's Class

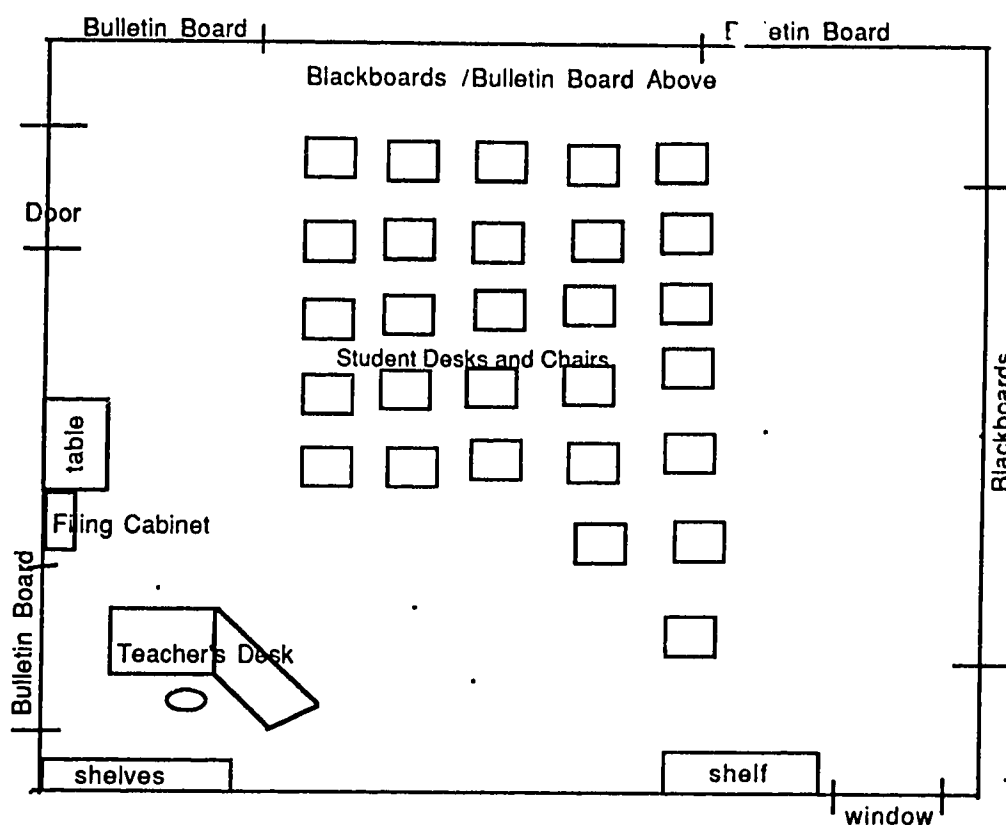


Figure 5

As they write, Darrell moves up and down the rows, commenting to different students and ensuring that each student is focused on the assignment. A couple of students express difficulty in writing an entire half-page on one question, "I can't think of any more to say," and Darrell encourages them to consider another question to answer.

It is clear that the students are expected to work quietly to finish the assignment, but students also seem to feel free to ask questions and to make comments as Darrell walks by. When the class ends, the students return their journals to the cabinet before leaving, clearly a well-established routine.

In addition to the thematic unit they have been working on, the grade eight class has recently read S. E. Hinton's novel That Was Then, This Is Now and are preparing for a unit exam. The exam Darrell plans to give them focuses on the students' knowledge and comprehension of the novel form, as well as asking for their personal response to aspects of the novel. Darrell feels that this type of exam, focusing on one unit, is an improvement

over the previous final exams that reflected the work of an entire year, and it is a change he has encouraged in his school. More and more emphasis is being placed on process, as exemplified by Darrell's use of response journals; but he feels that students still "need grammar lessons to prepare them for high school" because his perception is that grammar is not emphasized in high school and that students are expected to have a clear understanding of grammar concepts in order to be prepared for high school English.

This year for the first time, Darrell has collaborated with the social studies department head to use shared portfolios with their students. "Portfolios have been really popular lately, and everyone talks about them, but we're not really sure where they're going," Darrell comments. "If we're to do it again next year I have a lot of recommendations" for improvement. He would like to see them being used, not just as collection devices, but to encourage students to respond to their own work, and to reflect on what they have accomplished. Darrell isn't sure if all students have yet achieved these goals this year.

As with many new projects taken on by teachers, this portfolio project has been implemented hurriedly at the beginning of the year -- there was little time to do extensive planning, and less time to reflect on the pros and cons of the project during the year. Darrell is looking forward to sitting down with his colleagues to reflect on the successes and the problems associated with the portfolio assessment. The portfolios have yet to be assessed or graded, but will be evaluated by both the language arts and the social studies teachers, using criteria that have been established at the outset of the portfolio project. The students have had a fair amount of choice in what they have included in their portfolios, but there are also some teacher-directed activities included.

It is really important for Darrell to find joy in his teaching, and that is reflected in the type of activities he does with his students and the colleagues he chooses to associate with: "I try to stay away from the doom-and-gloom type of people on a staff. It seems to me that people I've tried to follow have been happy, energetic and well-organized." Darrell attempts to model that kind of behavior and attitude for his students and his colleagues.

At the end of our conversation, Darrell shares with me a key part of his philosophy of teaching, one that he has diagrammed as shown in Figure 6. The diagram shows his view of an educational rut with strategies to avoid falling in or staying in the rut. The concepts outside of the rut help teachers from slipping into a comfortable place that is difficult to escape. He has shown the courage, suggested by Newman (1990), that is a necessary aspect of teacher change. He has attempted to implement a variety of strategies throughout his teaching career in order to remain out of the rut, such as implementing response journals in his language arts classes, experimenting with portfolio assessment, and collaborating with other subject area teachers.

Teaching is a shared experience, one in which Darrell sees himself as a constant learner along with his students. He tries to continually challenge himself, inviting collaboration and new ideas into his classroom world, capturing and recapturing the enthusiasm and zest that makes teaching, for him, worthwhile.

### "Educational" Rut Described by Darrell

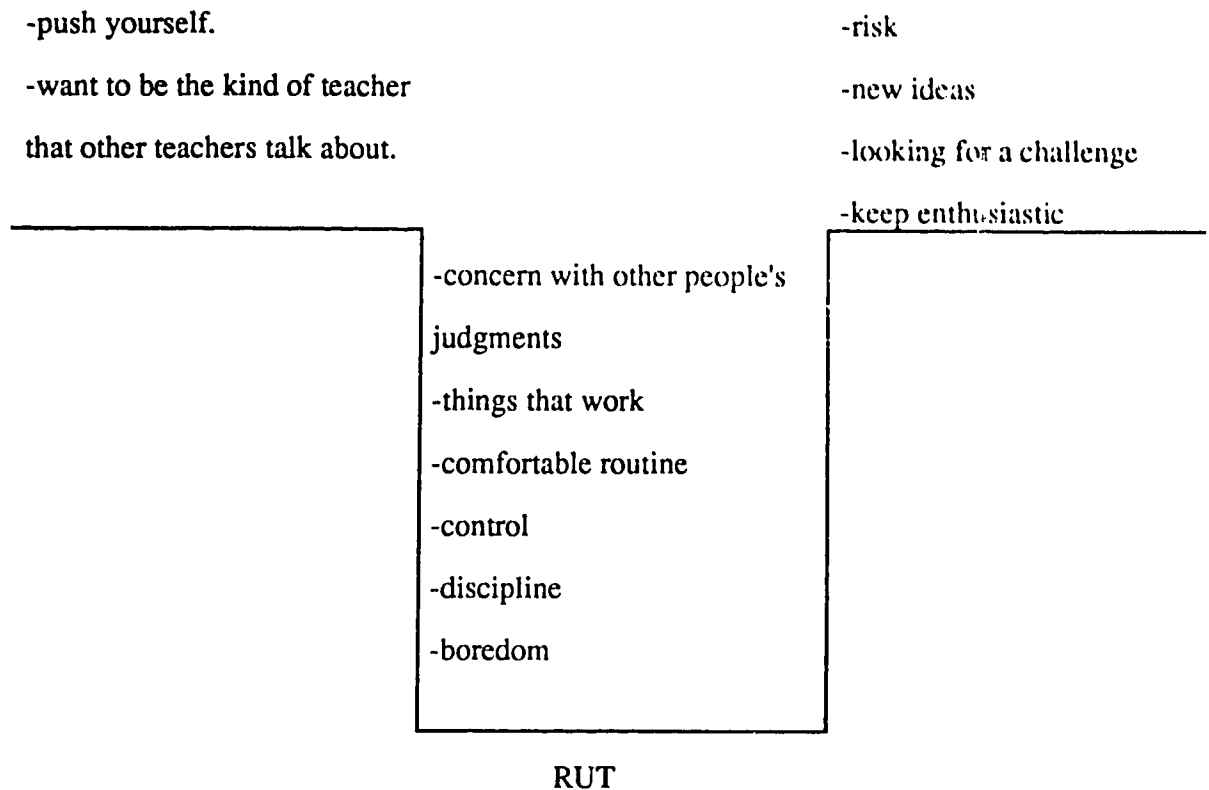


Figure 6

### Inge Bohn

Inge has, until this year, been my colleague and the language arts coordinator at a junior high school east of Edmonton. We have taught language arts together for five years and yet I have had little opportunity to visit her classes. So today I have the opportunity to learn a lot from Inge that as colleagues we did not take time to share and discuss.

Today we meet in her classroom to talk, a classroom she is not particularly pleased to have. There are ventilation problems, smells coming from (they tell her) the carpets and, like all other classrooms in this school, her classroom has no windows. However, the room is visually stimulating with students' work displayed on various bulletin boards and wall spaces, paper mache masks, and various other laminated posters and pictures. She

shows obvious pride in discussing the accomplishments of her students, and visually "touring" me around her room.

Inge's teaching career has had two distinct parts to it, divided by a space of seven years where she elected to stay home with her two small children. As a new graduate from the Faculty of Education, she began teaching at a large rural junior/senior high school with a less than desirable reputation -- her parents were afraid to have her teach there. In addition, as a new teacher she picked up the subjects that were left over from the pickings of the established teachers on the staff, and she was left with the non-academic courses. It took her awhile to come to terms with teaching these "real" kids rather than the ones she had imagined, the ones that were more like herself. The time she spent at this school she described as a "baptism by fire" to the teaching profession.

After four years of teaching language arts, which was at that time split into "literature" and "language" courses, and art, Inge took a leave of absence to become a parent. This period of time she describes as also being part of her education, because being a parent gives a new perspective on and understanding of students.

Although not teaching full time when her children were young, Inge chose to stay in touch with teaching by accepting three long-term substitute positions, and then returned to full-time teaching in 1983. She had had experiences in teaching at the elementary, junior high and senior high levels, and decided to concentrate her attention on junior high students, accepting her current job in 1987 where she has been teaching language arts for six years.

Inge is always interested in new information and making connections with that information for her students in class. She has taken her students on archaeological digs and to the Provincial court house to support thematic study in the classroom. Today when I visit she is extremely enthusiastic about the learning her students are doing in the area of native cultures, initiated by the reading of Katz' novel *False Face*. She also supports collaborative projects with other subject areas, such as combined social studies/language arts research assignments.

Involvement with student teachers has been beneficial in introducing Inge to new ideas and approaches in language arts, in demonstrating their own flexibility and adaptability to situations, and in enabling Inge to reflect about her own beliefs and approaches to teaching language arts.

Flexibility has been an important aspect of dealing with the Basic Core class that Inge teaches. She finds that she must be constantly trying new ways of working with these students who struggle with academic difficulties as well as a lack of confidence and social skills. She attempts to show them their strengths, that are often in other areas than reading and writing, and tries to offer them opportunities to be successful such as oral presentations and group activities.

Flexibility is necessary and desirable, and Inge sees herself becoming more flexible each year, although the flexibility exists within a structure that she has set up for the students. She believes that teachers need to establish expectations for their students. The structure developed by these expectations then gives the students the freedom to live up to and exceed these established expectations and goals. The freedom within a structure is exemplified by an evaluation scale she developed in collaboration with a previous student teacher (See Appendix C).



Inge has established workshops for reading and writing in her classes and this year has attempted to combine the two into one workshop situation. Students are encouraged to make connections between what they read and what they write, in order to develop in both of these areas. They use response journals to record and extend their thoughts and ideas, and are encouraged to read and write in a variety of genres. Inge also uses computers extensively with her students as a tool for writing and revising their writing.

Inge enjoys her students and is looking forward to continuing her work with them next year as they continue in a higher grade. She shows sensitivity to the students' strengths and weaknesses as well as to their interests. The short story "The Most Dangerous Game" has been selected for the grade nine Basic Core class because of its high level of action and interest, and Inge reads it aloud to them in class. She offers support by way of questions that review the plot and characters, and shows them a film version of the story following the reading of it. She also clearly establishes her expectations of effort on their part, and also her faith in their abilities to complete assigned activities. Inge accepts students' responses positively -- "I've never thought of that idea" -- and the message is clearly given that students have valuable ideas to contribute.

In addition to reading and writing skills, the importance of listening and viewing is established. Before viewing the film, the students' expectations of the film are discussed and a brief background to the film's production is given. Working in pairs, the students then jot down their ideas about what the setting might look like, who the actors might be, and what type of background music might be used. Inge shares with me that it is important for the Basic Core students to leave with a sense of accomplishment and with a specific assignment completed. She checks their lists for completion and at the bell dismisses them with positive feedback regarding their ideas.

The desks in Inge's class are organized in rows facing the side of the classroom, as seen in Figure 7, and are often moved into different arrangements for particular activities.

As the next class enters, a grade eight language arts class with twenty-nine students, they quickly rearrange the desks into paired rows and begin reading silently. After about ten minutes of reading novels of their own choices, a class discussion is initiated by a student who has made a discovery regarding native Indians in a news article she has recently read. Inge then compares one of her own experiences with the student's, and a discussion that involves the whole class takes place. The discussion covers issues about native religion, Anne Frank (an earlier unit of study) and a student's own changing perceptions about natives.

The discussion then moves into more specific concepts involved in the novel being studied, and Inge raises several issues that she feels are important to present to the class. She acts as a guide through the students' discussion of their reading, asking specific questions to focus their investigations and thoughts, paraphrasing comments, and including as many students as possible in the discussion. As the discussion winds down, Inge reminds the students of an upcoming quiz and lets them know the purpose and the focus of the quiz.

It is obvious through this discussion with her grade eight class that Inge values the input of her students -- their writing ability continually amazes her as she gives them their freedom in choice of subject and genre. Their positive reactions to assignments reaffirm her own beliefs and encourage her to continue exploring new ideas.

### The Floor Plan of Inge's Class

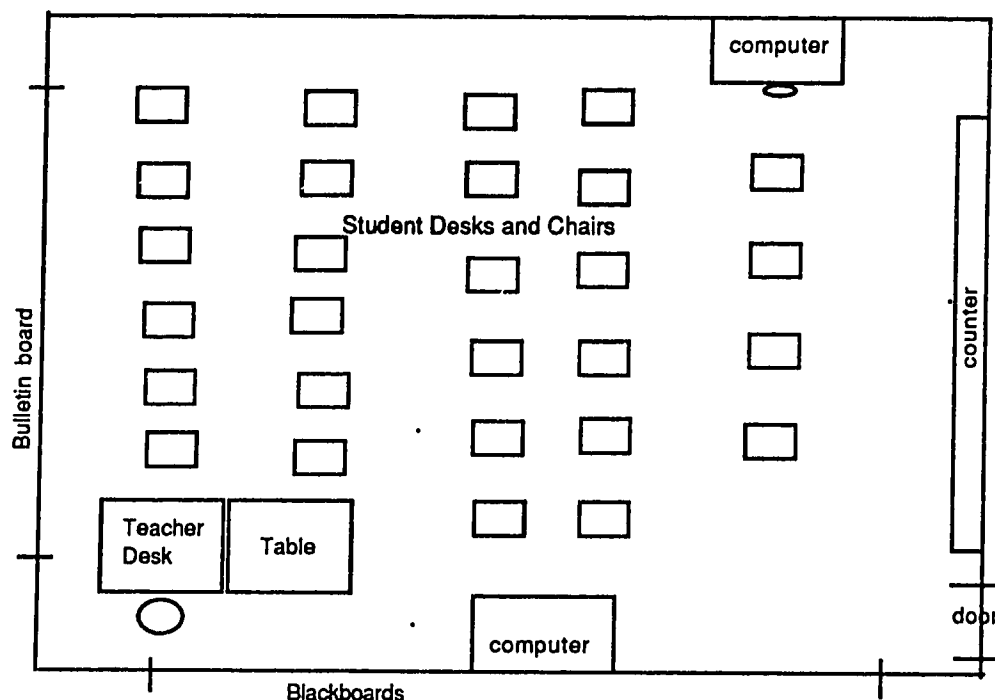


Figure 7

Inge finds it challenging to work with colleagues especially in her role as language arts coordinator, when there is a lack of interest in change and growth. Her expectation that everyone will be interested in new ideas is frustrated by others' lack of interest and initiative, and she finds this difficult to accommodate into her own vision of language arts teaching. She prefers to work with her students, with student teachers and with colleagues in the system who share her view of language arts as a developing and exciting area of study to make connections between the classroom and the world beyond.

### Recapitulation

These six junior high language arts teachers have offered me melodies to broaden my personal understanding of what it means to teach language arts. Their voices have allowed me to hear six new and unique, although brief, compositions of language arts teaching. Sometimes their voices have been harmonious and sometimes they have been singing individual melodies, but seldom have I heard dissonance in their interwoven stories and themes.

## CHAPTER V

### THEMES: POLYPHONY

I have chosen the participants of my study well, I believe, as I become attuned to the symphony of ideas playing throughout the schools. I am continually surprised at the uniqueness of each teaching situation and teacher that I visit, at the diversity and skill and art that is displayed. Their joy of teaching creates a pleasing resonance to the ears of an outside listener, as I have taken a moment to share their classrooms.

From the first visit to the sixth, I am continually aware of the many arrangements and styles that can be presented. The students, their community, the teacher's personality, background and interests, the administrative support, and the particular day are all possible notes that create melodies and chords that become part of the whole composition -- some sounds dissonant and some harmonious.

The styles of each of my participants suggest that there is clearly no one way in which language arts teaching should be performed or conducted. All of these six teachers have found favourite arrangements of the language arts melody for themselves, arrangements that include interludes, variations, and sometimes silence. But within each of the compositions there are aspects of the melody that recur, that resonate, and that harmonize.

As I visit each of these teachers briefly one final time before summer vacation I am struck by some common features. All of these professionals are reliable and dependable. They are always present, in their classrooms, at their meetings or extracurricular activities, taking responsibility and providing leadership to their students and to their colleagues. They have the same implicit understanding of the importance of their appearance; while each teacher looks distinctive and unique, they all have achieved a non-threatening look that balances the roles of professional and co-learner. Their appearance does not distance them from their students but provides a subtle message of collaboration as well as a positive example for the students.

The six teachers involved in my study have differing beliefs about teaching and styles of working within their classrooms. They structure their timetables differently, work with different materials and tools, and have different types of opportunities. However, within these differences I continually hear recognizable themes playing throughout our conversations, playing in various keys and pitches and volumes, but clearly recognizable nonetheless. I have identified seven themes that underlie these teachers' abilities to change and adapt in their profession. These themes have been dominant throughout their conversations with me.

To find the themes for my study, I have played back the tapes of each of the interviews and reread the notes I made from the interviews and from my classroom observations. I listen for recurring ideas and record these, then group them in categories that seem to resonate with commonality. I then replay the themes in my head, superimposing the themes on the voices of the participants. The rhythms and structures of the themes that I identify seem to support the melodies of each of the participants.

The themes that have emerged from my study can be identified as the development of relationships in teaching situations, balance between classroom structure and flexibility, knowledge of problem-solving strategies, desire to make a difference in teaching, interest in life-long learning, a broad definition of teaching and its roles; and development of a voice that empowers the implementation of an educational vision.

I elaborate on each of the identified themes by using the tunes and rhythms I have heard in the six participants' conversations with me.

### **Harmony: Developing Relationships in Teaching**

The development of strong trusting relationships between teachers, their students and their colleagues is desirable in establishing successful teaching situations and is a key factor in encouraging change. Strong relationships are developed through the respect that teachers show to others they work with, and, although not explicitly stated to me in our discussions, this respect for others is an implicit melody in the decisions and directions that teachers choose.

An obvious similarity between all of the teaching situations I observe is the genuine caring that the teachers demonstrate. This caring is exemplified in the interactions with students, in the exciting manner in which language arts curriculum is presented, and in the way that these teachers embrace their roles as teacher in a junior high school. Bryan still welcomes a student from three years ago to his home to do homework; he views his students almost as family as he interacts with them over the course of three years, and gets to know their strengths and their weaknesses, and cares about them. Wendy shows her caring through her awareness of each individual student's successes and interests. Her caring is also demonstrated by questions and comments at the beginning of class. Her desire to know her students as individuals helps establish strong relationships between the learner and the learning coach.

Bill exemplifies his genuine caring of language arts and of teaching in the energy he devotes to supporting his colleagues, through area meetings with neighbouring schools, system inservices and professional development, and collaborative activities with the university. He does not want to pass up opportunities that will help his students to ultimately become better prepared for life beyond school, and so he continues his involvement in Leadworks, in the yearbook, and in other school initiatives that he sees as his responsibility as language arts coordinator of his school.

Humour is an aspect of student-teacher interaction that is discussed and modeled by each of the six teachers. This humour is a lilting, gentle humour that establishes a positive and accepting relationship with students. The kind of humour used by these teachers is not in the nature of slapstick tricks or raucous jokes, but the type that shows the ability to see a lighter side to situations, laughing with the students and letting them laugh with the teacher. So when Darrell's students come to class without pens, he provides them with loaners and a (semi)humorous comment. He makes them aware of their responsibilities but does not let their lack of a pen interfere with the more important aspects of learning. Janice is able to use humour to deflect a student's challenging comments about her ability to teach. The student is invited to prepare a lesson and teach it herself in the upcoming week. This interesting prospect serves to deflect a possibly confrontational situation and to establish a harmonious connection between the teacher and the student.

There is positive energy generated through successful and productive interactions with students that seems to generate further energy and enthusiasm in the teachers. This sustains them and supports their new curricular initiatives. Wendy sees her Year 7 students supporting their Years 8 and 9 peers, taking control of their learning and challenging their own learning boundaries. Their energy and ability to direct their own learning causes Wendy to continue looking for new connections and directions for these students and for herself in order to challenge them further, and enables her to continue to enjoy and respect her students.

Mutual respect also exists in Inge's Grade 8 language arts class, where she invites students to share their discoveries and understandings with the class. They interact as co-learners to share new-found ideas about native cultures that arise from a class novel study. Inge encourages them by sharing her own learning with them. Mutual respect and appreciation are further developed when students learn to respect their peers who value reading and writing. A culture in which reading is seen as admirable is created within the language arts classroom.

Student choice is an aspect of the language arts classes taught by these six teachers that is a key aspect of their class activities. As active players in their learning, students select reading materials and writing assignments that harmonize with their own personal interests and goals. Respect for the students' abilities to make appropriate choices develops from the relationships that grow between the teacher and the students. As collaborators in the classroom, students are given varying degrees of choices. These choices involve such things as materials and the presentation of their learning. The participants of my study believe that the students will be more free to consider their own beliefs and values as they choose to read and write than if the teacher was selecting and directing every activity. They see that some of the more recent initiatives in language arts learning -- such as workshops, portfolio assessment, and response journals -- support the encouragement of students in taking more active roles in their own learning compositions.

Through the use of response journals or learning logs, the participants are able to ask and to listen to their students' opinions and to encourage their own developing voices. Journals are an integral part of each of these teachers' language arts programs, as they encourage students to develop their own intentions, to make connections, and to further their thinking through writing. As students become comfortable with selecting their own writing topics, they come to understand the power of language and their abilities to influence others with their writing. They learn to, as Wendy suggests, "take dead words and make people laugh or cry. They realize they can write pieces that strongly affect people emotionally."

Teachers realize, as students become more fluent with their writing and verbal expression, how capable and talented their students actually are. This realization further increases their respect for their students and their enthusiasm for teaching language arts. Inge talks about a student who "burst into a story this year, and what she has learned to write is wonderful." These experiences of joy and excitement come about because students are empowered and encouraged to use their genuine voices in writing.

As well as choices in language arts activities, some of the approaches and strategies being implemented in these language arts classes allow for choice in assessment as well. The portfolios being used in Darrell's classes this year encourage students to become involved in selecting their compositions to be evaluated. Bill's evaluation scales enable students to assess their own performance in the various language arts strands and understand how their performance is graded.

This theme of relationships also includes the development of relationships with colleagues, both on the same staff, across the city, and beyond. Teachers are both supportive and supported by mutual interests and concerns. They see themselves as being supportive by modeling strategies and activities to their peers, talking to rather than at, and showing interest in both giving and receiving new ideas. These six particular teachers develop relationships as they plan professional development days within their school, attend inservices sponsored by system consultants, work with student teachers, and attend specialist council conferences. As with students, these relationships develop mutual respect among colleagues that help to sustain their enthusiasm and energy throughout the years. All of the participants speak highly of various colleagues with whom they practice and perform their language arts skills.

### **Form: Balance between Classroom Structure and Flexibility**

Throughout my dialogues with the six teacher participants, I have been hearing strains of this common tune. It seems to be important for the participants to have a recognizable structure in place in their classes -- a foundation that feels sturdy and secure for the students, that offers them, in Bryan's words, "a safe and comfortable place." The structure, however, must be transparent and expandable and must allow students to move beyond that structure with their growth spurts and divergences and unprepared springboard leaps. In these classrooms, this structure is created by beliefs and activities that encourage active and meaningful use of language in various ways, such as independent reading supported by personal responses, writing workshop activities and creative dramatic presentations.

Discipline is mentioned as a main concern in junior high classrooms by the participants, regardless of the classroom organization developed by the teacher. Although, as Bill says, playing the role of disciplinarian "gets in the way of language arts teaching," it is an integral part of the job. Discipline need not, however, be seen as a negative aspect of the classroom community and is positively established by these teachers through caring, trusting relationships with the students. Several of the participants talk about their increased flexibility in their classrooms, moving away from the authoritarian stance to one that more closely resembles that of a guide or a facilitator. The respect with which they view their students establishes student-teacher relationships that allow for comfort and improvised flexibility in the classroom.

Again, a cycle is implied. The more comfortable the teachers seem to feel with their students, the more open and safe they feel about implementing different strategies with their students. The encouragement of students developing their own strong voices and melodies through response journals, cooperative learning, group presentations and workshops serves to strengthen the understanding and productive communication between the students and their teachers.

Wendy feels free to tell her students that she is not sure of an answer dealing with electromagnetics, but she shows them where to get the information. Darrell has stopped presenting his classes with a list of teacher-generated rules in September, and now begins the year with an attitude of "Let's get started. We're going to have a great year." They are able to provide safe and comfortable environments for their students because they have enabled the students to feel safe and comfortable.

However invisible the underlying structures in the classroom may be, they are vital to the successes attained by both teachers and students. The structure selected by the teacher, whether it is a method of organizing writers' workshop, collecting response journals, or selecting novels, adds to the security offered in the classroom. Nancie Atwell's workshop approaches work well because they are highly, although subtly, structured for adolescents who still rely on adults providing guidelines for them. The structure that Bryan has provided for his students which allows them to store their books in special spots in his classroom, the structure that Janice has provided for her students that develops a magazine response to a novel study, and the structure that allows Darrell's students to retrieve and return response journals to an assigned filing cabinet drawer, all encourage and allow for the students' success. I observe many other structures in my classroom visits with the six teachers that seem to have been carefully planned and developed. Each of the workshop situations, writing assignments and presentations demonstrates structure that both encourages student involvement and gives them guidelines to work within.

The physical layout of classrooms is often dictated by existing structures such as room size, carpeting, and available furniture, but the teachers I have been observing are creative in their use of spaces and desks. The students in Wendy's class sit at tables and computer terminals, while the other classes are furnished with desks and chairs for the students. These, too, have been organized into different arrangements -- rows in Darrell's class, paired rows in Janice and Inge's classes, and a large rectangle in Bryan and Bill's classes. The teachers' desks are found in a corner of the room, and large tables for shared use are set up in the middle of Bryan's room, in the corners of the room in Bill's room, and in other cases the students use the floor, the hallways, and any other available spaces they can find in the school to complete projects and assignments.

Time is another imposed structure in most junior high situations, one that has been creatively managed by the participants. In situations such as the ones Janice and Wendy experience, students spend most of their time with their homeroom teacher who can then shape or negotiate the timetable in a variety of ways. In a more constrained structure where students move to the sound of a bell every forty-five minutes, it is still possible to manipulate scheduling through double blocks of language arts and structuring activities that can be continued from class to class. Many of the activities that I observe the students involved with are ongoing, extended ones such as novel studies of False Face, writing workshops focusing on revision and editing, and thematic units dealing with humour and suspense rather than isolated activities that are expected to be completed in forty-five minutes.

The balance between structure and flexibility seems to be a key for language arts teachers in offering a program that encourages active student participation. The comfortable balance is found at different places with each of the six teachers, and is changed as they find different comfort levels in their classes with different groups of students.

### **Improvisation: Knowledge of Problem-Solving Strategies**

The ability of teachers to recognize and control stressful aspects of teaching junior high language arts gives them a level of support and security. Although several major areas of discord are identified repeatedly by all of the teachers I talk with, they have been able to find creative resolutions to the problems.

These teachers identified five general concerns for teachers of language arts: 1) amount of time available, 2) full integration, 3) large sized classes, 4) teachers' feelings of

insecurity, and, to a lesser extent, 5) lack of up-to-date materials. However, even though each of these discordant issues has been mentioned several times, the teachers have adapted their programs, their teaching styles, and their priorities to work within the constraints mentioned. Rather than taking a passive role of complaint and routinization, they accommodate other players, improvise on their melodies, and alter their pacing.

The lack of time to accomplish everything they would like to accomplish (conferencing individually with students, evaluating, preparing materials, meeting with colleagues, personal activities) is seen as the biggest hurdle for the teachers to overcome and the one most often mentioned in our conversations. All of the teachers have considered ways to overcome the lack of time in a teacher's day. Bill suggests the possibility, in an ideal world, of teaching fewer classes or different subject areas, in order to more evenly balance the teachers' day between instructing, planning, reflecting, conferencing, evaluating, and relaxing. Inge suggests the re-prioritizing of funding in order to reduce class sizes, to enable teachers to attend more professional development activities, and to listen with a more attuned ear to individual students.

The teachers use several strategies to provide a full complement of experiences to their students, while still having time to deal with the students individually. These strategies include the use of alternative assessment ideas such as portfolios and evaluation scales, cooperative learning activities, and workshop situations. These approaches accommodate different student levels of ability and achievement and also allow students to select certain pieces of their work, from the many they have composed, for grading.

A second area of concern for some of the participant teachers is that of integration of students with special needs into the mainstream classrooms. There is a difference of opinion on this issue between the teachers working in more traditionally structured junior high schools and those working within alternative structures. One example of integration is seen in Janice's classroom, a Year Seven class that also accommodates Academic Challenge, adaptation, behaviour disordered, and ESL students. Janice feels that her special education background enables her to successfully accommodate all of the abilities of the students in her program.

Wendy's classroom also accommodates students with a variety of backgrounds and abilities. Her homeroom class, the one she works with throughout the day, is made up of students from Year Seven to Year Nine with varying academic and behavioural success levels. Two students in her class, one in Year Six and one in Year Nine are newly-arrived from India and have limited English language facility. It is possible in this class to accommodate both the grade level differences and the students' lack of English language facility to provide them with a comfortable learning environment while encouraging the other students to become more attuned to a variety of cultural sounds.

Although Inge would feel comfortable integrating the Basic Core students (those who have difficulty in achieving standards in a regular program, for a variety of reasons) and sees integration as the direction in which we should all be moving for these students, she expresses a concern common to many teachers, that of full integration. At some levels teachers are not trained to deal with the severe disabilities that students may have, and again time and class size are factors that become important for the teachers and for the other students in the class.

The teachers suggest several problems that need to be resolved in order to offer effective language arts programs and they work on alternative harmonizations for these problems. For example, the participants find they can more realistically discover students' opinions and hear true voices through journals than through individual conferences, given the time



constraints of junior high timetables, and the constraints of having thirty students in a class. Realistically, as desirable as it might be, teachers find it very difficult to schedule time to talk with each student individually for a length of time, and often not all students feel confident in contributing to full class discussions. It is also difficult to ignore some students who tend to want to sing solo in conversations, either because they are enthusiastic and knowledgeable, or because they are disruptive and off-task. It is not always simple to achieve a balanced blend of voices in class discussions. In the class discussion on native cultures that I observed in Inge's class, several students were very enthusiastic in sharing their ideas. However, although the remainder of the class may have been learning and participating by listening, it was difficult for Inge to be certain of their participation. Student response journals, on the other hand, enable her to listen to the tunefulness of each of their voices as they participate in aspects of the conversation that appeal to them. A writing workshop situation allows Bill to circulate among his students and confer with many of them, either with informal conversation or with longer, more formal conferences. I observe Bill pausing to answer an editing concern for one student and then taking a seat beside another to engage in a more lengthy discussion about a piece of her writing.

Implementing new strategies and materials into a classroom involves risk. It has become important for these teachers to find ways, in taking risks, to deal with their own insecurities and fears of failure in order to institute changes. In order to overcome these powerful dissonant feelings involved with risk-taking, and sometimes carried from years past, these teachers have developed strategies for moving beyond their lack of confidence. One of the main ways they mention for allaying their fears is in talking to supportive colleagues with whom they can share their ideas, ask questions and generally find mutual support. Bryan, Janice, and Bill meet with other language arts teachers in their area, to discuss and to share; and they have been drawn together as well by the system's language arts consultant. In these meetings they exchange activities that have been effective and seek help in working through problematic sections of their language arts programs.

All of these teachers have taken on leadership roles within the language arts departments of their schools and share routinely with colleagues on their staffs, discussing possibilities for portfolio assessment, structures for writing workshops and other types of approaches to language that have required dramatic shifts in thinking for teachers.

Although most of these teachers' schools have adequate resources, by way of anthologies, novels, library materials and computers, there is usually a need to share resources with other classes. Copyright, too, has created some problems with access to current materials. These concerns require creative problem-solving strategies on the part of the teachers and often on the part of the students as well. Cooperative learning activities, individualized reading and writing programs, and group work can alleviate the need for multiple copies of texts. The students in Bill's class are encouraged to select their own reading materials and they can also select from anthologies of student work. Janice's students as well individualize their reading program, so that class sets of novels are not needed.

The reflective ability of these teachers is an important aspect of their problem-solving abilities. They are able to review their successful and less successful classes with an ear to changing and adapting, constantly moving the realities of their classrooms closer to the melodic vision that each holds for their language arts classes. Through reflecting on ways to attain these visions, they set priorities that support the beliefs and values they have come to listen for in their language arts programs and their teaching practices.

### **Composing: Desire to Make a Difference in Teaching**

The beliefs held by Bill, Wendy, Janice, Darrell, Inge and Bryan are very important to them as language arts teachers and as professionals in a broader sense. Believing strongly in particular ways of doing things causes them to recognize, as part of their role and responsibility, attempts to influence the direction that language arts moves in their own schools, and beyond. For example, the series of evaluation scales that Bill has shared with colleagues on a number of occasions in inservice and professional development sessions has influenced others, not only through the development of his strategies, but also by his willingness to share them with others.

Making a contribution, a lasting and meaningful contribution, has become a key issue for Bryan in his teaching. He feels that there are places where he can really make a contribution of which he can be proud, one in which he can make his voice heard and reverberate both with his students and his colleagues.

Becoming an exemplary teacher, one who leads by example, by modeling and talking to colleagues, also concerns the other participants. As Bill suggests, "it is rewarding, for me, to be seen on the 'leading edge' of language arts instruction" -- of education -- and to be involved and informed and willing to talk about both successful and less successful implementations of ideas. These teachers all have moved into leadership roles in language arts teaching in their schools and in the larger community. They do not want to jump on educational bandwagons, but rather wish to create thoughtful and collaborative arrangements that move in educationally sound directions and support their beliefs and values.

Inge finds affirmation of her teaching beliefs by giving a presentation at a provincial English Language Arts conference, working in collaboration with a former student teacher. Sharing knowledge with interested colleagues establishes her own dynamic view of her teaching and encourages her to continue in new directions. Wendy does not speak directly about her desire to make a difference, but her professional actions speak of this desire. She has consciously made choices that have placed her in positions of influence -- orchestrating English Language Arts Conferences, harmonizing with university programs, and choosing to work in tonalities that demand flexibility and willingness to change.

The wish to make a difference begins with the possession of strong beliefs about teaching that these teachers wish to share with colleagues. They also believe that a true difference is made from within a community such as a school staff or a specialist council, by personal involvement and the continuation of dialogue.

### **Bridging: Interest in Life-Long Learning**

One of the aspects of continued success and enjoyment among these six teachers is the interest to continue their own learning processes. Their willingness and desire to learn is a strong motivator in considering and applying change to their own teaching. They share a quality of open-mindedness and can be instructed by many sources. Inge had cause to consider evaluation criteria after listening to a Power 92 radio station spoof on the topic of the abilities of politicians to problem-solve. She applies the criteria that is used in judging politicians' success to criteria that could be applied to the integration of students. This is one example of Inge's capacity to learn from and build on ideas from many

sources, including media, her students, student teachers, courses and workshops, all that lead her in new and polyphonic directions.

Several of the teachers I speak with have returned to university for courses beyond their Bachelor of Education degree, to pursue further areas of personal and professional interest. This direction not only enables them to learn new ideas from university faculty members, from their own writing, and from reading, to enrich their understanding of possible tonalities and rhythms, but also connects them to many other teacher-learners with similar interests and concerns. Further education is also seen by these teachers as a way of facilitating change by giving a broader perspective and base of knowledge and experience, as well as extending the informal educational network often spoken of by Wendy and Bill. These opportunities allow teachers time to reflect on their teaching practices and beliefs. (Diamond, 1991; Fullan, 1982)

The willingness to learn from many diverse sources indicates a lack of concern on the part of these teachers for personal power and control. Indeed, the participants suggest that they find it necessary to relinquish some of their autonomy and authority in order to negotiate with their co-learners -- the students, their colleagues, their consultants. They express interest in learning about new technologies, new materials, new assessment strategies, and about filling in gaps of their own learning with some not-so-new information. Bryan is interested in discovering more about using computers for language arts learning, and Darrell continues exploring in the area of portfolio assessment.

There is not an overwhelming desire on the part of these teachers to move "up" into positions of administration, rather to "move across" educational experiences to expand rather than to extend. Janice expresses the desire to work as part of a team, and others are aware that their influence can be best felt in the classrooms with their students.

These teachers are people who seek out new learning situations, express a love of learning, and are eager to try out new tonalities in their classes. Bill has seen many new ideas in classes he visited which he immediately took back to try in his own classes. Janice has been influenced by inservices on workshop approaches that have suggested ways of structuring her classroom to support her beliefs about language arts learning. Bryan has concentrated for several years on the area of reading, which is leading into successful paired reading activities, and now he is looking for new areas of learning -- perhaps computers. Darrell has learned about some of the positive aspects of response journals through professional development activities, and he is now seeking out more information regarding portfolio assessment. This year Inge has been working on strategies for combining reading and writing workshop situations to help students make connections in their learning.

Wendy's own love of learning causes her to ask "Why do I enjoy learning so much, and what can I do to help kids like it, too?" She seeks to ensure that her students become life-long learners and have basic strategies that allow them to feel confident in their ability to be successful. The concern to give students basic learning strategies leads to an emphasis on the processes involved in learning rather than solely on product. Students need to learn how to find and sort and make sense out of a wide variety of materials rather than to focus on mastering a body of knowledge -- to improvise as well as to memorize. This process emphasis is exemplified in all of the six classrooms I have visited, where many opportunities are available to students to make connections in their learning in active and thoughtful ways, allowing for their own melodic voices to influence their learning.

These teachers share a common belief about the role of content knowledge in students' learning, a belief that content is a by-product of learning. While students are learning

concepts, they are also remembering specific information. Janice suggests that content is the material, like clay, and like musical sounds; we use it to create our learning; and, like the fired and glazed pot, or the thematic composition, content is one of the products of our experiences.

The willingness to take risks, to create new harmonies, and to step in uncertain places are important aspects of life-long learning. The rewards that are reaped from these risky attempts are success with students and their own evolution into keen learners, as well as the teachers' own renewed energy and enthusiasm for teaching.

### **Variations: Broad Definition of the Teacher's Role**

Whether defining the role of teacher as an occupation, a calling, or a way of life, teaching is for these six teachers a part of their lives that influences all other parts. The teacher's role, while not clearly defined, permeates how they perceive and interact with the world. The role shifts from class to class, day to day, year to year. At times, Wendy suggests, it is necessary for teachers to guide, leading students through muddy and dangerous waters, whereas at other times it is important to provide materials, point the direction, and then get out of the students' way.

The teacher's role is ever-changing and one with many transformations. The participants mentioned a variety of roles that are expected of them at different times, including those of nurses, technicians, conductors, police, readers, parents, counselors, interpreters, coaches, and ministering angels, to name but a few. In addition to these diverse roles, they are also responsible for ensuring their students' educational success. Darrell mentions the perceived importance of his students to be successful on district and provincial achievement examinations, and Bryan spends many classes helping his students to prepare for upcoming tests. Teachers are also responsible for leading students to learning that will stay with them and influence their lives.

The role of teacher, in Bryan's eyes, is to be a helper to the students and to provide whatever students need, individually or collectively. As the wind blowing through the classroom, Janice ensures that the classroom is not a static place but one of change and diversity. Darrell looks for the joy in teaching subjects he loves; and although teachers may be realistically asked to work in different curricular areas, he feels that they need to find satisfaction and pleasure in working within particular subject specializations.

The balance between guide and facilitator is an important aspect of the teachers' roles. This aspect is mentioned often and by several of these participants. Bill speaks of guiding students to understandings and then getting out of their way so that they can explore and develop their intentions in individual ways. Bill's comment is similar to Inge's beliefs about the teacher's role, that students need freedom but within an instructional framework constructed by the teacher. The balance is between the amount of framework and the amount of freedom that is provided, a balance that shifts with each teacher-student relationship.

The main roles of the teacher also change depending upon the purpose of the classroom events. It is not possible, in Wendy's view, to be entirely student-centred or entirely curriculum-centred. Instead, the centre changes depending upon circumstances and needs. Teachers need some control of classroom activities in order to diagnose their students' abilities and problems, to satisfy the system and community expectations regarding evaluation and promotion, and to actively encourage or nudge students to challenge

themselves. It is still an important aspect of the teacher's role to give students access to a wide variety of knowledge, but Wendy compares her role to that of a choreographer rather to one of a dispenser of information. The choreographer creates steps and sequences of an educational dance, and then lets the students perform. The steps and sequences involve language arts as a foundation for all dance routines that then include other curricular areas to enhance and expand the repertoire of performances.

There are many aspects of teaching in which teachers cannot avoid becoming involved, but the theme I hear clearly in talking to these teachers is that they willingly accept the variety of roles implied in teaching and find varied ways to combine and effectively deal with them all. The main roles of educators are changing. No longer can teachers present information to students to be remembered and reproduced. The role is much more diverse and challenging; as the role changes, so do these teachers. The participants of this study recognize the need for new rhythms, new harmonies, and new arrangements, and have, in a variety of ways (attending inservice presentations, reading professional journals, talking to colleagues, reflecting on their own practices and beliefs) been able to meet these needs.

### **Style: Development of Voice that Empowers the Articulation of an Educational Vision**

A personal articulation for education is a significant force that drives the need to change and to develop. The six teachers I have been working with have each at some point in their careers brought a vision to the teaching profession. Some, like Bill, have come to teaching with a vision of language arts experiences that would be very different from his own experiences as a student, a vision that he gradually has developed through working with other educators and with students. Janice's changing educational composition has been supported by her special education background that has enabled her to hear different arrangements for achieving her goals. Bryan's vision has been supported by the success he experiences with his students and by his own academic achievements. By assuming positions of leadership within schools and within systems, all six of these teachers are encouraged to voice their beliefs in hope that they will have some influence on others.

Willingness to risk trying new approaches to support a vision has been mentioned often by the teachers. They have needed to develop their personal voices in order to articulate and share their compositions and to find ways of supporting and justifying their creations to others. By taking small steps initially that provide some success, the participants are encouraged to take the next step and the next.

The fear of failure that has plagued some of the teachers has been lessened by repeated successes and by encouragement from others. Janice has taken a chance by moving to a new school involving a leadership role, partly because of encouragement from colleagues and administration. Inge has risked presenting at a conference, partly because of collegial collaboration. These specific successes have encouraged Inge and Janice to take further steps to continue their journeys toward the fulfillment of their visions.

The successful outcomes of risk-taking have enabled these teachers to find strong personal voices which speak of their beliefs about teaching language arts and of ways of seeing these beliefs enacted in classrooms. The voices speak of team approaches to teaching, integration of students and of curriculum contents, of continuous advancement of students, and of a variety of other features of their developing polyphonic ideas of education.

Although the final symphonic work has not always been clearly articulated for the participants or for other language arts teachers, the developing rhythms and melodies have driven the direction of their teaching. As confidence has been gained, ways to overcome insecurities found, and personal abilities and limitations recognized, new directions for teaching are opened up for them. The participants are continually changing in order to find new ways to attune their compositions.

### **Recapitulation**

The seven themes I have identified play polyphonically throughout the text I am writing. Through the voices of the six teachers, I continue to hear variations on the themes that I have identified: 1) developing relationships in teaching, 2) balance between classroom flexibility and structure, 3) knowledge of problem-solving strategies, 4) the desire to make a difference in teaching, 5) an interest in life-long learning, 6) a broad definition of the teacher's role, and 7) the development of a voice that empowers teachers to articulate an educational vision. I identify these themes in an order that suggests the dominance I hear and while all themes play an important part in the composition as a whole, I also hear primary and secondary themes as the teachers speak. There are many variations on the themes; they repeat themselves over and over in different voices and using different texts, and they suggest ways that these six teachers continue to change and to grow as professionals and as language arts teachers. These themes are specifically attuned to language arts teaching but can resonate with all teachers. As arrangements of these themes are conducted and performed in classrooms, music is created and interpreted in new ways.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONDUCTING THE SYMPHONY

I now step back to consider the melodies and themes carried by each of the participants' voices individually and by the blended chorus of their voices. I hear them telling me that teaching is a joyful experience and that they have found ways to make sense of their teaching lives, to build meaningful relationships with colleagues and students, and to express their lives through language arts teaching. I also hear them saying that their vocation is a difficult and ongoing process fraught with discouragement and frustration.

Central to their understanding of effective language arts teaching are the participants' beliefs in the power of expressive personal voice and the encouragement they can give their students and colleagues to discover their voices. The valuing of voice indicates the willingness of the participant teachers to enter relationships where power is redistributed, where students are considered important people, and partners in learning decisions that are made.

The six participants make continual efforts to learn about new developments and ideas in the presentation of language arts in junior high classrooms, by reading recent publications, by reflecting on their own practices, by attending conferences and by maintaining active conversations with colleagues. They all believe in the abilities and talents of their students and are interested in discovering how best to encourage all of their students to develop their own potentials.

#### Polyphonic Recapitulation

In a recapitulation of my original research inquiry, I restate the question before proceeding to compose a resolution. My question focuses on the issue of teacher transformation, the changing of teaching practices and beliefs to accompany changing students and changing educational theories. In my subject-specific investigation of teacher change, I ask the questions: "What is it that motivates junior high language arts teachers to adopt innovative teaching methods?", and consider two related questions: "What are the forces that drive teachers to look beyond their present situation to discover new ideas and approaches to language arts?" and, "How can those forces that drive some teachers to innovate be duplicated for other teachers?"

My interviews and classroom visits with the six junior high language arts teachers who became the participants of my study provide me with many unique and individual melodies. These melodies have begun to develop into seven dominant themes. The principal set of themes in my musical composition focus on four clear strains that recur often in our interviews. First and with greatest clarity I hear the participants speak clearly of the importance of building strong trusting relationships among themselves, their students, and their colleagues. These relationships, they state, develop and grow through mutual respect and caring. I also hear a second variation on the theme that speaks of establishing classrooms that balance structure and flexibility. The foundational structure is important, but equally important is the opportunity to grow beyond the structure. Teachers are besieged with many diverse problems as they teach, and the third theme I

hear is that of the ability to find creative solutions to the problems that arise -- they cope with situations using a variety of strategies. Fourth, the desire to really make a difference through their teaching is a theme that sounds ringingly through all of their conversations. My participants tell me that they believe that through their teaching in junior high language arts classes, they can make a difference.

Another set of themes begins to develop the original melodic question beyond the boundaries of the junior high language arts classroom, and rings true to teachers in all situations. This more expansive set of themes includes the importance of establishing lifelong learning habits in students and in teachers, and encouraging the pleasure that can be derived by learning new things. A second part to this set of themes is the need for a broad definition of teachers' roles that will encompass a wide range of the responsibilities and characterizations that constitute teaching. And finally, the need for teachers to find an empowering voice that they can use to encourage the implementation of a strong educational vision is the theme that resolves the musical composition.

### **Modulation: Language Arts Ideas**

Much of the current theoretical writing about language arts teaching resonates with the voices of the six participants in my study and serves to accent the variety of themes I have drawn from my study. A dominant theme in the literature that maintains the rhythm and tune of this composition is that of the need for voice, for the developed and considered voice in every student and every teacher, to have something valuable to say and the ability and confidence to say it. The development of language arts teaching through reader response, workshops, journalling, young adult novels and student presentations encourages students and teachers to develop their ideas and to pursue them in individual and creative ways.

The writing workshop, as described by Graves (1983), Atwell (1987), Romano (1987), and others, is being implemented in the language arts classrooms of several of the participants. I observe Bill's students actively engaged in working through the final stages of the writing process in order to publish a piece of their writing; Inge's students are working with an experimental reading/writing workshop approach that integrates their independent reading of literature with their creative projects; Janice's workshop approach involves students creating their own magazines as personal and critical responses to individual novel studies.

Students talking, both with their peers and with their teachers, is an obvious feature of all the participants' classrooms. The teachers I interview use informal talk as a starting point for exploring ideas, for helping each other to shape and improve their writing, and for discussing reading selections. They also use formal talk for class presentations. Informal talk is encouraged in Bryan's class through his establishment of working partners that help each other work through math problems and help each other to improve their writing assignments in language arts. In much the same manner, Wendy's students use talk to teach each other concepts of science and to help their partners study. Talk is used by the students to make connections and to develop understanding in personally meaningful ways. Janice's students use talk to share their attempts at writing introductions to research essays with their classmates and to obtain feedback and constructive suggestions.

In my interview with Wendy, she discusses the importance of leading students to an understanding of the power of language and, like Calkins, encourages students to link their language learning to meaningful lifelong ventures. In the spirit of Atwell's dining



room table approach to the discussion of literature, Bill attempts to establish a culture in his class where reading is seen by the students as an admirable and desirable activity, one that all students will want to participate in. This atmosphere is established by modeling the behavior of readers and by providing positive experiences with reading for students. A wide variety of young adult literature is available to the students and an emphasis is placed on enjoyment of the literature being read.

To extend and enrich the reading experiences of students, reading response journals or learning logs are used frequently in the participants' classrooms. Darrell encourages his students to respond to films they have viewed in class, using questions that guide their responses. Inge's students use their journals to link their learning between reading and writing.

The red pen approach to marking student work is not seen by the six participants as a positive learning event. A variety of alternative strategies have been adopted in their classes that encourage student involvement in and understanding of the evaluation process. Two examples are shown to me by the participants. One example is a set of evaluation scales for assessing the viewing, oral language, reading and writing skills of students that Bill has created for use with his language arts students. (see Appendix A.) The second is a self-evaluation scale for writers' workshop that Inge has created with one of her former student teachers. (see Appendix C.) The participants attempt to support the directions and philosophies of language arts instruction in their classrooms by using these types of alternative evaluation strategies.

### **Modulation: Teachers Changing**

The voices of the participants echo many suggestions about the nature of teacher change in current research. Parker's questions "What do teachers' personal theories look like? What sort of relationships exist between teachers' personal private theories ... and the impersonal public theories proposed by scholars?" (Parker, 1988, p. 26) are answered in six different ways by the participants of my study. Six arrangements of teacher change themes are offered for reflection and connection to other well-known themes. The idiosyncratic nature of teacher change suggested in Newman's work is born out by my investigation in which I hear six distinct variations on the dominant themes.

However, the participants' variations can be heard to relate to the main themes, the repetitions providing emphasis and validity to the themes that other teachers have voiced. The frustrations and fears are similar from situation to situation, and similar overtones can be heard in the participants' suggestions about the atmosphere necessary to support positive change.

The model of knowing and learning suggested in Figure 8 by Jaggar (1989, p. 73) supports the information provided by my six participant teachers. By implementing conferencing, response journals, process approaches, and student choice in their language arts classes, the participants encourage learning by watching and listening, thinking and reflecting, sensing and feeling, and by doing. They also encourage change both for themselves and for their students. Interaction and collaboration with colleagues, attendance at conferences, and reading educational journals exemplify the four sources of teacher knowledge that Jaggar's model identifies.

## Sources of Knowing - Ways of Learning

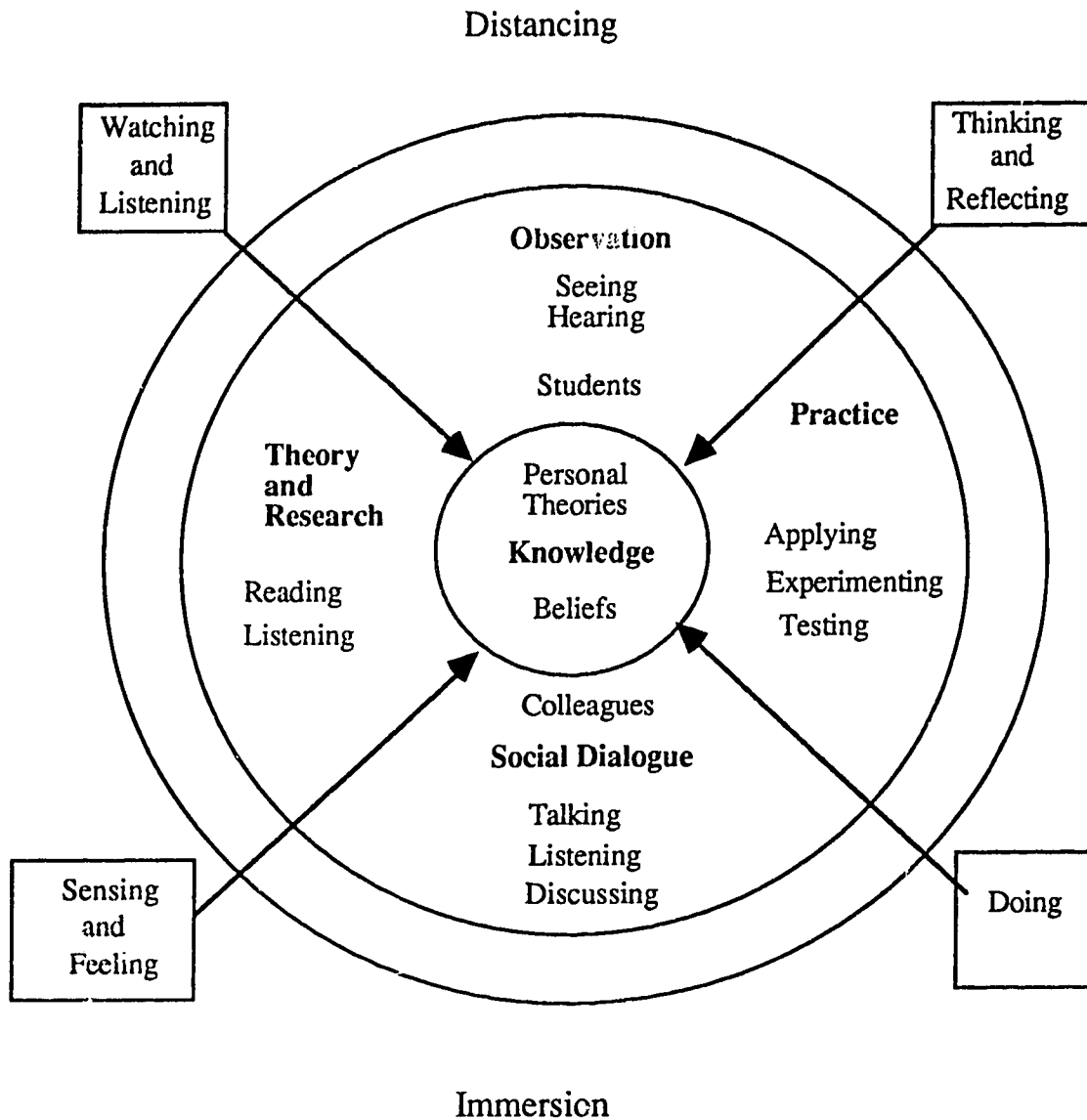


Figure 1

The frustrations voiced by the participants are echoed in other literature that explores the nature of teaching. Teachers' fear of failure and lack of confidence is often a concern mentioned in research studies; it is also discussed by most of my participants. My participants also reiterate the research in mentioning the ever-increasing role expectations and lack of time to successfully accomplish all aspects of their teaching jobs. Need for administrative and public support and a perceived lack of that support are also mentioned throughout the participants' interview and in the current research I have read.

However, the recognition of teachers' own voices is a positive step in their reclaiming control over the direction of their teaching. This recognition is given through books that acknowledge the importance of teacher' experiences through personal narrative (for example, Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) and through dialogue between teachers and other interested groups such as universities, school administrations, and curriculum developers. The recognition of the importance of the six participants' voices in my study will hopefully add a ring of polyphonic authenticity and encouragement to the suggested findings I am offering to the teaching community.

## **Discovered Understandings of Musical Arrangements**

### **1) Polyphonic Lines: Composing My Investigation**

I make several discoveries during my interviews and observations with my participants that are important to my understanding and interpretation of the data.

I learn during my first interview with Bryan Rees that I can only prepare so much for what will unfold. Beyond thinking about questions to pose, the order in which to pose the questions, and the wording of the questions, it is not possible to predict the intonation of the interviews. Bryan and later the other participants influence the arrangement of the composition through emphases and accentuations. My role is to listen intently for melodies both unique and repetitions, to encourage the development of those melodies. My role is to provide a secure and comfortable atmosphere in which the participants can risk talking to me and sharing their opinions.

I become aware of another aspect of interviewing during my second interview, with Bill Talbot. As I talk with Bill I am aware of strains of melody that are recurring from Bryan's comments. I hear myself asking questions that are influenced by the previous interview. I make connections that were not previously part of my experiences and, in doing so, create a new interview situation with Bill. During the subsequent interviews I am more consciously aware of this possibility, this inevitable development, and must consciously and quickly decide whether to pursue connections or attempt to listen only to the voice of the participant being interviewed at the moment -- if, indeed, I can. As far as I can be aware, I choose to listen for solo voices and leave the connecting of ideas and themes to later when I can review the interview data.

I also choose to listen to the participants, as much as possible, as an uninvolved observer, and, I liken myself to a video camera. I treat these meetings as interviews rather than as conversations, and I leave much of my own experiences out of the situation. As well as my experiences, I try to leave my biases and preconceived notions in the background, in order to make determinations and connections at a later time. I am not sure if this choice provides the best results, as my experience with Darrell causes me to question. It is during our post-interview informal chat when the tape-recorder has been turned off, in which I include some of my own personal experiences, that Darrell is reminded and speaks of his convictions about teaching language arts.

This experience with Darrell causes me to consider how I have chosen to structure the interviews, and I decide that perhaps more two-way conversation into the talk would have

been welcomed by the participants. I realize now that the information I gain may be different (although not necessarily less or more) depending on choices such as this one.

I begin each of my classroom visits in the same way. I try to find a spot in the class that is unobtrusive and then I create a map of the classroom on the notepad before me. The map, crudely drawn, includes the shape of the room, features such as skylights, cupboards, windows, and sinks, furniture, and details of classroom displays such as student work, posters, plants, photographs, and other personal touches. I begin creating a map during my first observation in Bryan's classroom; and I become aware that he is concerned with the information I am recording. The visually obvious creation of a class floor plan seems to indicate the type of information I am interested in recording, that I am genuinely more interested in observing than in judging. I continue this mapping practice throughout each of my classroom visits in the attempt to alleviate any discomfort my presence may cause. It seems to work.

I learn, too, about how the participants perceive my visits through their introductions of me to their classes. I am introduced variously as a colleague, a visitor from the university, a friend, and a researcher. In one instance I am not introduced at all. Each of these labels suggests how I am seen by the participants. I realize again the power of labels. The introductions also enable me to connect in various ways with the students in the classes. I am regarded with less suspicion when I am introduced as a friend and a colleague than when I am labeled as a researcher or a visitor from the university, and am the subject of many curious questions and glances when I am not introduced at all. I find my conversations with students, when they are possible, to be helpful by providing additional dimensions to the data I am collecting, in understanding how the students perceive the activities they are involved in.

## 2) Developing a Fluent Technique

In reflecting on the interview and observation experiences I establish for this study, I am aware of the similarities between these situations and the conference situations I have participated in as a junior high language arts teacher. The development of a positive and trusting relationship is a key aspect to conducting a successful and informative interview, regardless of whether it is with a colleague or a student, whether it is about teaching philosophies or about a piece of student writing. It is important for the participants to believe in my genuine interest in their answers and in their activities and my belief in the validity and truth of the responses. I realize how much sensitivity on the part of the interviewer is required, both to know when to ask a further question and where the question should lead, and when to wait and listen. I have become aware at different times, by the participants' expressions of puzzlement or uncertainty, that I have taken the participants off a track that they were exploring in their talk and that this changing of tracks may be hindering my chances to gain access to the participants' thoughts. I learn through my interviews the importance of listening to the words and expressions and body language of the participants and the students, and of focusing on their intent rather than on my own. Through my observations I learn about the variety of successful ways that people work and am instructed that my way is not necessarily the best or the only way.

## 3) Restatement

My interviews and observations with the six participants of this study reconfirm the discoveries and implications of previous research, in determining environments that

foster and encourage teacher change and growth, as reviewed in Chapter Two. As I consider the information I have obtained by my connections with the participants, I am aware of several conditions and attributes that encourage their continuous learning and changing.

A principal attribute of the six participant teachers seems to be their interest in hearing other voices, voices of teachers, researchers and theorists who propose alternatives for the teaching of language arts. These teachers continually seek out information from language arts consultants and colleagues. They are aware that there is information to be gained and are aware of how to find the information. They regularly attend conferences and workshops that will provide them with more information and possibilities for classroom practice. The interest in influential voices that encourage writing workshops, use of journals, and a wide variety of reading materials enables the practicing teachers to develop and strengthen their own individual voices. The teachers' voices blend with the voices of researchers and become influential through their focus and strength. The voices of influential writers such as Murray, Calkins, Atwell, Britton and others have stimulated the curiosity of the participants in new language arts developments and have kept them from the rut of complacency that Darrell describes in our interview. New ideas keep them invigorated and excited in the possibilities that present themselves.

As I reflect on the melodies that I have heard, I am struck by the importance of continuing the connections between schools and universities -- practices and theories. The university faculty members are able to read, talk, and make connections more widely than practicing school teachers, and are able to reflect upon and share their understandings with teachers in courses, inservices, and conferences. In return, classroom teachers extend the practical understanding by conferring with university faculty. These vital links between schools and universities that support continuing change and development are evident with the participants of this study. Two of the participants have returned to university to complete Masters' degrees, and two have continued to take courses through university programs. Further connections between schools and universities are made through consultants and student teachers. All of these links encourage and enable teachers to make sense of new beliefs and understandings, and to more easily continue to change and adapt their own practices.

Talk with colleagues reinforces the teachers' interest that has been established by research and theory, clarifying and developing ideas suggested in articles, texts, and inservices. Connections between educators form the basis for much teacher research that uses personal narrative to listen to the voices of teachers and to support their work. The talk about teaching encourages relationships between colleagues, and then extends to relationships between teachers and students. These relationships encourage active listening between the participants and their students and meaningful use of language to communicate and to extend learning.

All relationships that are developed in teachers' lives influence and shape us as teachers. In considering our own beliefs and strengths as teachers, we need to look to ourselves and the relationships we have developed. The power of story and autobiographical writing to unlock perhaps hidden or unclear understandings of what has shaped and encouraged our development is being recognized. We look to relationships with family, friends, and colleagues to better understand how we can develop strengths and deal with weaknesses, and how we can more actively seek to renew ourselves through the relationships we choose to develop. As we take control of the direction of our teaching lives, our voices become more focused and articulate, and we more easily and clearly value the voices of our colleagues and our students.

The recognition of students' voices influences the way in which the participants perceive their students and, in turn, how they perceive teaching. One aspect of their perception of teaching is in the broad definition they give to teaching, in accepting a wide range of activities and expectations as a part of the job. Another aspect of their perception of teaching is in their belief in and desire to make a difference to other language arts teachers and to education in general. They use their articulate voices to encourage, to share, and to support their colleagues and their students.

### Finale

The composition has been arranged. The instrumentation is balanced. The players have tuned. What is left now is for the symphonic work to be performed, complete with the joyous and purposeful movement of polyphonic lines, harmonious blending of the different voices in a variety of dynamic ranges and rhythmic patterns. The cymbal crashes and drum rolls ensure the riveted attention of the audience as the work is played out.

Who are the players of this musical composition? Who is the audience? The players change each time music is performed and arranged, but are those educators among us who are embracing changes, seeking out new arrangements and styles, continually tuning to the sounds of their students and colleagues. The audience is made up of educators who have not yet joined the orchestra, but may be still working at playing their instrument alone, those who enjoy listening to the symphonic work, those who enjoy the precision of the rhythm, or the event of the symphony itself, and others.

There are many qualified conductors among language arts educators, teachers and administrators interested in progressing the understanding of language arts instruction. I have chosen six language arts teachers, the participants of this study, to step up to the podium. I have listened to the melodious voices of the six participants with a careful ear, I have heard them again with my mind's ear, and have found myself humming dominant melodies over and over. I find the melodies weaving together and combining to become part of the larger symphonic work that exists. The insistent repetition of these melodies enables me to recognize them as my own, and as universal. They are melodies that sing, through time, of education and of language learning.

Change is a necessary condition of language arts, and of all education, and brings with it revitalization and enthusiasm to teachers and students. Change, however, must be combined with goals so that there is a direction and focus for the changes. Theoretical beliefs provide a framework for classroom practice -- beliefs and understandings change from reflection of practice which changes beliefs. Change is needed because many teachers are frustrated, bored and alienated. "Good change processes which foster sustained professional development and lead students to benefits may be one of the few sources of revitalization and satisfaction left for teachers." (Fullan, 1982, p. 118)

I have listened carefully to the voices of these language arts teachers who have participated in my investigation, in order to better understand how a positive and supportive climate encourages members of a language arts department or a school staff to continually reflect upon and change their teaching practices. I believe that teachers must be open to and capable of change during their careers, in order to best prepare their students for the future. The literature that documents teachers experiencing change, such as Perl and Wilson (1986) and Newman (1990), provides a tonal blending that supports and embellishes the melodies of the six participants in this study.

As I consider my conversations with these teachers, several conditions emerge that seem to facilitate the attitudes that promote and develop dynamic and evolving teaching practices based on informed and intelligent directions:

- 1) **Sense of Community:** A school staff must have a sense of community, and relationships based on respect and trust need to be established by the school leaders -- administrators and curriculum coordinators. Each teacher's voice needs to be heard and considered; and, problems and concerns need to be discussed in accepting and caring ways. As teachers' voices are heard, they complement and support the voices of the students. Each unique voice is seen as valuable, as worth listening to, as having a contribution to the educational community.
- 2) **Frequent dialogues:** Meeting times need to be established frequently to productively and openly discuss issues of common concern and to develop action plans for implementing necessary or desired changes. I believe, in some small ways, that my study was also an encouragement for the teachers I interviewed. Discussion of theoretical and philosophical understandings needs to occur, in order for teachers to first recognize the existence of these beliefs and then to develop a common set of goals and beliefs for language arts teaching. The goals and beliefs developed by the staff members need to allow for continual adaptation depending on the needs of the students and the teachers.
- 3) **Encouragement and support:** Teaching can be a lonely and isolating endeavour without understanding and support. Through continual and open conversation that fosters knowledge of teachers' situations and needs, support can be expected and given by administrators, consultants, colleagues, students, and parents, all participants in the change process. Some of the greatest rewards teachers report are successes with their students and acknowledged respect of others.
- 4) **Sharing of ideas:** Open discussion and collaboration between colleagues can additionally support teachers in their work. Networks of teachers with common interests can encourage the growth of new ideas and can also reduce the teachers' workload. Many teachers can work towards a common goal rather than working in isolation.
- 5) **Implementation in manageable ways:** New approaches and teaching methods need to be developed in clear, manageable ways so that teachers can restructure and organize their classroom situations without becoming overwhelmed. Networks of language arts teachers, administrators, and system consultants can work towards enabling teachers to implement changes in their teaching in positive and non-threatening ways.

These conditions and attitudes are realistic possibilities for teachers in all types of teaching situations and are not exclusive to particular types of teachers. Teachers must learn to take advantage of opportunities which enable them to interact with other teachers in examining instructional practices. One of the most pressing needs in education is for teachers to have the opportunity to restore their sense of confidence, meaning and efficacy in making improvements through carefully considered changes in instruction. (Fullan, 1982, p. 129)

This research investigation has changed my understanding of language arts teaching as well as my understanding of the processes of change. I am aware that there are many polyphonic lines of melody, each representing a teaching style and voice that can effectively build relationships between teacher, student, and curriculum. No two melodies are the same and yet can harmoniously blend to create a positive learning environment within a school. My melody is not the only, or the best, but one of many melodies.

I have come to an awareness of some of the reasons that teachers can and do change, and am looking more carefully for situations that offer and encourage the conditions for development and change in teaching practices and beliefs. I am more actively seeking situations where I can share ideas and questions, and continue building a learning community with my colleagues. I am considering ways to support and encourage my language arts colleagues as well as to seek support for myself.

I am changed because I have developed connections with six language arts teachers who offer fresh insights and approaches for me to consider, connections to situations that are unique but similar. I have listened to new tonalities and been able to harmonize with each as I interviewed the participants and visited their classrooms. These connections have enabled me to hear with new appreciation the unique voices of six language arts teachers who are themselves continually seeking innovative teaching methods that encourage their students to success with language arts and with learning.

### Coda

The end of my symphonic work is composed of many polyphonic lines heard individually and in harmonies. The six participants, the featured musicians in my study, give voice to the joyful as well as the unhappy sounds in their teaching, the excitement and the frustration. They share their views and understanding of teaching in order to present their melodies in new ways and to make connections with other melodies. The themes that they identify are shared with many teachers, and yet they each create unique and tuneful variations, reflecting differences in style, tone, and mood. As language arts teachers improvise change in their classrooms, their own personal themes blend with those of many of their colleagues, and yet their variations demonstrate a wide range of interpretations and improvisations.

The acts of teaching are individual and unique acts; yet, at the same time, these acts must be collaborative. There is no one composition; all teaching compositions can be works of art. Teachers have a responsibility to share their voices with others, to sing and to speak and to shout so that their voices are heard and understood both in solo and in chorus. Teaching involves making connections with others -- it can not be an isolated activity. The power of language comes from an understanding of that power, and an awareness that the power is increased by voices being heard together and by being answered.

The power of teaching comes from a commitment to change -- both for students and for teachers. Good teaching IS changing. Good teaching desires to create and develop new ideas and new abilities and new directions. Without change, teaching is custodial. Without change, teaching is attaining technical proficiency. With change, teaching is a myriad of musical possibilities enabling people to make discoveries that enrich lives. Good language arts teaching enriches the lives of students -- and of teachers.

### Musical Moments

The 1991 English Language Arts Conference in Banff is memorable because three of our language arts staff attend. We all drive to Banff together and spend the time in pleasant chat, establishing more personal relationships than we had in several years of teaching together. But it is nothing like the drive home! We have attended many sessions among the three of us, and the ideas are bristling out of us.



The drive back gives us time to discuss the new connections we have made with other language arts teachers around the province, and to share and reflect on the ideas we have gained, new directions we see ourselves going, and in planning department initiatives for the next year. The atmosphere is alive with our ideas and enthusiasm, and although the conference has been very successful, we are eager to return to school to share our experiences and ideas with our colleagues.

I still can feel the energy and joy that has been generated through the talks and collaborative planning that resulted from our weekend together.

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The idea to put on a musical is my colleague's, but one that is exciting to several of us on staff, so we decide to "give it a whirl." A core group of four or five teachers get together to decide how to begin, and what play to perform, but a larger group of staff, including secretaries, teacher aides, and janitorial staff become involved. We choose Rock 'n' Roll to perform, a light '50s comedy, and begin auditions. With the support and enthusiasm of the administration, and the volunteered help of the music teacher leading the band, the assistant principal playing the drums, the home economics teacher planning and organizing costumes, the physical education teacher choreographing, the industrial arts teacher and several teacher aides working on props and sets, other teachers working on make-up, advertising and promotion, programs, and ticket sales, we develop a team feeling.

Jerry, a student who has not experienced much academic success, eagerly assists the science teacher with the sound system, while other students work as props people, prompters, and lighting technicians. The cast is composed of grade seven, eight, and nine students with varying degrees of talent, enthusiasm, and commitment. After two months of rehearsal, we're ready to present ourselves and our play to the community.

Through our preparations we have established numerous links and common interests with each other that enable us to make other connections, curricular and extra-curricular, throughout the year.

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The unit entitled Ran: A Film Study, developed by the Calgary Catholic School Board, initiates the collaborative work between the grade seven language arts and social studies teachers, a unit that supports the studies of Japan (social studies curriculum) and the skills of viewing, analyzing, and critical thinking (language arts curriculum.)

The decision for the language arts and social studies departments to work together necessitates several informal meetings to consider how each section of the unit is to be handled and by whom, and to plan teaching strategies and assignments that support both subject areas. We decide to maintain a common journal for the unit, from which students can draw ideas in creating assignments for both social studies and language arts.

We know that our collaboration is successful when students comment, "We don't know whether this is a language arts or a social studies class" but we see evidence of their understanding of Japanese history, foreshadowing, symbolism, and character development through their journal entries and their culminating activities.

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I am fortunate to have the opportunity to work with a doctoral student, Charles Hart, on an action research project. He is looking for a classroom where he can develop a project and I am looking for an opportunity to learn from an outside observer.

We begin our work together by meeting at my school to discuss possible areas of interest and collaboration. We decide on evaluation -- both student and teacher evaluation -- to be the focus of our action research. Although we have a general area of interest identified, it takes us several meetings, sharing of journal entries, and discussion before we decide on a more specific set of research questions.

As we focus, we also draw others into our work. The principal becomes involved through her evaluation of me as a staff member and, because she is also teaching language arts, through exchange observations that we arrange. Another language arts teacher becomes involved in several informal talks with us, and other teachers express, if nothing else, curiosity about the purpose of our regular meetings.

The research also includes a class of grade seven students who work with us in trying out evaluation strategies. The culminating activity involves a guest poet, all the grade seven students in the school and their language arts teachers, and several parents. The number of people involved in our research continues to widen as we write and publish an article (Hart and Smith, 1989), give a presentation at an English Language Arts Conference, and beyond to our own future teaching practices. The small stone we drop in the middle of the pond continues to cause ripples that affect us and others, in myriad ways that we are aware of and those that we are not, changing how we perceive ourselves and our teaching roles.

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## **Appendix A**



**BILL TALBOT**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

## READING

10. Loves reading and reads a wide variety of literature including classics. Responds to literature in a variety of ways which demonstrate insight into character's actions and motives, personal and social issues arising from the novel, and understanding of the author's craft. Responses are articulate, and demonstrate superior effort. Superior ability to communicate information, feelings and opinions about books through oral, pictorial, and written means.
9. An avid reader who reads a good variety of literature both in and out of class. Attempts some challenging books including some classics. Responses are insightful at times. Excellent ability to communicate information, feelings and opinions about books through oral, pictorial, and written means.
8. Enjoys reading and reads many books, with some variety. Responses to literature are articulate and demonstrate excellent effort and comprehension. Competence in responding to literature in a variety of ways is demonstrated. Effectively communicates information, feelings and opinions about books through oral, pictorial, and written means.
7. Reads willingly and demonstrates good comprehension in extending responses, although a bit uneven. Moving from detailed summaries to more meaningful ways of responding such as predicting, questioning, or discussing character's actions. Starting to read a wider variety of books. Very good ability to communicate information, feelings or opinions through oral, pictorial and written means. May show good growth in readings skills or attitude.
6. Reads willingly but not much outside class. May tend to stick to the same type of books. Responses may be detailed summaries of what was read with a general prediction or comment about the book or an attempt to discuss the novel but has few examples or specific statements to take the response beyond general statements. Good attempt at communicating information, feelings and opinions about books.
5. Reads in class. Responses consist mostly of short summaries of what has been read with a general comment about the book. Is able to communicate some information, feelings and opinions about books.
4. Reads, although somewhat unwillingly or with some difficulty. Responses tend to be short summaries, which may be somewhat unclear. Some difficulty in communicating information, feelings and opinions about books.
3. Reads unwillingly or with great difficulty. Is able to provide only a minimal response to literature. Great difficulty in communicating information, feelings and opinions about books or attempts show little effort, or has not done the required number of responses.
2. Reads only under protest. Unable or unwilling to respond in a meaningful way to literature. Little or no attempt to communicate information, feelings and opinions about books.

1. Does not read or respond to literature.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent signature \_\_\_\_\_

GOAL:

**BILL TALBOT**

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

**WRITING**

10. Loves to write and develops an exceptional amount, in an excellent variety of forms. All pieces of writing show evidence of superior thought and effort. Thoughts and feelings are purposeful and insightful. Is able to craft pieces of writing through revision to produce sophisticated final drafts which are well developed through detail, description and precise vocabulary. All writing reads smoothly and is well organized with excellent sentence variety. Excellent proofreading skills. Exceptional voice, awareness of audience and publishing skills are evident.

9. Enjoys writing and writes fluently in a number of forms. Is able to generate ideas for writing easily and develop numerous first drafts. All pieces of writing show evidence of careful thought and effort. Thoughts and feelings are purposeful and demonstrate some insight. Strong organizational, revision and proofreading skills. Evidence of strong voice, vocabulary, and sentence structure and variety.

8. Writes willingly and is able to generate many ideas for writing, with some variety. Good thought and effort are evident in all pieces. Thoughts and feelings are purposeful. Pieces may be insightful but general or detailed but conventional. Revision skills are good but still developing. Proofreading is good but a few errors may not be caught. Final drafts are clear, well organized and well developed with detail and good variety in sentences and vocabulary. Voice and awareness of audience are present but still developing.

7. Is able to develop some good ideas for writing on own or many with some help. The writing tends to be uneven with some strong pieces, while others need more thought and effort. The writer may still be gaining control of some of the elements of writing such as paragraphing and sentence variety. Is learning to revise and proofread and is able to do so with some help although some errors are still evident in final drafts. Vocabulary is appropriate but not yet precise. Voice and awareness of audience are present in some places. May show good growth in writing over the term.

6. Fluency is developing and an adequate amount of writing is included in the writing folder, or great effort is shown but writer may still be developing control over the writing, especially in use of detail, organization, sentence construction and punctuation. Is able to revise surface features of writing and is starting to proofread but errors in conventions still interfere somewhat with meaning. Vocabulary is correct but may be stilted in some places. Voice and awareness of audience are emerging.

5. Fluency or lack of effort are somewhat of a problem although the writer is able to produce some first drafts, or the student may show good effort but has not yet developed control over the writing. The writing may not be developed to any extent and final drafts are still in first draft language.

4. Fluency is a problem and the writer has difficulty in generating ideas for writing or writes reluctantly. Writing pieces show evidence of lack of control or effort. The writer may know what he or she means but is unable to develop it for the reader. Has not yet

developed revision and proofreading skills, so that final drafts tend to duplicate the same problems evident in first drafts. Errors in conventions intrude significantly on meaning. Has not taken any writing through to publishing stage. Required writing missing from folder.

3. The writing is difficult to understand but some meaning can be deciphered. Little writing is included in folder.

2. The writing is not understandable. The writer lacks the ability to communicate meaning. Only one or two short pieces in folder.

1. Not enough writing has been completed to judge any writing ability.

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

GOAL:

## BILL TALBOT

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

## ORAL LANGUAGE

10. Takes leadership role in group work and discussion by organizing and encouraging others to participate. Uses voice (volume, articulation, emphasis and rate), gesture and facial expressions to extend oral presentations. Excellent ability to use language creatively in a wide variety of communication situations, such as use of dialect, Shakespearean English, etc. Presentations and oral interpretation of literature are creative and original or insightful. Superior ability interpret and analyze while listening and to synthesize information in order to produce an insightful response.
9. Eagerly participates in group and whole class discussion and shows leadership at times. Excellent use of voice (volume, rate, pitch, articulation) and body language. Presentations are creative or insightful in places. Excellent use of language in even challenging situations. Excellent ability to analyze and respond in various listening situations.
8. Willingly and effectively participates in group and class discussion. Presentations are well organized and effective. Strong use of volume, rate and articulation although use of emphasis and body language may not be as polished. Is able to use language effectively in most contexts, including more challenging situations such as dialect or Shakespearean English. Able to effectively interpret and respond while listening.
7. Eagerly participates in speaking and listening activities but not always as effectively as desired. Contributes to class and group discussion and is generally on topic. Presentations are understandable and easy to follow or may be somewhat uneven with some well-organized and effective, while others need more work. Voice and body language are appropriate to presentation or may also be uneven, i.e., excellent in some presentations but not all. Uses language effectively in common contexts and is able to use it somewhat in more challenging situations but is not yet consistent. Is able to comprehend and accurately reproduce information while listening.
6. Participates in class and group discussion although may need encouragement to contribute or guidance to stay on topic. Presentations are appropriate but may have some organizational or concentration problems. Good use of voice but gesture and facial expression may be lacking or inappropriate, or volume, rate and articulation may need work. Makes a good attempt to use language appropriately in challenging contexts but has some difficulty. Is able to comprehend information while listening and reproduce most of the major points.
5. Contributes in group work but not always appropriately. Tends not to contribute much to class discussion without encouragement or can be off task during class or group discussion. Oral presentations may be somewhat difficult to follow because of volume, rate, articulation or concentration. Is able to use appropriate register in common communication situations but is unable to adapt to more challenging situations. Has some difficulty in comprehending or in reproducing information gained from listening.
4. Does not contribute to class discussion and can be somewhat disruptive. Is passive or off task in group work so that projects are not always completed on time. Oral presentations demonstrate some difficulty in using voice and body language to communicate and has difficulty in changing register for different communication situations. Has great difficulty in comprehending or reproducing information gained from listening.
3. Major difficulty in communicating in oral presentations and is disruptive in group work. Is able to produce only a minimal response in listening situations.

2. Disrupts others from contributing to discussions and presentations and is unable to get work done in groups. Does not complete major oral presentations because of lack of effort or consistent unexcused absences lead to minimal participation. Is unable or unwilling to focus on the task when listening.

1. Unwilling or unable to function in groups or present material orally.

Parent signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

GOAL:

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

## VIEWING

10. Demonstrates superior effort and ability to use specific techniques of the chosen medium to enhance visual messages. Presentations are original and demonstrate exceptional awareness of intended audience. Uses visual elements such as colour, shape, texture and lettering to extend visual messages. Shows the ability to fully understand and interpret visual messages created by others.
9. Visual messages are exceptionally creative and somewhat original. Excellent understanding of the use of specific techniques of the chosen medium for an intended audience, is demonstrated. Use of visual elements such as colour, shape, texture, and lettering enhance visual messages. Exceptional ability to understand and interpret visual messages created by others.
8. Effort is excellent and projects are creative. Use of specific techniques of the chosen medium are evident and appropriate to the visual message. Use of visual elements such as colour, shape, texture and lettering obviously contribute to visual messages. Excellent ability to understand and interpret visual messages created by others.
7. Very good effort and creativity are shown, but techniques used may not be entirely appropriate for the message or the intended audience. Projects are neat and attractive but may not be entirely effective in sending message. Very good ability to use visual elements such as colour, shape, texture, and lettering in visual messages, is shown. Very good ability to understand and interpret visual messages created by others.
6. Good effort and creativity are shown but the student may not fully understand the use of techniques of the chosen medium, or use of specific techniques may not be evident. Good attempt at using visual elements such as colour, shape, texture and lettering in visual messages. Good ability to understand visual messages created by others is demonstrated.
5. Some effort is shown, and projects are completed satisfactorily but there are some problems in the use of specific techniques and in the use of visual elements such as colour, shape, texture, and lettering. Purpose may not be evident in projects. Good attempt at interpreting visual messages created by others, but some difficulties are evident.
4. Projects are not entirely complete or may show lack of effort. Difficulty or lack of understanding in use of techniques of the chosen medium and in the use of visual elements such as colour, texture, shape, and lettering are evident. Has difficulty in understanding visual messages created by others.
3. A major project was not completed or the student has great difficulty in using techniques of the chosen medium and in the use of visual elements such as colour, texture, shape and lettering. Great difficulty in understanding visual messages created by others is evident.

2. Very little work completed or complete lack of effort or understanding in visual projects. Shows lack of effort in attempting to understand visual messages created by others.

1. Student lacks the will or ability to create or understand visual messages.

Parent Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

GOAL:



## **Appendix B**

## INDEPENDENT NOVEL STUDY - Year 7

**TASK:** You are the editor of a magazine called \_\_\_\_\_.  
Your job is to produce an edition based on the novel \_\_\_\_\_  
by \_\_\_\_\_.

**\*All starred assignments must be in the order given. The other assignments can be in whatever order you choose.**

### THE MAGAZINE MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

**\*1.** An interesting cover, which lists some of the articles and features in this issue. The picture on your cover must reflect the theme of your novel. **(10 marks)**

**\*2.** Table of Contents (make sure you organize your magazine in an interesting way). **(5 marks)**

**\*3.** Editorial Page (give it an interesting title) - your editorial is a response to your novel. Check your handout on RESPONSES for ideas. Give at least **10** good observations. **(10 marks)**

**4.** At least two full page ads for products that have something to do with the story. You may use magazine pictures but the words must be your own. **(5 marks each)**

**5.** A full page ad for an upcoming movie based on the novel. Use real actors. **(10 marks)**

**6.** A section called "TRAVEL" (or whatever you choose) with **3** pages of articles and ads that have something to do with the setting of your novel. **(15 marks)**

**7.** A Word Search or Crossword Puzzle which includes at least 10 vocabulary words from your novel. It must have definitions as clues. **(10 marks)**

**8. ARTICLE** - A letter from one of the minor characters to one of the main characters describing a problem from the story, and a reply from the main character. At least one page. **(10 marks)**

**9. ARTICLE** - An article comparing:  
 a) 2 characters from the novel **or**  
 b) a character from this novel with a character from another novel you have read **or**  
 c) this novel to another one you have read. **(10 marks)**

**\*10.** A "LETTERS" column (you give it a better title) which includes at least 5 reactions to your magazine from its readers. **(10 marks)**

**FORMAT, LAYOUT, NEATNESS, EFFORT, USE OF CLASS TIME (25 MARKS)**

-Your pages must have 4 cm margins all around. It's a good idea to lightly pencil in margins and erase them later.

-Your articles can be printed or typed, but they must be **ERROR FREE** (no crossouts, spelling errors, punctuation errors) before you glue them in your magazine. Have someone else edit and proof read for you. **DON'T LOSE MARKS BECAUSE OF CARELESSNESS!**

-Have a look at a variety of magazines at home to get ideas for interesting layouts, titles, ads, etc.

-You can fill up extra space with small ads or articles. **Remember, there are no blank spaces in magazines!**

**HAVE FUN WITH THIS ASSIGNMENT! YOUR CREATIVITY WILL PAY OFF!**

**THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL BE WORTH 125 OF YOUR FINAL LA MARKS.**

**Due Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent's signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**(Please include this outline at the very back of your magazine)**

## **Appendix C**

## Writer's Workshop Self Evaluation

### CONTENT

This includes the information in your story. Are your ideas clearly explained? Have you used vocabulary that is appropriate for your story? Are your sentences clear and simple?

poor	below average	good	very good	superior	excellent
1	2	3	4	5	6

### CONVENTIONS

Do you have errors in spelling, punctuation, or grammar? Do your errors make the meaning of your work unclear?

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

### CREATIVITY

Did you take any risks with this piece of writing regarding the language that you used or with your ideas or thoughts? Did you keep your ideas simple?

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

### DEVELOPMENT

Does your work have a strong beginning, middle, and end? Does your work have many details?

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

### PROCESS

Did you use your time for every class to the best of your ability? Did you include all the steps of the writing process? (Brainstorm, rough, editing, conference form, final copy)

1	2	3	4	5	6
---	---	---	---	---	---

### COMMENTS