

Embracing an Empathic-Thou Lens: Re-minding English Language Arts Writing Assessment

by

Nicole Kristine Day

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Department of Secondary Education
University of Alberta

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Abstract

This theoretical dissertation asks: “How might an empathic-Thou lens inform ELA teachers’ values, decisions, and practices surrounding writing assessment?” Using a framework informed by Martin Buber’s *I-Thou* philosophy—and an approach informed by hermeneutics, autoethnography, and writing as inquiry—this study engages textual research and personal experiences to explore the powerful forces of three major concepts—writing, assessment, and empathy. This study documents the resulting disruption and re-minding.

Asserting an understanding of the history, theoretical underpinnings, and coinciding values as necessary starting points, the study first individually examines each concept that roots the inquiry question. I first explore empathy and develop an empathic-Thou lens for inquiry that encourages readers to engage 3 R’s: relationality, rupture, and re-minding. Then, an empathic-Thou exploration of writing and assessment suggests that both can be connected to Cartesian separation—reinforcing objectivity and binary thinking, influencing how English Language Arts teachers approach, respond to, and evaluate student writing—enculturation that establishes separations between student and teacher, mind and body, head and heart, and work from context.

The study suggests that engaging an empathic-Thou lens could shift these educational tendencies, bringing an awareness to our separatist inclinations that, by default, distance us from students and their work. Furthermore, an empathic-Thou lens has the potential to motivate educators to make substantial change to our educational-doing through a greater awareness of our way of being in action. This dissertation suggests that exploring these concerns through a framework informed by Martin Buber’s *I-Thou* dialogical philosophy—while building a deeper understanding of empathy—might differently inform ELA teachers’ values, decisions, and practices surrounding writing assessment.

Preface

I am the sole author and researcher of this dissertation. Short excerpts included in this dissertation have been previously published. An excerpt in Chapter 4 was previously published in 2011 as N. Day, “Allowing Authentic Engagement,” in *Canadian Teacher Magazine*, volume 8, issue 2, p. 5. An excerpt in Chapter 10 was previously published in 2013 as N. Day, “Little Square Pegs,” in *Education Canada*, volume 53, issue 1, p. 46.

For Jim, Olivia, and Gisella.

Love is responsibility of an I for a Thou.

-Martin Buber

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INTRODUCTION: LAYING THE PATH

A Roadmap for Readers

I am a teacher. Recently, I returned to some of my early writing about teaching. The retrospective revealed ways my research journey has changed me. My beginning musings ruminated on the possibilities inherent in what I phrased “an educational pilgrimage” and suggested a desire to transform education in its entirety. Those lofty goals and nebulous articulations included an intention for this dissertation to lay the path while walking it. Likely, my early ambiguity was partially driven by idealism; partially a desire to breach confines of educational research that I worried forced me into a methodological box; and, partially fueled by my love of literature and yearning to craft my dissertation similarly—to let the story unfold. I have come to realize that the research I initially imagined became a pilgrimage of my own.

This theoretical study posits: “How might an empathic-Thou lens inform English Language Arts (ELA) teachers’ values, decisions, and practices surrounding writing assessment?” To arrive at that end, the study first investigates what I refer to as three core *concepts* that root the inquiry question. I use the term concept to suggest the complicated nature and various ways empathy, writing, and assessment can each be conceptualized. Each one of these forces is an essential component of my research question, and each one can be understood as a powerful tool, activity, and process—pregnant with possibility and yet possibly limited by its historicity. My choice to use the umbrella term *concept* is my attempt to engage a broad signifier that can stand as a placeholder until the work of my dissertation specifies and examines each in detail.

The process of writing this dissertation encouraged me to explore my own pedagogical practices in depth; examine the assumptions and coinciding values that ground powerful concepts at play within my discipline; and question my own previously unexamined

underpinnings and values. Importantly, this exploration has led me to consider how these experiences might be shared by other teachers. The result is a theoretical consideration that explores how this different way of understanding could shape our pedagogical way of being and our pedagogical doing as ELA teachers. I hope the following articulation of my own learning about teaching and assessing writing will resonate and inspire readers to engage exploratory processes of their own.

The writing drew me into the wild. At times, I found myself wandering. Perhaps an odyssey was necessary to narrow my initially broad educational imaginings. That said, my own circuitous route has allowed me to see the value of sparing my readers a similarly epic adventure. To that end, I offer readers the following preview of the structure of the dissertation that follows.

Reading this Dissertation

I have organized my work into four main sections and chapters within each section. The reader will encounter commonalities and repetitive stylistic structures in each. Chapters begin with an *anecdotal offering*—a short narrative, journal entry, experiential reflection, or evocative excerpt that is thematically related to the content of the chapter. Some of these anecdotal offerings are my own; some are others'. These introductory hooks are single-spaced, italicized and will not have in-text citations, rather informational footnotes. At times, there will be similar anecdotal offerings interjected in the body of the chapters—also single-spaced, italicized, and footnoted.

These anecdotal offerings can be read as stand-alone pieces; they can be read as offered in combination with the text; or, they can be omitted. The text can stand without them. They are included because I believe they infuse the study with imaginative and descriptive richness, and/or ethnographic insight about the culture and experiences that I have been part of.

The rest of the body of work (mostly) follows conventional APA alignment. Each chapter will begin with a “Roadmap Reminder” to guide readers through the content of each chapter. Readers will also note that most chapters will follow a similar structure in which there is a transactional engagement of historical and scholarly literature, and a “Pause for Reflection” section in which my own pedagogical and personal experiences are explored. These reflections are not told in narrative form; rather, I engage an empathic-Thou lens to differently consider those experiences, and share my reflexive understanding. Thus, this study is a hermeneutic and autoethnographic engagement of scholarly work and my own experiences—a study that is explored through writing as inquiry.

Part 1: Answering the Call sets the personal, professional, and academic foundation for this study. Chapter 1 shares my journey as an English Language Arts teacher and explains the rationale (personally and pedagogically) for engaging the study. I articulate my belief in the importance of educators being *re-minded* (introduced in Chapter 1 and more fully developed in Chapter 4), and I draw awareness to our Western tendency to attach to binary and separatist, versus relational, thinking. The chapter posits how those tendencies could be limiting new directions in education. This study suggests that exploring these concerns—while building a different understanding of empathy, informed by Buber’s (1923/1996) *I and Thou*—might differently inform the way English Language Arts teachers assess student writing. The subsequent work of this dissertation explores how embracing an empathic-Thou lens might shift these educational tendencies by bringing an awareness to our separatist inclinations, motivating educators to make substantial change to our educational-doing through a greater awareness of our way of being in action.

Chapter 2 articulates how Martin Buber's (1923/1996) *I and Thou* has given voice to my belief that relationship is fundamental and, although this dissertation focuses primarily on relationships between people, how I have been influenced by Buber's broader beliefs surrounding the importance of relationships in other realms. I begin by describing my educational path to finding Martin Buber, provide a brief biography about Martin Buber, summarize some key ideas in *I and Thou*, and describe how those ideas are meaningful to my work. I also connect Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy to the concept of empathy and explore Buber's hermeneutic approach.

In Chapter 3, I describe my research philosophy, methodology, and practice. I articulate how my methodology is informed by Buberian *pointings* and I explore how my research approach and process has been informed by (a) hermeneutics, (b) autoethnography, and (c) writing as inquiry. This chapter closes by offering ways in which this work could be adjudicated.

Part 2: The Powers at Play explores the three concepts that root my research question—empathy, writing, and assessment. I believe that deconstructing each concept is a necessary starting point before weaving them together in the final section. Therefore, Chapter 4 consists of a transactional engagement of the literature that both synthesizes research on empathy and conceptualizes how (and why) empathy can (and should) be used as a lens for educational inquiry. The chapter then engages empathy in important communion with Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy to develop what I call an empathic-Thou lens. I suggest an empathic-Thou lens encourages us to consider the importance of (a) relationality; (b) rupture; (c) and re-minding.

Chapter 5 follows the same process, focusing on writing. Using the empathic-Thou lens built in Chapter 4, I engage historical references and academic articles to explore the history, power, and theoretical underpinnings that root writing. The chapter then narrows to examine the

role of writing in education and, specifically, writing in ELA classes. Importantly, understanding the complexity of considering writing as noun, and writing as verb is engaged.

Chapter 6 engages a similar process with assessment. The chapter begins with a historical review that explores assessment's long history to testing and measurement. The concept of assessment-as-judgment is introduced and both summative and formative assessment are explored in relation to judgment.

Importantly, as I noted earlier, each section also includes engagements of my personal and professional experiences reflected upon and explored through an empathic-Thou lens.

Part 3: An Empathic-Thou Lens on Writing Assessment joins the three concepts and posits how specific pedagogical decision-making and practice might be valuably informed through an empathic-Thou lens. This section begins with Chapter 7, which builds connections between writing, assessment, and empathy. Then, through an empathic-Thou lens, I identify gaps in our current North American classroom writing assessment practices and decision-making.

Chapter 8 explores the results of writing assessment as a form of objective-judgment. I suggest that the previous waves of writing assessment have been driven by a testing culture that continues to impact our classroom decision-making. Changing these practices requires educators to be challenged about the role of subjectivity.

Chapter 9 encourages the conception of writing assessment as empathic-Thou judgment and response. An imaginative engagement of Buber's own writing through commonly accepted assessment practices is a beginning point to highlight the importance of the process of being reminded. Asserting that writing assessment is response based on teacher-reading, this chapter articulates how an empathic-Thou lens might encourage teachers to engage judgment and

response as forms of empathic reading. The chapter ends with imagining possible ways in which an empathic-Thou lens might re-mind our classroom writing assessment practices.

Part 4: Looking Forward, Looking Back explores the implications these disruptions could have on the big (our predilection to lean toward educational doing versus educational being); and the small (our values, decision-making, and specific practices surrounding ELA writing assessment). I began this research as a teacher, and I end as a teacher – albeit a re-minded teacher. This final section of the dissertation attempts to bring my personal reflections and research explorations together. Specifically, the final chapter reviews my own unfolding understandings and continuing mysteries. Importantly, this section reflects on and considers my own process of being re-minded.

PART 1: ANSWERING THE CALL

Chapter 1: Relationships and Realizations

A few weeks ago, I presented my Grandmother's eulogy. I was honored that she—a writer and broadcaster—had asked me to compose and share the final celebration of her life's story. However, my pre-funeral panic-attack took me aback. A few days ago, I became nervous as well, this time at the thought of presenting my 'geotext' to our class. This safe community of supportive peers was far from a critical audience. My emotional response was perplexing.

Over the years, I have had countless public experiences presenting and performing. I even have a diploma in Theater Studies—with a major in acting. And, twice a week for the past two months, I have faced 102 undergrads and "presented" lesson material. Not to mention the (almost) twenty years of teaching before that. Aside from that always-tingly-first-day, no nerves! Considering a history that has solidly prepared me, one that should evoke a growing sense of confidence rather than nervousness, I was befuddled. Until recently.

A moment of clarity brought these recent emotional responses into focus. My growing desire to weave my world into a connected whole is having surprising side effects. Pieces of myself are shared, stemming from this journey to nurture a sense of connection to others, my environment, and my research—in authentic and holistic ways. Part of my new worldview has resulted in an increasing sense of deep groundedness. It also unearthed deep vulnerability.

Perhaps I must accept the likelihood that sharing my ideas to a community of academics and interested others may result in a growing sense of nervous significance. I must learn to embrace this feeling, knowing it is a healthy result of caring about the things of which I speak, and knowing I am offering a piece of myself to others who care enough to listen. It is part of this interwoven personal and academic journey.¹

Roadmap Reminder

This initial chapter shares my journey and stories my rationale for engaging the study. I introduce and explore my personal relationship with the three core concepts that root this study—empathy, writing and assessment; and, in the final section of the chapter, I revisit my research question: “How might engaging an empathic-Thou lens inform ELA teachers’ values, decisions, and practices surrounding writing assessment?”

Beginnings

I began teaching English Language Arts (ELA) over twenty years ago. Every year, students filed in, filled my classroom—usually to the brim—and filed out, allowing me to bear witness to transitory fads: beanie babies, bleached hair, and boy-bands; piercings, pogs, and

¹ Personal Reflection, November, 2013.

Pokémon. “Fads” have also come and gone in education: some have stayed; some have not. There has been experimentation: with tools—clickers, smartboards, and rubrics; with approaches—whole-language, phonics, and thematic planning; with learning styles—brain-based, experiential, and collaborative; and in teacher professional development—in-house, district-wide, and Professional Learning Communities. We bandy around concepts such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and collaboration—all with an intent to better teach students, helping them become adept 21-century learners.

My discipline name also changed, as did the Alberta Program of Studies—and, it is in the process of changing again. I began teaching *English*, a literature-focused program of studies that gave way to *English Language Arts*, a program that combines the study of literature with using and manipulating language, reflecting a broader understanding of the importance of engaging language contextually while using literature as a springboard for further inquiry. Trends have also been apparent when assessing and evaluating these new outcomes. Teachers have been encouraged to shift from summative to formative assessment—from testing to performance-based tasks. Meanwhile, O’Connor (2007) helped us fix our broken grades; no zeros were accepted; and Wiggins and McTighe (2011) suggested we start with planning the end in mind. Yet, it seems that while significant educational change is attempted, *trans-formation* is difficult.

Exploring words. An important part of this dissertation aims to disquiet and explore tacitly held assumptions, with the intent of revealing the values upon which those assumptions rest. Some of this dissertation’s investigation applies that exploratory premise to education in general; most of the study applies specifically to writing and assessment. Since the exploratory tool is language, words cannot be exempt. Questioning semantic choices is central to a process

in which the tacit is made explicit. It may appear self-indulgent language-play, or post-modern tomfoolery (bracketing, slashing, and dividing words into their constituent morphemes for performative purposes), but exploring “trans-formation” is necessarily central to my work.

In this work, I advocate for pedagogical change that emphasizes the prefix *trans*. Dictionary.com defines the pre-fix *trans* as “used with meanings ‘across,’ ‘beyond,’ [and] ‘through.’” In this context, I hyphenate trans-formation to draw attention to the prefix that suggests a type of change that requires a transactional process (akin to my process of research that engages an exploration of existing ideas and secondary sources in new ways that might allow for something fresh and unique to be imagined), change that takes ideas and actions to a place beyond, or across, where we are pedagogically stuck. Granted, Dictionary.com denotes the non-hyphenated word form *transformation* to mean a type of significant change in the “condition,” “form,” “nature” or “substance.” Problematically—however—those understandings are also conflated with definitions that denote a simple, surface change of “appearance.” Therefore, the hyphenated word form (trans-formation) fits my intention and pedagogical desire to go across, beyond, or through to something differently understood, embracing classroom practices and values that could be the result of both the old *and* the new.

Robinson and Aronica (2009) supported the assertion that education needs to be transformed. As Einstein suggested, no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it. Perhaps trans-formation will require us to begin by challenging and revising our mental conceptions of the world, of who we *are* as well as what we *do*. This rationale grounds my intention to niggle at foundational roots, unearthing understanding before suggesting action.

Currently minded. It is the contention of this dissertation that Western society is currently ‘minded’ in a way that shapes us to understanding experiences and makes sense of the

world in largely dualistic ways. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *dualism* as a philosophy that reinforces “the idea or belief that everything has two opposite parts or principles.” The roots of this philosophy can be traced back to René Descartes’ work, resulting in Cartesian thinking that “adopted an ontological dualism of two finite substances, mind (spirit or soul) and matter” (Watson, 2015, n.p.). From these roots, the notion of “Cartesian anxiety” was formed, resulting in an either/or mentality, the belief that “*either* there is some support for our being, *or* we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelops us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 18). Societally rooted in Cartesian separation and yearning for certainty, we find ourselves inclined toward binary thinking—a pattern that encourages us to find answers instead of dwelling in possibilities; creates separations between mind and body, self and others, and subjectivity and objectivity; and leads us to seek out differences instead of similarities.

This belief has resulted in what Bai, Eppert, Scott, Tait, and Nguyen (2015) have labeled a *separationist ethos*, “an ethos that stresses differences and dualism in conflict, an individualism that posits self before and over others and the environment, [and] a scientism that supports objectification” (p. 636). Bowers (2007)—writing on topics relating education, eco-justice, and revitalizing the commons—shared similar concerns. He suggested this separationist ethos has resulted in a “*Titanic mindset*,” which he attributed to “the largely unrecognized legacy of Western philosophers and political theorists” (p. 2), resulting in “a prejudice against the forms of knowledge and interdependent face-to-face relationships that exist largely outside of a money economy” (p. 1).

Bowers (2007) also linked this societal problem to education, suggesting that this legacy has created biases resulting in “widespread silences in the thinking of today’s public school

teachers and university professors” (p. 2), silences that are essential to recognize and address. Bower’s work draws educators’ attention to society’s “current values and attitudes, suggested by words and phrases such as ‘freedom,’ ‘private property,’ ‘individualism,’ ‘progress,’ and ‘survival of the fittest’ (now replaced by ‘Darwinian fitness’)” (p. 1). Connecting dots and weaving threads, Bowers noted that these values can be “traced back to the ethnocentric thinking of the West’s most influential thinkers” (p. 1). We have been shaped to be this way.

Other thinkers speak to our human ability to be differently. For me, Martin Buber’s (1923/1996) *I and Thou* has become an importance voice that has inspired me to wonder if we have lost something to which we could return. One of the major themes of his book is that meaningfulness is rooted in relationship—not separation—and that humans are originally inclined to this orientation. Buber (1923/1996) suggested that “it is the instinct to make everything into a Thou, to give relation to the universe” (p. 38) because “in the beginning is relation—as a category of being, readiness, grasping form, mould for the soul; it is the *a priori* of relation; *the inborn Thou*” (p. 69, italics original). This idea is foundational to this dissertation’s call to be *re-minded*.

‘Being’ re-minded. Dictionary.com defines *re* as “a prefix, occurring originally in loanwords from Latin, used with the meaning ‘back’ or ‘backward.’” If, as Buber (1923/1996) noted, “the beginning is relation” (p. 69), I suggest we need to be re-minded—urged and helped—to re-turn to a pre-Cartesian, pre-separatist state. It is my intention to differentiate the hyphenated word form “re-minded” from our usual denotation of “reminded.” Dictionary.com defines *remind* as: “to cause a person to think of someone or something” or “to cause a person to remember.” Following the trail set out in the definition, *remember* is defined as “recalling to the mind,” “an act or effort of memory,” and “to think again; to keep in mind.” I suggest this current

definition reveals our deep ties to separation, currently associated with the head—and with thought—somehow separated from feeling and from the rest of our senses.

Therefore, I intend this dissertation’s use of the hyphenated “re-mind(ed)” to suggest a possibility of being differently minded—to help bring awareness to these cultural tendencies that have drawn us toward separation within our own bodies, as well as between individuals, and a yearning for certainty—binary thinking that leads us to seek out differences instead of similarities.

In Buber’s (1923/1996) words, “the development of the function of experiencing and using comes about mostly through decrease of man’s power to enter in to relation” (p. 53). He goes on to caution readers that when “a culture ceases to be centered in the living and continually renewed relational event, then it hardens...” (p. 61). Literally and figuratively, personally and professionally, we are in desperate need of re-minding. A deeper engagement of Buber’s *I and Thou* will be addressed in Chapter 2, and it is the contention of this dissertation that engaging an empathic-Thou lens could assist us in reconnecting to our primal state—important re-minding, an essential component of the empathic-Thou lens, developed in Chapter 4.

Modern Education’s Journey

Education has also been impacted by these philosophical groundings that have taken us from our primal orientation (Buber 1923/1958) and have shaped Western society to see the world in terms of an either/or mentality, creating ruts that can entrench and bind. As Dewey (1938/1997) stated, “[m]ankind likes to think in terms of extreme opposites. It is given to formulating its beliefs in terms of Either-Or, between which it recognizes no intermediate possibilities.... Educational philosophy is no exception” (chapter 1, para. 1).

I have concerns that education awakens to find itself suspended or grounded—between “conflicting” paradigms and binary positions—until a best practice, reform, or government policy shifts the institution back to the other side. In my view, education has been riding a teeter-totter, bumping along while weathering occasional boosts and kerplunking shifts—ones positioned on a pendulum that is systemically entrenched, unable (or unwilling) to become derailed from a track that offers an either/or. The work of this study develops Anne Gere’s (1980) assertion that without “scrutiny of our concept of meaning; anything else will merely tinker with externals” (p. 58).

Since the 1970’s, both schooling and education have teetered between two culturally created binaries—the paradigms of modernity and postmodernity. According to Mauricio Kagel, “the conflict between [the two] is based upon the illusion that one could simply supersede the other, as if one...is valid where [the other] was valid before” (as cited in Heile, 2002, p. 286). Although Kagel’s simple statement might bring the absurdity of that illusion to light, society has been conditioned to believe that these paradigms are antithetical: based on opposing and mutually exclusive principles, rather than divergent: fundamentally intertwined, and interacting (Heile, 2002, p. 288).

As a result, vestiges of the old—tempted by seductions of the new—result in a back-and-forth sway. On one side is modernity, with its trappings of positivism and the possibility of an objective, view-from-nowhere stance. In its extreme, “modernist knowledge takes the demeaning of everyday life to extremes by reducing it to numbers, statistics, and generalizations; in other words, it averages out the human experience” (D’Souza, 2014, p. 15). Given our educational system’s predilection toward standardized testing, focus on core curriculum accountability, and linear push toward “progress,” it is difficult to argue the prevailing influence—and evidence—of

the modern paradigm, persuasively demonstrated through the Fraser Institute's annual reports, publically sharing information on Canadian schools' "success" and "improvement," based on high-stakes, standardized testing. The irony is not lost on me when some of us in education grumble and criticize the methods of the Fraser Institute over our own pile of marking, evaluation processes that involve awarding numerical grades, using rubrics that chunk and chop holistic assignments to reductionist pieces, conforming to our own annual reports that translate students' overall learning to a percentage.

On the other side is post-modernity. Educational efforts and approaches have worked to foster diversity, multiple voices, and focus on the lived experiences of students. Postmodernity, as Wilson (1989) suggested, "refuses to privilege any one perspective, and recognizes only difference" (p. 209), resulting in what he called liberation (p. 208). Following Lyotard's (1984) views, postmodernity can be characterized "as tolerant of incommensurable alternatives and as sensitive to differences" (Firat, 1991, n.p.). In education—and society—postmodernity has encouraged the voices of those who had been silenced, and encouraged educators to understand curriculum as a *process*, instead of mere *content* (Pinar, 1975).

However, dangers are inherent in this paradigm; postmodernity may result in a feeling of "limbo, a state of never being certain where one stands, causing a continual seeking of new states and new experiences" (Firat, 1991, n.p.). In schools, I suggest this limbo is, in part, what lures educational practices back to the comforting arms of modernity, where solid truth and concrete certainty assuage nebulousness. Thus, education—rocked between the modern and postmodern paradigms, and locked into viewing paradigms as conflicting either/or choices—fails to engage problems in ways that reveal the roots that drive our decision-making.

Trans-formation: A historical lens. If we soften our gaze and look to the past, significant educational trans-formation is evident. This hindsight may be interpreted by some as evidence of progress, engendering a sense of relief—gratitude that the informality of storytelling and imitation have given way to structured learning environments that identify explicit purposes for teaching students, formally governing values, ideals, and content. For some, this same hindsight may incur a breach—a sense of being torn from the wraps of our mothers and grandmothers and displaced from our fathers’ fields and family lands, ripped from the traditional places where our learning took place.

Regardless, it is apparent—for better and/or for worse—significant trans-formation has occurred. In education, as in society, fires in the great halls and hearths of the homes were extinguished, abandoning generational gatherings that fostered a survival of ancestral stories, nurtured relationships, shared knowledge, and celebrated kinships to land and to each other. Learning no longer valued nor attended to the lessons of the ‘commons’—and with that absence dismissed the concept of marginal gain. Compared to a traditionalist paradigm, learning that involved trusting one’s gut eroded; many became blind to news that floats on wind and numb to a sense of spirit (Abram, 1996). Society changed, and so did education. Schools were constructed. Education was formalized. Education became differently formed.

I do not mean to suggest that society embraced something better; nor do I suggest education remain firmly rooted in a place of tradition—not entirely. However, revisiting this time persuades me of the possibility of *being differently*. Although traces and tendrils may linger from those traditionalist times—I am newly concerned about the ways I believe educational practices are now stuck on a teeter-totter between the conflicting influences of modernity and postmodernity, inhabiting an anesthetizing no-man’s-land.

A Journey of Interconnectedness

My growing concerns about education have evolved with my personal story. Compared to many others, I was raised in want of little. Like many of my peers who hail from white, middle-class upbringings—educated in Canadian public schools—I have been granted certain privileges. This upbringing also came at a cultural/relational cost; I was swayed to believe in competition, individualism, and shaped by an entrepreneurial environment. My parents, engaged in permaculture and sustainable living, may argue I have never been specifically encouraged to buy *things*; however, I was raised in a culture where an omnipotent ethos shaped me into an adult who valued independence, professional drive, and goal setting. For me, this ethos also translated into a perspective that led me to categorize and label life into comprehensible units and chunks.

A few years ago, I packed up my former life, and my former values. Although I eagerly embraced change and transformation, I was nervous. I had been directed, narrow in focus, and pointed toward a singular purpose. Looking back, I realize it was a dysfunctional vision. At the mangled root was a barricade I had erected in an impossible attempt to separate my professional and personal life. At home, I was a wife and a mother; at work, I had been stepping into an administrative role. I believed these journeys could run parallel, separate routes. Erroneously, I thought each could function in isolation. I could be one person at work, another at home, and neither would (or should) influence the other. It was as futile as a severed brain trying to control the body. I was impossibly misguided.

At some point, I engaged the possibility of living differently—of *being* differently—something more than a sequential, or alternating, collection of roles and fragments. I no longer wanted to engage in a frenetic charade that demanded changing hats, and jumping through the serial costume changes of a one-woman show, a process that had required me to prioritize

disparate identities and assign worth. Inevitably, I had assigned some roles more value than others. The entire process came at great cost.

This shift began with a revision of myself, as one shaped, enriched—and sometimes distracted—by my varying and concurrent interactions as wife, mother, daughter, friend, educator, writer, researcher, human. These ways of being are not labels; they are dynamically alive. Rather than defining me, the words—wife, mother, daughter, friend, educator, writer, researcher, and human—describe me, shape me, and construct me. They are interconnected.

Slowly, I realized the concomitant benefits and unique insights gained from seeking important connections and resonances; I began to celebrate the way this newly embraced multiplicity grounded me, instead of pulling me apart. Believing myself to be someone holistically greater than a previously fragmented collection of parts was impactful—and empowering. Although this transformation has not been seamless, and is admittedly far from complete, it has been contagious. Challenging my own(ed) Cartesian mind/body dualism, as well as questioning the dichotomy of self/other opened me to examine the power—and feel the desire—to act differently in the world.

Engaging empathy. Empathy revolves around this important ability to connect to—rather than objectify, or disengage from—others (Baron-Cohen, 2011b). Brigitte Cooper (2011) suggested that empathy “describes a sense of understanding between people—an area of common ground... an understanding that, while it is hard to define and measure, is too important for human relationships to ignore” (p. 7).

Empathy is integral to human experience. In *The Empathic Civilization* anime, Jeremy Rifkin (2010a) suggested, “we have the whiff of death in empathy, and the celebration of life” (n.p.). This suggestion resonates, reverberating my own significant experiences that have taught

important lessons regarding the tremendous impact we have on each other's lives. Some have been joyful experiences—the birth of a child. Some have been devastating—the suicide of a spouse. All have deepened and personalized my understanding of the dynamic concept and experience of *empathy*.

Empathy engages the dreams I nurture for children—my own and others'. My research interests are linked to the world in which we live, and the futures they will inhabit. I want to live in a world where people care for each other; I believe it is possible to impact the world in positive ways—to take care of others—to share in community and relationships. In all these actions, empathy helps us to see that others exist and have value. Years later, I began to realize Buber's important *I-Thou* connection to empathy as well.

That said, the cumulative impact of over twenty years of working in schools cannot be overlooked. Just as personal experiences and worldly concerns tugged me toward my topic, so too has my teaching experience. This experience is partially rooted in a lasting love affair that entwines literature, writing, and teaching. Historically, my happiest teaching assignments have allowed me to teach senior high school English Language Arts (ELA)—and, more recently, those who will become teachers.

In fact, one of the most meaningful courses I have taught was an optional education course for a group of interdisciplinary pre-service teachers that focused on issues related to teaching composition within various discipline areas. In this class, we—as a collaborative learning community—explored what writing 'is,' and collectively questioned what we 'need to know' to effectively teach and assess composition within specific subject areas, as well as cross-curricularly. The process encouraged me to review my own historical relationship with writing—and to further investigate the power of writing.

Pausing for Reflection

Relationships with writing. I have always loved writing. As a child, I wrote “books.” I was supported by early years’ teachers who carefully bound those missives in homemade wallpaper book-covers; encouraged me to add autobiographies (in which I noted ‘author’ as my career goal); and who dutifully signed me up to attend young author conferences. Although I celebrated my first publication a few years ago (Day, 2011), I have newly remembered that my first publication was at the age of 10; Miss Hnatuik had surprised me by submitting one of my classroom pieces to a children’s literature magazine—an imaginative book report in which I ventured to meet Sam Gribly (from *My Side of the Mountain*), hung out with him in his hollowed-out tree, and lived off the land. The piece was published, and I earned ten dollars in prize money!

Hindsight has reminded me that, since I have been able, I have recorded my ideas in writing. However, I have also realized that my life-long relationship with writing has been mercurial. In my early years, writing for pleasure and exploration was synonymous with writing. It didn’t matter if I were writing a story for myself, or a book report for school. Writing was writing. I laid the path while writing *whatever* I was writing—and it was fun. Although I grew up in the country, physically surrounded by acres and forests filled with imaginative possibilities, I had another equally enjoyable *field of play* (Richardson, 1994). Writing.

My love of writing continued into my adult years; but, at some point, pleasurable and exploratory writing became confined to forms: personal communication, notes, emails, letters, and journaling. In these forms, I felt free to engage flights of fancy. Meanwhile, my attitude toward—and engagement with—academic writing had changed. Somewhere along the line, I had begun to believe in misguided writing rules that dictated, when writing academically, that I

was to know what I was going to say before I wrote. Academic writing solidified into a process that involved a documentation of pre-generated thoughts, resulting in a value that shaped me to see the importance of writing as a noun, versus writing as verb. I began to value the writer's writing, instead of the writer writing (Yagelski, 2011, n.p).

I began to settle into writing to document rather than to discover, and I rejected the place of imaginative or exploratory writing within the parameters of academic writing; I regarded the *product* of my academic endeavors as more important than the *process*. Reflection suggests that my attitude toward my writing—aligned with my attitude toward other areas of my life—categorized and placed writing within specific boundaries and defined separations. Writing for pleasure was free and creative: enjoyable, but value-less. Writing for school was a process that involved careful documentation of pre-generated and pre-organized concepts: lacking enjoyment, but resulting in a valuable product. Those perspectives, values, and beliefs stuck and, for many unfortunate years, transferred into my career as an English teacher, impacting the way I conceptualized, actualized, taught—and assessed—writing.

Fast-forwarding many years, I found myself in weighty discussion with future teachers, more aware of my historical and still-evolving relationship with writing and differently aware of ways that binary and separatist thinking have potential to impact a collective definition of what writing 'is;' how we might (mis)teach students to write; how we may be shaped to engage (or disregard) the importance of the writing process(es); and how our ontological positioning might sway teachers to place themselves in objectified relationships to texts when assessing student work. Importantly, I found myself fortified to encourage pre-service teachers to question prevailing attitudes by exploring their root causes—foundations, I fear, that limit the way we teach and assess student writing.

Writing and culture. Those questions also encouraged me to embark on a more fulsome understanding about what writing *is* and what writing has *done*. I began to wonder about the way in which writing itself might have connections to objectivity and separatist thought. The fields of anthropology and sociology revealed rich conversations about the cultural consequences of alphabetic literacy, comparing ‘pre-literate’ societies (an admittedly contentious term given the many types of literacy) with (alphabetically) literate societies—something I explore in detail in Chapter 5. I became somewhat alarmed, and intrigued, at my growing realization that the English Language Art strand of writing—a strand on which teachers place intense emphasis (my experience suggests significantly more than listening, viewing, speaking, or representing)—has links to segmentation, separation, as well as objectivity (Bowman & Woolf, 1994; Goody, 1968; Havelock, 1963; Janks, 2009; Martin, 1988/1994; Mazama, 1998).

Teaching that specific writing course was an epiphany of sorts, resulting in reflection, questions, and conversations that encouraged me to question not only the importance of recognizing the broader issues of a separationist ethos in educational philosophy, but also in writing as a Language Art, and finally in our day-to-day practice assessing that writing. That pedagogical experience—in combination with my academic reading and continuing engagement with a diverse body of theory—has led me to wonder, if I were able to go back in time, what I would do again? What I should ‘do’ differently? More importantly, I wondered what continuing conversations are necessary within our community of practice? That experience reinforced the importance of making the common uncommon, of exploring theoretical and epistemological underpinnings to better understand who we are, and to shed insight on why we do what we do. This process also reaffirmed the importance of empathy.

Empathy reaffirmed. Educational transformation—both in general, and regarding our specific classroom practices—requires powerful energy to rally against deeply engrained separatist forces. We see students educated and children taught in schools that enclose—concrete walls and framed yards separate students from the rest of the community and from nature, and classrooms arbitrarily divide students by age and grade. These boundaries not only sort students, but also shape the type of learning that takes place; content is organized into disciplinary subjects, with a goal of encouraging students to “master” learning outcomes, valuing the degree in which they are able to engage their learning *independently*. And, within those disciplines, other—arbitrary—boundaries are also largely created and reinforced.

Furthermore, separatist thinking encourages us to respond to and evaluate this learning through processes that similarly reinforce binaries—establishing separations between student and teacher, mind and body, head and heart, and work from context. It should be no surprise that, within this framework, the prevailing practice of separatist thinking stunts pedagogical practice.

Embracing empathy is powerfully significant in terms of us being able to differently *imagine* these connections between inner and outer relationships, as well as the relationships between personal, social, and educational transformation. I suggest it has never been more important to engage a concept that has the potential to jilt education, and specific educational practices, beyond this separatist—and towards a relational—ethos. Perhaps it does not have to be this way; perhaps empathy has the power to heal.

Concept and Calling: Research Questions

The big. With candor and hopefulness, I present a theoretical study, a layering of possibilities imagined through a Buberian-informed framework that has brought academic research and professional experiences into connected conversations. This dissertation process

has encouraged me to develop and reconceptualize empathy as a lens for discovery. Central to this study is a process of disruption—of engaging a relational, empathic-Thou lens to expose and differently explore values and assumptions that may be rooting and directing our educational decisions (and actions) without us being fully aware.

This process of disruption begins by engaging three powerful concepts—empathy, writing, and assessment—and their connection to education and the ELA classroom. Empathy is explored first, and then developed as a lens for inquiry that encourages readers to engage three R's: relationality, rupture, and re-minding. Then, the history and values inherent in the concepts of writing and assessment—both present in English Language Arts classrooms—are explored through an empathic-Thou lens.

Through a transactional review of the literature and a process that draws my own experiences and reflections into consideration, the dissertation documents my own different consideration about the ways these three powerful forces have presented themselves and impacted both education and English Language Arts education. However, large scale, institutional transformation will not happen over-night; therefore, the *small* holds an essential place in life and in education.

And the small. My own world is super-sized. The material scope of our family's large houses; my overflowing wardrobe; and our multiple cars are similarly matched and mirrored by my prideful drive to do more—to juggle numerous projects and to take on extra responsibilities. Within this personal and cultural context of big and more—somehow related to importance and significance—it has been hard for me to appreciate *the small*.

Slowly, I have begun to recognize the ways we are pushed, conditioned, and cajoled by our cultural beliefs to equate scope and size with worth and value; we do not see the small as

belonging to the large. However, the large consists of the small; many small are what is large. Although I believe eventual, significant, institutional change is necessary and important, part of this journey has encouraged me to wonder if we have been looking too big. Teachers can make profoundly impactful choices—within our classrooms and within our relationships—by valuing *small* moments, *small* learnings, and *small* changes.

*I bend down, mid-step, quickly retying my shoe. I suddenly picture our daughter. She sits with a shoe in her lap, laces long and loose. Her face is frozen. Her effervescence has been channeled, narrowed to a single point of focus. Her small hands wind and tease the lace into place. Just as she pulls the bow tight, an errant end escapes. She begins again. And again. And again. After endless beginnings, she succeeds. It's a messy bow, but it holds. A small learning, and hard-earned at that. Insignificant and important. She celebrates.*²

This contemplation of *the small* encouraged me to look to Wendell Berry. In an interview, Wendell Berry was asked if it were "possible to reshape our thinking in baby steps, or must we make sweeping changes?" Berry answered, "Oh, let's be against sweeping changes and in favor of doing things in small steps. Let's not discourage ourselves by trying for too much or subject ourselves to the tyranny of somebody else's big idea" (Brockman, 2006, n.p.).

Therefore, this research considers how an empathic-Thou lens might encourage ELA educators' openness to small changes—this dissertation asks, "How might embracing an empathic-Thou lens inform ELA teachers' values, decisions, and practices surrounding writing assessment?"

Essential to the work is an encouragement for ELA educators to become more fully aware of the theories and values that are driving our practices. I see this study as another voice in the call to "harness [the power of assessment] to the beliefs and assumptions that drive pedagogies, and for controlling that power in a productive fashion for the teaching and learning of writing" (Huot, 2002, p. 20). This research encourages an investigation of those beliefs and

² Personal Reflection, November 2013.

assumptions; this research questions the driving force behind our pedagogies; this research inquires into the definition of productive, asking according to who? For what purpose? Once those questions are posed and explored, empathically-engaged research and educational decision-making could allow us to differently imagine the productive power of assessment for the teaching and learning of writing. This dissertation is an articulation of my own learning. I hope it will inspire readers to engage their own exploration.

Why Assessment? An Introductory Comment

At this final introductory juncture, I begin to address a simple question that does not have a simple answer: why assessment? I could have chosen to study any aspect of English Language Arts teaching and learning and explored its connection to empathy. I have already begun to articulate why I have narrowed my focus to the English Language Arts strand of writing—but why assessment?

There is power in assessment; this assertion is also more fully explored and supported in the body of my dissertation itself. However, as a starting point, the Glossary of Education Reform (2005) stated “because assessments are designed to measure the acquisition of specific knowledge or skills, the design of an assessment can determine or influence what gets taught [or ignored] in the classroom” (n.p). But how do we decide what knowledge or skills we measure in the first place? The answer to that question encourages a recognition that “assessment is the site where we marshal evidence about what we value globally as a society and more locally as teachers, researcher, and administrators” (Huot, 2002, p. 8).

Therefore, a change in assessment requires drawing attention to what is being valued to begin with. In terms of writing assessment, Brian Huot (2002) and Patricia Lynn (2004) have suggested a lack of attention has rooted a problem; they have suggested that many of our current

debates about writing assessment issues occur within a theoretical vacuum, and that the work to forward assessment requires our academic community take our tacit beliefs and assumptions about writing assessment and make them visible. This work noted that one of theory's roles is to excavate assumptions about writing, thus the necessity of understanding the theories that drive our practices. Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, Huot (2002) also suggested the necessity of creating new practices that are consistent with the theories we hold—or *want* to hold. In part, my work takes on this task.

Changing practice requires us to disrupt the foundations upon which assessments are developed and implemented. Therefore, it has not been—nor will it be—easy to make any substantive changes in writing assessment (Huot, 2002; Lynn, 2004), but these challenges speak to me of the importance of this type of work. There is power and importance naming the theoretical underpinnings and coinciding values that root our educational practices, a process that has encouraged me to posit, imagine, and advocate alternative ways of seeing—and engaging—the world.

This study explores our beliefs, but it is also an attempt to inspire a new vision. This vision involves imagining which values and what theories we *want* to hold. Empathy has been a helpful and powerful concept in forwarding those understandings, and—in education—harnessing the power of assessment can act as catalyst for significant transformation. As Huot (2002) persuasively stated, “by changing assessment, we can change what we ultimately value” (p. 8).

Transitioning Comment

The task of this first chapter was to set the personal and professional foundation to this study and explain the rationale of my research interest. The next chapter explores Martin Buber's role in my research approach and his work itself.

Chapter 2: Constructing a Framework

... Every room was lined, ceiling to floor, with books and large library ladders on rollers, even in the dining room. There was a very young child playing with a kitty. After tea, we stood around the dining room and in came a frail, fragile looking old man in house shoes. The child crawled into his lap and he spoke briefly, then told us we could ask questions. We were all awed by the situation, but there were some questions. Finally, he indicated that he was tired, so only one more question. Someone asked, 'Dr. Buber, who do you think has a been the greatest man in history?' Buber paused a moment, almost as if surprised and said quietly: 'Why there are no great men, only useful ones.' Then he rose, smiled a gentle smile, bowed slightly, and shuffled out to the kitchen where the women were preparing a meal.³

Roadmap Reminder

In this chapter I describe my conceptual framework. I begin by (a) describing my educational path to finding Martin Buber's work; (b) sharing some background and stories about Martin Buber's life; (c) providing an overview of *I and Thou* in connection to my work; and (d) transparently identifying some challenges to engaging/applying the text, including an exploration of Buber's *I-Thou* philosophy to the concept of empathy. In the final section, (e) I identify Martin Buber as a hermeneut and summarize his interpretive approach. These ideas provide a deep rationale for who I am thinking with—and why.

Finding My Way

As a developing researcher, it is important to demonstrate respect and awareness that “my” newly exciting ideas rest significantly on those that have come before, and to acknowledge that my own interpretations are deeply influenced by my conceptions of the world. As I openly shared, my work has been contemplated through a lens that focuses on the importance of relationships with a purposeful goal to erode binaries that separate and divide. To better articulate how and why I see the world the way I do, my research journey involved investigating others' writing to discover ideas—or ‘useful’ contributions, as Buber suggested in the initial

³ Kramwer & Gawlick, 2003, p. 5: A vignette told by Phyllis Anderson in a letter to the authors.

vignette—that would help shape a deeper understanding of my investigation. (It occurred to me that considering people ‘useful’ was not very *Thou* of Buber; perhaps an example of his acknowledged need for the world of the *It*. But more on that later.)

A couple of years ago, I was in a meeting with a colleague. I was preparing to teach an introductory research methods class to a group of international graduate students. We were discussing how much of an emphasis we should place on teaching about conceptual or theoretical frameworks. The conversation then turned to a discussion regarding the difference between the terms—and how we conceptualized or applied those definitions to our work. At one point, deeply down the rabbit hole, my colleague suggested that we were complicating the conversation. She said: “When I was working on my PhD, I was asked who I was thinking with. And why?” That conversation stuck. Many times, I have returned to both of her little questions. Who am I thinking with? And why? My process of discovering the answers to those questions was more complex than the questions themselves. I was as deeply informed about my study (and myself) by learning what did not “fit”—as learning what did.

Because of a research interest in empathy, I began practically, drawing on the work of economist and social theorist Jeremy Rifkin (2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c) to ground my work. At the foundation of Rifkin’s work is a position that has articulated “our inseparable ecological relationship to one another and our fellow species” and a “biological predisposition to be empathic—that our core nature is not rational, detached, acquisitive, aggressive, and narcissistic, but affectionate, highly social, cooperative, and interdependent” (Rifkin, 2010b, para. 10). Rifkin has rejected the assumption that “knowledge is power;” rather, knowledge is an “expression of the shared responsibilities for the collective well-being of humanity and the planet as a whole” (para. 13), advocating models of distributed and collaborative education that value

the combined wisdom and collective knowledge—rejecting reductionist approaches to understanding phenomena.

Although I continue to believe deeply in Rifkin’s work, draw on his ideas, and have deep respect for his ability as a synthesizer to join various pieces together into his own collective vision, he spoke to my head in ways that failed to engage my heart and spirit. I was drawn to the importance of digging deeper, and realized that “if we shut our ears to the old prophets who still speak more or less in the old tongues, using ancient words, occasionally in new ways, we shall have very little music. We are not so rich that we can do without tradition” (Kaufmann, 1970, p. 11). These words were an elegiac—and powerful—re-minder; I am not so rich that I can do without tradition.

From there, I looked to older, deeper, more poetic ways of exploring my conceptions. I dipped my toes into the philosophy of Levinas; I waded a bit further into Buddhist thought. Eventually, I came to Martin Buber. In Martin Buber’s (1923/1970) *I and Thou* there is a human imperative to act relationally and a wariness of experiencing and using an other; there was also an allowance for a shared relationship to occur—genuine ‘meetings’ that could result in connection. Buber called attention to the importance of the world of the *Thou* (dialogical, genuine, timeless, open) but made allowances for the necessary world of the *It* (time-bound, knowledge-based, experiential) and recognized that life will have a healthy alternation between the two. In Martin Buber’s *I and Thou*, I found a framework that challenged me while also fit personally and professionally.

Martin Buber’s Background, Stories, and Journey to *I and Thou*

(Mordecai) Martin Buber was born in Vienna on February 8, 1878, to a middle-class Jewish couple. According to Aubrey Hodes (1978)—a trusted and longtime acquaintance of

Buber, and author of *Martin Buber: An Intimate Portrait*—Buber’s parents were neither particularly religious nor intellectual. However, when Buber was three years old, his parents separated and he was sent to Lemberg—which became Lvov (in the Soviet Union) and is now called Lviv (part of the western Ukraine)—to live with his paternal grandparents. His grandparents were strongly orthodox and learned; thus, the “atmosphere in the home was one of piety and learning, with a strong influence on Jewish tradition” (p. 43).

Martin Buber stayed connected with his father, but he saw his mother only one time after the separation when he was an adult. The strongest active influences in Buber’s life were Solomon and Adela Buber, his grandparents. Martin Buber’s grandfather was a well-known Hebrew scholar; Buber’s grandmother was well-read, self-taught, fluent in German, and ran the family business. The complimentary influences of these caregivers resulted in Buber’s diverse exposure to the study of multiple languages such as: Hebrew, Yiddish, Polish, German, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and English; classical Jewish writings; the works of thinkers such as Kant and Goethe; the prose and poetry of German authors, as well as an appreciation for the sanctity of nature.

The family farming business also encouraged Buber’s appreciation of nature. Buber’s grandparents’ farm became known for its new methods and positive treatment of the workers (Hodes, 1978). When Buber was a boy, his father came to manage the farm and Buber spent summers there from the age of nine. These early experiences shaped the philosophy Buber (1923/1996) would later write about in *I and Thou*.

When I was eleven years of age, spending the summer on my grandparents’ estate, I used, as often as I could do it unobserved, to steal into the stable and gently stroke the neck of my darling, a broad dapple-gray horse. It was not a casual delight but a great, certainly friendly, but also deeply stirring happening. If I am to explain it now, beginning from the still very fresh memory of my hand, I must say that what I experienced in touch with the animal was the Other, the immense otherness of the Other, which, however, did not remain strange like the

*otherness of the ox and the ram, but rather let me draw near and touch it. When I stroked the mighty mane, sometimes marvelously smooth-combed, at other times, just as astonishingly wild, and felt the life beneath my hand, it was as though the element of vitality itself bordered on my skin, something that was not I, was not akin to me, palpably the other, not just another, really the Other itself: and yet it let me approach, confided itself to me, placed itself elementally in the relation of Thou and Thou with me.*⁴

According to Hodes (1978), although Buber had strong orthodox roots, he began questioning his religion and the concept of a vengeful god when he was in his pre-teens. At his bar mitzvah, Buber delivered a talk on Schiller instead of a passage from the Bible and, although he continued to study the Bible and Torah in earnestness, he began to break away from accepted orthodox norms, such as saying daily prayers. That said, the steadying presence of his grandparents and Jewish environment continued to ground Buber, but once he moved away from home, those grounding forces eroded. In 1896, at the age of 18, Buber studied philosophy and art at the University of Vienna, followed by studies at Berlin, Zurich, and Leipzig—years of study that Buber termed “the world of confusion” (as cited in Hodes, 1978, p. 51).

*So long as I lived with [my grandfather], my roots were firm, although many questions and doubts also jogged about in me. Soon after I left his house, the whirl of the age took me in... My spirit was in steady and multiple movement, in an alienation of tension and release, determined by manifold influences, taking ever new shape, but without center and without growing substance.*⁵

In 1897, Buber joined the Zionist cause. According to Wood (1969), “Zionism was concerned with establishing some sort of political identity for the Jewish community. Buber found in Zionism his ‘renewed taking root in the community’” (p. 8). He became the editor of a Zionist journal where he met his future wife, Paula Winkler, a Roman Catholic from Munich who later converted to Judaism. But again, Buber suffered a spiritual crisis. Around the age of 26, Buber was drawn toward Hasidism; returning to experiences he observed in villages of his youth,

⁴ Buber’s personal account of a Thou-encounter in the relational realm of nature: Buber, 1947/2002, p. 26.

⁵ Buber’s story from *Hasidism and Modern Man*, as cited in Wood, 1969, p. 3.

connecting with the Hasidic concepts of loving-kindness, and questioning his own intellectual estrangement that had resulted in what Buber self-described as “looking down at [Hasidism], from the heights of rational man” (Hodes, 1978, p. 50), Buber withdrew from the Zionist’s organizational work and put in dedicated efforts in studying and writing, deeply shaped by Hasidic beliefs and, in 1904, Buber completed his doctoral dissertation on German mysticism.

In 1916, Buber completed a rough sketch of *I and Thou*, wrote a first rough draft in 1919, and published the text in 1923. Freidman (1993) suggested, *I and Thou* was the tangible creation of an idea that had been with him since his youth, and “Buber’s response to events and meetings in many different spheres of life” (p. ix).

During that period, and until 1938, Buber lived and worked in Germany—lecturing, writing, and speaking. In the years following the publication of *I and Thou*, Buber wrote a series of essays that expanded on and developed the initial ideas in the text. Although he later wrote about concepts he introduced in *I and Thou*, it is interesting to note that—other than the addition of a postscript—Buber chose not to revise the original text in subsequent editions. Buber warned that “the inspirations of such enthusiasm one may not change anymore, not even for the sake of exactness. For one can only estimate what one would gain, but not what would be lost” (as cited in Kaufmann, 1970, p. 23).

In 1938, Buber moved to Jerusalem and taught at the Hebrew University until he retired in 1951. After his retirement, he remained politically and academically active. Buber engaged a lecture tour to the United States, continued to write and speak publically—including a well-known dialogue with Carl Rogers at the University of Michigan (1957)—and later was honored with many prestigious awards including the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, the Israel

Prize in the Humanities, and the Erasmus Award. His wife, Paula Buber, died in 1958; Martin Buber died in 1965, at the age of 87, in his home in Talbiyeh, Jerusalem.

I and Thou: A Difficult Introduction

Buber's (1923/1996) message in *I and Thou* encourages readers—and rather more importantly, his ideas encourage our human way of being in action—to consider what matters. Buber's writing suggested that these ideas must be acted on, lived out, and engaged relationally if they are to be known and understood, requiring full presence and awareness. This reality of human existence must necessarily be lived out, not simply expressed in words; language cannot adequately express an idea that is ultimately beyond linguistic expression; thus, the structure and the writing of the text are unconventional.

Buber shaped his work into an alternating, overlapping, sometimes repetitive series of explorations, suggestions, stories, descriptions, interjections, aphorisms, and applications. As a result, the thematic, non-linear, poetic text is somewhat difficult to read. Ravenscroft (2017) warned readers that “*I and Thou* is a book that appeals as much to the imagination as to reason” (p. 12).

It was said in Israel:

When Buber first came to Jerusalem, his spoken Hebrew was comparatively simple, and so people understood what he meant. But over the years his Hebrew improved, and then no one any longer knew what he was saying.⁶

English translations. There have been various English translations of Buber's text. *I and Thou* was originally published in German (*Ich und Du*) in 1923. In 1937, Ronald Gregor Smith first translated the book into English. In 1958, a second edition was published that

⁶ Hodes, 1978, p. 131: From a chapter called “Tales of the Master.”

included a postscript by Buber. In 1970, after Buber's death, his son Rafael requested Walter Kaufmann to retranslate the text again.

When I first read *I and Thou*, I read the Kaufmann (1923/1996) translation. If I am honest, my decision to read the Kaufmann version was flippant. I could buy it on Amazon, have it delivered in three days, and it was cheap. I had no idea this little text would have a major role in my work. Later, I thought to read the Smith (1923/2000) translation. Once I did, I spent time exploring the differences and decided each had qualities that resonated and some that did not. Therefore, I now use—and quote—from both versions.

Du and You and Thou. Perhaps the most significant variation between the two translations was Kaufmann's (1923/1996) decision to change *Thou* to *You*. Buber's book title—and the perennial attitude to which it refers—is widely known as *I and Thou*; from the layman to the academic, it is likely that those who have heard of Martin Buber would articulate their understanding, either basic or nuanced, in terms of *I-Thou* and not of *I-You*.

Kaufmann (1996) justified his translation decision in the forward. Aware of the complexities of changing the accustomed term, Kaufmann asserted that *Thou* does not capture the intention of Buber's original German term *Du*, the term used between lovers, family, and friends, with connotations that imply “spontan[eity], and unpretentious[ness], remote from formality, pomp and dignity” (p. 14).

Kaufmann (1996) articulated a logic that described “many mansions” of *Thou*—including Shakespeare and the Bible—and persuasively declared how “*Thou* can mean many things, but it has no place whatever in the language of direct, non-literary, spontaneous human relationships” (p. 15). Though unfamiliar, *You* is used throughout the Kaufmann translation, versus the more accustomed term *Thou*—in his mind, a better semantic fit to the perennial attitude Buber

explored in the *I-Thou* word pair. That said, almost every author who refers to Buber's work has chosen *Thou* as the signifier. The very title of the book remains *I and Thou*. For consistency throughout this work, I respectfully have chosen to change Kaufmann's translation choice of *You* to [*Thou*] when quoting the Kaufman translation of Martin Buber's work.

The complexities of *Du*, *You*, and *Thou* point to a larger issue that I must acknowledge. My inability to read the text in its original German form is a limitation. It is significant that the text has already been translated and therefore worked through the hermeneutic circle with the translator. The Smith and Kaufmann versions are both translations—and therefore also interpretations—of Buber's original idea expressed in German, cryptic to begin with! Because of this, I am aware that my understanding of Buber's work is dependent on Smith's and Kaufmann's understanding. For that reason, I thought it was helpful to include an awareness and combination of both voices in this work.

Finally, I think it is also important to note that although I focus significantly on the primary source of *I and Thou*, comments and ideas from secondary sources are also important. These sources serve to develop and enrich Buber's ideas in a form of dialogical conversation. Furthermore, because Buber spent his lifetime speaking with people about his work, many of the secondary sources describe clarifying conversations and comments that Buber himself made. I especially lean on Maurice Friedman—an academic who spent over fifty years studying and working with Buber's texts, and many years working with Buber himself; Ronald Gregor Smith—who also worked closely with Buber; and Walter Kaufmann. Both Smith and Kaufmann translated and therefore have “lived” the original text in intense relation, and both of whom had academic (and somewhat personal) relationships with Buber himself.

I and Thou: Form and Content

Structure. The book contains three sections with overlapping themes. Buber did not title the sections. This stylistic choice has prevented readers from systematically reducing the book to a point form outline, nor talking about ‘it’ easily. He would rather us live the relationships that he writes about—and live the relationship with the book. As a result, after multiple years of ‘thinking with Buber,’ I still find it difficult to describe the structure of the book to those unfamiliar with the work. Apparently, I am not alone. According to Friedman (2003):

Buber wrote *I and Thou* in a sort of ecstasy in which he did not choose a language but “what was to be said formed it as the tree its bark”.... There is indeed a unique fusion of content and poetic language in *I and Thou* that makes it as difficult to paraphrase as it is to paraphrase a true poem. (p. x)

In general, the core concepts of *I and Thou* explore how humans relate to each other; how they relate to the world that they inhabit; and how they relate to God. The first section introduces the reader to the concepts of the *I-Thou* and *I-It* word pairs and the possible realms of relation. The section also explores the qualities of a *Thou*-encounter and the emergence of the *It*. The second section has a darker tone as it explores the growth of the world of the *It*, and the connections of the *It* to man and society. The final section is a deep exploration of the *Eternal Thou* and engages the connection between the relational world and God.

Core pointings. The next section will explore the core *pointings* that Buber introduces in *I and Thou*. I borrow Buber’s term. Reluctant to label his ideas teachings, nor call himself a teacher, Buber suggested, “I have no teaching. I only point to something...I point to something in reality that had not or had too little been seen” (as cited in Kramer & Galwick, 2003, p. 4).

Therefore, the next section will focus on three areas that Buber invited readers to look at more closely, and I comment on what these pointings lend to my own work. In Chapter 4, I will build a stronger bridge between these ideas and how I have allowed these pointings to inform what I call an empathic-Thou lens.

What happened was no more than that one forenoon, after a morning of "religious" enthusiasm, I had a visit from an unknown young man, without being there in spirit. I certainly did not fail to let the meeting be friendly, I did not treat him any more remissly than all his contemporaries who were in the habit of seeking me out about this time of day as an oracle that is ready to listen to reason. I conversed attentively and openly with him—only I omitted to guess the questions that he did not put. Later, not long after, I learned from one of his friends—he himself was no longer alive—the essential content of these questions; I learned that he had come to me not casually, but borne by destiny, not for a chat but for a decision. He had come to me, he had come in this hour. What do we expect when we are in despair and yet go to a man? Surely a presence by means of which we are told that nevertheless there is meaning.

Since then I have given up the "religious" which is nothing but the exception, extraction, exaltation, ecstasy; or it has given me up. I possess nothing but the everyday out of which I am never taken. The mystery is no longer disclosed, it has escaped or it has made its dwelling here where everything happens as it happens. I know no fullness but each mortal hour's fullness of claim and responsibility. Though far from being equal to it, yet I know that in the claim I am claimed and may respond in responsibility, and know who speaks and demands a response.⁷

Responsibility and relationships. When Friedman was asked the most important point necessary to understand *I and Thou*, he said: "It must be understood first that Thou is not an object but a relationship. If this is not understood, the rest of the book will not be understood" (Kramer & Galwick, 2003, p. 15). With that important note in mind, Buber (1923/2000) suggested humans bring a twofold attitude to the world around them. Buber asserted that these modes of existence are either *I-Thou* or *I-It*. Buber wrote:

To man the world is twofold in accordance with his twofold attitude.

⁷ Buber, 1947/2002, p. 16. This experience was also personally shared with Hodes (1978) in conversation and one the pieces Buber chose to include in *Meetings: Autobiographical Fragments*.

The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words he speaks.

The primary words are not isolated worlds, but combined words.

The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*.

The other primary word is the combination *I-It*; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words *He* and *She* can replace *It*. (p. 19)

We see the importance of relationship (that Friedman noted) is emphasized in the original text; Buber stated that “primary words do not signify things, but they intimate relations... if *Thou* is said, the *I* of the combination *I-Thou* is said along with it. If *It* is said, *I-It* is said along with it” (p. 19). Importantly, although the signifier *I* is used in both primary word combination, readers must remember that “the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primary word *I-It*” (p. 19). This is an essential distinction to understand.

On the most basic level, *I-It* is world of predominantly objectified encounters, “existing in the sphere of goal directed verbs” (Buber, 1923/1996, p. 54). This attitude may be the result of acting out of necessity—or due to mean/ends behaviour. Therefore, *I-It* encounters are based on a temporal modality of the past. In *I-It* encounters, the human way of relating to—or treating another—is based on what one thinks one knows, shaped by past experiences and habits. In this attitude, one fails to recognize another’s deep humanity; rather, it is often about getting others to do what one wants them to do. *I-It* establishes the world of instrumentality.

The alternative word pair is *I-Thou*; *I-Thou* encounters are based on full engagement that happens when one is fully present, in the present. Buber wrote that, “when *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no thing for his object.... Every *It* is bounded by others...but when *Thou* is spoken, there is no thing. *Thou* has no bounds” (p. 20). Thus, *I-Thou* encounters are acts of inclusion

which allow us to meet and know the other in someone/thing's concrete uniqueness, and not solely as the result of the content of one's own experiences. Buber cautioned that we must be wisely aware of the idea of "experience" and the human tendency to "travel over the surface of things and experience them" (p. 21). When we experience things in this way, we "extract knowledge" and win "what belongs to the things.... As experience, the world belongs to the primary word *I-It*. The primary word *I-Thou* establishes the world of relation" (p. 21).

Essential to this exploration is also how, in a personal introduction that rejected dualism and bifurcation, I have embraced a scholar whose work is—at least on first glance—a dualistic offering. Buber (1923/1996) described (on numerous occasions throughout the text) "the world is twofold for man in accordance with his twofold attitude." However, as readers let Buber's work wash over them, the endless opportunities become apparent; it seems that Buber's twofold path (that humans are drawn toward) also invites a world that is layered and nuanced, unfolding possibilities.

Buber's work explored "many ways of living in a world without a [Thou] [and] ... many worlds with the poles I-[Thou]" (Kaufmann, 1996, p. 14). Unpacking these manifold layers wrapped in an either/or package is important; Buber's work draws important focus to *Thou*-relations and cautions readers about living a life in which *I-It* eclipses *I-Thou*. However, it is also important to grapple with—and reject—dualisms that result in temptations to glorify the *I-Thou* attitude, and reject, or demonize, the *I-It* attitude Buber explored. Rather, they stand in "fruitful and necessary alternation with each other" (Friedman, 1965/2002, xiii).

Buber suggested that the "*It* is the chrysalis, the [*Thou*] the eternal butterfly. Only it is not always as if these states took turns so neatly; often it is an intricately entangled series of events" (Buber, 1923/1996, p. 69). Buber's chrysalis and butterfly are not *either* one *or* the other. They

are and/both. Furthermore, the worlds of *Thou* and *It* are both necessary. Although the world of *Thou* is poetically seductive—a place that allows us to become authentic and relational, the *Thou*-world is also nebulous, free of structures, and based in a pure present in which it is impossible to live. Alternatively, although privileges of the *It*-world allow it to “hang together in space and time” (p. 85), we must be wary that the world of the *It* does not “overrun and rob [us] of the reality of [our] own *I*” (p. 54). We need both. Buber directly stated, “without *It* a human being cannot live. But whoever lives only with that is not human” (p. 85).

Buber’s work gives voice to my own concerns about the ways the *It* has eclipsed the world of the *Thou* in education and schools. However, the pointings also make allowance for the world of the *It* to hold a necessary place. In terms of my work, *I and Thou* provides a re-minder about our relational responsibility while simultaneously acknowledging the realities of schooling, learning, and assessment that are a part of the *It*.

The relational realms. Buber’s (1923/2000) belief in the possibility of *I-Thou* encounters beyond a human realm was an important grounding for me as a teacher, writer, and researcher. Buber described three “spheres in which the world of relation arises” (p. 21): life with nature, life with men, and life with spiritual beings.

Clearly, as an educator, and one interested in empathy, ‘life with men’ was essential. Buber (1923/2000) described this sphere as one where “the relation is open and in the form of speech. We can give and accept the *Thou*” (p. 22). However, Buber’s pointings also articulate the importance of encounters beyond human relationships.

Life with nature seems to be the most difficult realm to understand. It is interesting to note that “Buber once told Maurice Friedman that if he were to write *I and Thou* again, he would try to find other language to describe the relationship with nature” (Kramer & Galwick, 2003, p.

53). This is also one area that Buber focused on in the 1958 postscript—and attempted to clarify his ideas. According to Buber, in “life with nature...relation sways in gloom, beneath the level of speech” (Buber, 1923/2000, pp. 21-22). When understanding this realm, it is important that the reader does not conceptualize nature in its entirety; rather, the reader is to understand the realm in possible relation with specific animals, plants, or elements. For example, in the text, Buber explored the realm by “considering a tree” (p. 22). Personally, I think Buber’s story about his childhood experience with the horse (see the narrative offering on p. 33), written after *I and Thou*, ‘shows’ readers and clarified what the text seemed to struggle with ‘telling.’

The third realm is life with spiritual beings. In this realm, “the relation is clouded yet discloses itself; it does not use speech, yet begets it...we feel we are addressed and we answer—forming, thinking, acting” (Buber, 1923/2000, p. 22). Here Buber explored the conception of art and thought and activity (p. 22). Buber (1923/1996) suggested that:

the form that confronts me I cannot experience nor describe; I can only actualize....

Tested for its objectivity the form is not “there” at all; but what can equal its presence?

And it is an actual relation; it acts on me and I act on it. Such work is creation, inventing is finding. Forming is discovery. (p. 61)

The realm suggests the idea that a spirit can become various forms (such as a work of art, a painting, or perhaps a book like *I and Thou*) and explores the process of the spirit becoming that form when an artist or writer’s *I* is open to the call of the *Thou*.

In terms of my work, the third sphere opens interesting considerations when imagining what this could mean for ELA teachers engaging and encountering texts—or researchers immersing themselves in relationship with their data, or writing. Importantly, and foundational

to Buber's (1923/1996) belief is that *all* the spheres of encounters are based on relation, and that "relation is reciprocity" (p. 67). Buber encouraged readers to understand that:

my [Thou] acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us. The "wicked" become a revelation when they are touched by the sacred basic word. How are we educated by children, by animals! Inscrutably involved, we live in the currents of universal reciprocity. (p. 67)

Buber's work has inspired me because it re-minds me of the concept of a self as a construction understood only through relational engagement. Buber (1923/2000) wrote, "I become through my relation to the *Thou*; as I become *I*, I say *Thou*" and "all real living is meeting" (p. 26). As ELA teachers, our practice is continually based on encounters that engage 'the self' with others (both others in the form of individuals, and others in the form of texts); as theoretical researchers, we are similarly engaging the self with 'others' that take the form of data, texts, and ideas.

Buber believed that there is, indeed, a self—but not without these encounters; the self is not an individual ball of ego; it only resides in relation in the primary word-pairs. Furthermore, and as important, Buber's work engages a possibility for one 'being' to come to meaningfully engage with another. Although I have a healthy awareness of the dangers of believing another can be categorized or "known," I am attracted to seeking authentic encounters that result in connection, encounters that encourage me to try to "meet and know the other in his concrete uniqueness and not just as a content of one's experiences" (Friedman, 2002, xiv).

Dialogical philosophy. *I and Thou* is the beginning foundation for Buber's conception about the importance of dialogue; scholars have asserted the very meaning of the term *dialogue*, in a philosophical—rather than a communicative—sense, is in large part a result of Buber's legacy (Anderson & Cissna, 1996; Cissna & Anderson, 2008; Stewart, 1985; Stewart, Zediker, &

Black, 2004). According to Anderson, Baxter, and Cissna (2004), Buber is considered a “touchstone theorist,” and noted among other twentieth century dialogical-thinkers such as Gadamer, Habermas, and Bakhtin (p. 3). Although a great body of work in this field has been influential, Buber’s work preceded much of the other, perhaps better known works, in the field of dialogue. This lends support to Anderson et al.’s claim that, “Buber, with his concepts of ‘the between’ and I-Thou relation had the most impact on the discipline’s early work in the philosophy of dialogue” (p. 5). Stewart, Zediker, and Black (2004) described how:

dialogue, for Buber, is the label for *a quality of contact* that exists for humans in tension with instrumental and objective contact, [a quality] that remains the site of human becoming. If appropriately facilitated, this quality of contact can enhance understanding. (p. 33, emphasis added)

In his later work, Buber developed this idea more fully—but those core pointings are rooted in *I and Thou*. Buber believed that human experience and existence does not develop in the mind, rather emerges from ‘the between,’ relational spaces that “become dialogical as each person truly comes up against the otherness or differences offered by [an]other” (Anderson & Cissna, 1996, p. 87). These relational spaces result in possibilities that allow the “response of one’s whole being to the otherness of the other, that otherness that is comprehended only when I open myself to him in the present and in the concrete situation and respond to his need even when he is himself not aware that he is addressing me” (Friedman, 2002, p. xvi.).

Although much of Buber’s writing centers on dialogical encounters between individuals, Buber’s assertions of ‘the three worlds of the Thou’ support possibility of extending dialogical encounters to natural and non-human (textual/artistic) encounters as well. Buber suggested that art (visual or literary) is the expression of a relationship between a human and a form or force;

the creation of art is one in which a ‘spirit’ or force makes its desires to be made into a work apparent by facing, or calling upon a human. This relationship is a *Thou* encounter. However, the very production of a text or piece of visual art inevitably limits or restricts multiple and imaginative possibilities; thus, “the artist turns the limitless *Thou* into a thing, an object; the artist leads “the form across—into the world of *It*” (p. 25) This process—one that turns the *Thou* into an *It*—also allows others access to that force, but the work (text, painting, sculpture) does not necessarily remain a static *It*. Rather, it can be brought back to life as *Thou* again through another “I-Thou” encounter.

Buber stated (1923/2000), “the work produced is a thing among things, able to be experienced and described as a sum of qualities. But from time to time it can face the receptive beholder in its whole embodied form” (p. 25). Kepnes (1996) suggested that this process allows us to understand the “rudiments of Buber’s dialogical hermeneutic philosophy” (p. 175), a process understood as a modified form of dialogue, or a form of ‘conversation.’ These core pointings are important re-minders to me as both a teacher and researcher, informing my pedagogical way of being and doing—and my scholarly way of being and doing as well.

I and Thou: Stumbling Blocks and Reconciliations

Spiritual message in a secular study. Buber engaged a message that is as spiritual as it is philosophical. Buber was a man of deep faith. In a previous anecdote, Buber asserted that he gave up religion; however, he meant that experience shifted his spiritual belief about God. He came to believe that God is to be lived with, rather than believed in—something that is deeply central to *I and Thou*; Buber’s spiritual beliefs permeate his writing and his being. There is little doubt that the third part of *I and Thou* brings God to the forefront of the conversation—the *Eternal Thou*. I have grappled with wondering if it is problematic to use a spiritual text to

inform a study related with educational practice in a public-school setting. I believe that it is not, but it is worthy of transparent comment.

The message in *I and Thou* has been broadly engaged in multiple fields (for example, education, psychology, communication, and social thought). The other day, I was shocked to randomly stumble on Buber in an article in the professional magazine of the BC Notaries. The article called on Buber's notions to suggest that fostering relationships could be considered a form of charitable giving.

These broad engagements suggest the generalizable nature of his work. The pointings in *I and Thou* are not limited to a single religious, ethnic, nor professional group. Although Buber was Jewish, his book is not specific to that faith. For example, in the text, Buber used examples of harmonious and connected *I's* from various sources and backgrounds. Buber (1923/2000) called on the "I of Socrates! ...the *I* of endless dialogue"; the "I of Goethe! ... the *I* of pure intercourse with nature"; and the "I of Jesus. ... the *I* of unconditional relation" (p. 70). Buber talked also of the Brahmana. He spoke of Buddha.

Therefore, I suggest that if one of my aims is to blur boundaries, advocate holistic ways of being and acting, and embrace and/both thinking, perhaps there is an important place for spirituality in a study that engages pedagogical practice in public schools, provided it is not narrowly framed as a specific religious teaching.

Problematic gender references and non-inclusive language. This comment centers on my decision to use a text that is non-gender-inclusive. Silberstein (1990) asserted that the titles and in-text translations of Buber's work often substitute a gender-free German term for the English masculine form of the word *man*; Silberstein suggested that "*mensch* in contrast to *mann*

is a gender-free term best translated as *person* or *human-being*” (p. xvii). I was interested to see if that might be the case in the body of *I and Thou*.

Both Smith and Kaufmann’s translations are peppered with masculine pronouns and examples of the nature of “*man*.” What I didn’t know was what Buber used in the original German text. Admittedly, I don’t read German, but when I compared the first paragraph of *Ich und Du* (1923) to *I and Thou* (1923/2000), I was persuaded.

Die Welt ist dem Menschen zwiefältig nach seiner zwiefältigen Haltung.
Die Haltung des Menschen ist zwiefältig nach der Zwiefalt der Grundworte, die er sprechen kann.
Die Grundworte sind nicht Einzelworte, sondern Wortpaare.
Das eine Grundwort ist das Wortpaar Ich-Du.
Das andere Grundwort ist das Wortpaar Ich-Es; wobei, ohne Änderung des Grundwortes, für Es auch eins der Worte Er und Sie eintreten kann.
Somit ist auch das Ich des Menschen zwiefältig.
Denn das Ich des Grundworts Ich-Du ist ein andres als das des Grundworts Ich-Es.

To man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude.
The attitude of man is twofold, in accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks.
The primary words are not isolated words, but combined words.
The one primary word is the combination *I-Thou*.
The other primary word is the combination *I-It*; wherein, without a change in the primary word, one of the words *He* and *She* can replace *It*.
Hence the *I* of man is also twofold.
For the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* is a different *I* from that of the primary word *I-It*.

8

I also looked up the definition of both *Mensch* and *Menschen* on various translation sites. My own uniformed thinking had led me to believe that a *Mensch* was a wise man. My findings confirmed Silberstein’s (1990) assertion that *person* or *human-being* is a closer fit—and likely what Buber meant. This suggests the lack of gender inclusive language is a problem of the translation; not a responsibility of the creator of the original text. Admittedly, this does not entirely solve the problem. However, it allows me to reconcile a concern that the original work that ‘I am thinking with’ was more gender inclusive than the English translation suggests.

Martin Buber and empathy. My last stumbling block relates to Martin Buber’s critique of empathy. Given I am advocating engaging an empathic-Thou lens, framed and informed by

⁸ Original German text: a screen shot from: <https://www.amazon.de/Ich-Du-Martin-Buber/dp/3579025724>; Smith’s (1958) translation: a screenshot from: <https://www.scribd.com/document/179250616/Buber-Martin-I-and-Thou-pdf>

Buber's *I and Thou* philosophy, this is an important claim to reconcile. How can I engage a concept that the creator of my conceptual framework held in abeyance?

Buber does not comment specifically on empathy in *I and Thou*. He began to introduce the idea of inclusion—the basis of genuine ‘meetings’—but empathy is not identified nor denied. Therefore, it wasn't until I began to read more of his prolific body of work that I stumbled on Buber's critique. This event happened well into my research process; I distinctly remember reading Buber's (1947/2002) statement that it would “be wrong to identify what is meant here with the familiar but not very significant term ‘empathy’” (p. 115). Immediately, I was thrown into a panic. My third child was being criticized—by Buber!

Empathy? “*Not very significant?*” And not what he meant?

I felt the very foundation of my study crumbling. The pieces were not holding together. The *I-Thou* encounter (that I had been suggesting is connected to empathy) was faulty; Buber did not endorse empathy as an appropriate way to guide a relational encounter. Buber (1947/2002) explained:

Empathy means, if anything, to glide with one's own feeling into the dynamic structure of an object, a pillar or a crystal or the branch of a tree, or even of an animal or a man, and as it were to trace it from within, understanding the formation and the motoriality of the object with the perceptions of one's own muscles; it means to “transpose” oneself over there and in there. Thus it means the exclusion of one's own concreteness, the extinguishing of the actual situation of life, the absorption in pure æstheticism of the reality in which one participates. Inclusion is the very opposite of this. (pp. 114–115)

It took me time to breathe again. What I began to realize, and that many other scholars before me have suggested (Bai et al., 2015; Kraznaric, 2015; Linsenmayer, Paskin, Alwan, & Horn,

2013; Scott, 2011; Stern, 2013; Tansey, 2008), is that Buber's definition had been influenced by the scholarship surrounding empathy *at the time*.

This concept will be explained more fully in Chapter 4; essentially though, the understanding and definition of empathy has changed significantly and taken on multiple meanings. Buber's understanding of empathy would have been informed by "old" German scholarship that conceptualized empathy as *Einfühlung*, an aesthetic relation to art or a non-human entity, and then applied to psychology in which humans could be 'known' through an *imitative* (and emotional) *process*. Some of our (many) modern understandings of empathy also reinforce that concept—others strictly differentiate it from this process.

Over the past few years I have spoken to a lot of people about empathy. From those informal conversations, I have come to realize that when many people think of empathy, they relate the concept to broadly known information about mirror neurons—they also experientially know what it is to have a sensory and embodied reaction in which those mirror neurons fire. When we bear witness to other's suffering (or joy) it is common to feel our chests tighten, sinuses tingle, and feel a (sometimes overwhelming) wave sweep us away. But empathy can be understood as more than the firing of mirror neurons. More than an emotional response. The cliché *I feel what you feel* has been an unhelpful, canned statement that has reinforced a narrow, generalized understanding of empathy (engaged in Chapter 4).

Buber would have rejected the view that one can experience a genuine encounter if it is a result of an imitative response or related to a reactionary process where self and the other are conflated. Anything akin to being swept away would have sat uncomfortably with Buber, antithetical to his belief of the importance of each side holding their own in an encounter or meeting. Buber's work calls importance to respecting the *Thou*. Buber's work calls equal

importance to respecting the *I*. A mis-meeting is one that would allow either side to be lost or conflated with the other. This would be significantly problematic for Buber. However, that conflated experience is not empathy—or not always. Likely, Buber’s understanding of empathy comes with a historical connection to a word that does not fully describe contemporary possibilities of what empathy is—or does.

Buber’s Hermeneutic Approach

Buber is often called a philosopher, philosophical anthropologist, or even a religious existentialist. Given my own research approach that draws on hermeneutics, I think it is important to make this connection to Buber as well. Not only did Buber write his own ideas, a great body of his work involved re-writing Hasidic legends and also translating the Hebrew Bible into German. Kramer and Gawlick (2003) noted that “Buber was by his own definition a *Schriftsteller* (both a writer and one who renders scriptures)” (p. 4).

Because my research approach is informed by hermeneutics (explored in Chapter 3), it is helpful to identify Buber as hermeneut and to engage a brief historical overview of Martin Buber’s interpretive approach. Given that I am not a Buberian scholar—rather one whose work is impacted by Buber’s text *I and Thou*—I base my understanding of this aspect of Buber’s work on scholars who have specialized in Buber’s dialogical theory of textual interpretation, primarily Steven Kepnes (1988, 1992, 1996) and John Stewart (1985), both of whom have published independently about Buber’s hermeneutic approach and also who have been included in a book edited by Maurice Friedman, previously established as a leading Buberian scholar.

According to Ochs (1996) and Kepnes (1988), in his early career Buber—influenced by Schleiermacher and Dilthey (Buber’s teacher)—engaged a process strongly influenced by Romantic hermeneutics, rooted in a conception of ‘understanding’ as “a means of uncovering an

author's or text's original meaning" (Ochs, 1996, p. 481). Understanding was synonymous with a method of recovering meaning.

Later, Buber's approach shifted to a dialogical process, aligned with—and pre-articulating—some of Gadamer's work (Kepnes, 1988, 1992, 1996; Stewart, 1985). During this phase, it seems Buber came to reject methodological approaches grounded in the realm of the *It*, and embraced modes which afforded the “highest type of hermeneutical experience” (Stewart, 1996, p. 150), engaging text as *Thou*. Kepnes (1992) suggested Buber's “middle phase” engaged a hermeneutic approach with a limited role given to method and a viewed priority of understanding as a dialogic, practical, situated activity.

In a third phase, Buber's approach changed again. Kepnes (1992) described Buber's ‘final’ hermeneutic approach as one in which understanding need not be viewed as incompatible with explanation. It was an approach based on a belief that:

the I-Thou paradigm [is] essential to establish a proper attitude, [but] added to or inserted within the I-Thou paradigm is a variety of technical operations and critical methods....

Buber seems to have become convinced that to ensure an I-Thou relationship between the reader and the [text], pure technique and method need not be eschewed. (p. 183)

Therefore, Buber's third phase of hermeneutic inquiry can be understood as a blend of both worlds. Although Buber was clear about the value of relational spaces offered in the world of the *Thou*, his own hermeneutic approach eventually evolved into a process that balanced *Thou* with the necessity of the *It*. It seems his own approach echoed his early assertions in *I and Thou*. According to Kepnes (1996), Buber came to realize that “certain ‘scientific’ methodologies from the realm of *It* must be included...[resulting in] a mixed discourse, an interpretive tool which includes both the techniques of I-It and the attitude of I-Thou” (p. 174).

Transitioning Comment

In this chapter I have tried to answer my colleague's two little questions: Who am I thinking with? And why? While answering these questions I have also tried to provide readers a sense of Martin Buber's *I and Thou* and to provide readers a sense of the man. The next chapter will articulate my research approach—and connect empathy and Buber's work to my research philosophy, methodology and practice.

Chapter 3: Philosophy, Methodology, and Practice

Buber began translating [Hasidic tales] into German. But when he saw the first of these...in print, Buber was disheartened. He had translated them exactly as they had been written. But the purity and clarity of the original tales had been lost.... He saw that he would have to adopt a different approach. "The stories would have to be told out of my own being," he wrote, "just as the painter absorbs the lines of his model in himself and creates the picture out of the formative memory."

He began retelling the tales, "modestly and clumsily" at first; as he said later.... the stories began coming alive, partly as fairy tales, partly as symbolic parables, always rich, with a thread of fantasy and...imagery.⁹

Roadmap Reminder

This chapter acquaints readers to my research philosophy, methodology, and practice. I orient this study in the qualitative paradigm and articulate those decisions. I then explore how my research methodology has been influenced by Buberian-thought, and I problematize the challenge of articulating a specific research method. I describe my decision to allow hermeneutics, autoethnography, and writing as inquiry to guide my process, and describe how those approaches have shaped and informed my decisions surrounding data collection, data analysis, interpretation—and product of itself. Finally, I engage the idea of research resonance versus research validity.

Research Orientation and Philosophy

By now, I am certain it is apparent that I am drawn toward qualitative research. McCaffery, Raffin-Bouchal, and Moules (2012) have defined qualitative research as “a response to a basic curiosity about human experience that is not satisfied by the results of inquiry based upon Cartesian assumptions of objectivity and isolated phenomena” (p. 219). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggested that qualitative researchers “attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). Whereas quantitative research

⁹ Hodes, 1978, p. 54.

perceives the world, or reality, to be fixed and measurable—positivistic in approach—qualitative research is investigated from an interpretivist approach (Merriam, 2002, p. 4).

Interpretivism, described synonymously as constructivism in some texts and a branch of constructivism in others, is a framework borne as a reaction to positivism. Founded on a belief that “reality” is individually and/or socially constructed, it is comparable to Mitch Albom’s (2003) simile describing youth as pristine glass that is marked by the prints of its handlers. Interpretivism suggests personal life experiences will shape individual constructions of reality, aligning philosophically with a belief that concerns itself with *understanding* (Crotty, 2005). Fundamental to interpretivism is the belief that individuals are not passive objects of socialization, but actively engage in constructing social realities (Crotty, 2005, p. 74). There is also a reason why so many teachers choose to engage qualitative research—they work with students with whom they have engaged in qualities of living in community—there is a closeness about good teaching that, like Buber (1923/2000) noted, is more akin to building community than organizing collectives.

As I write this, I recognize the inherent irony in “labeling” myself a qualitative, interpretivist researcher. This very act finds me guilty of binary thinking. It suggests that, if I am qualitative, I am not quantitative. If I assert I am an interpretivist, I seek to understand, dismissing a need to explain. If I think reality is constructed, I reject older grander narratives (Jungian archetypes and deep traditional knowledge steeped in our bones or coursing through our veins). If I label myself at all, I worry I continue to reinforce a way of being that roots my own either/or thinking—that I undermine and betray the deepest goal of this pilgrimage, to be simultaneously re-minded while moving toward something yet to be. And yet, if I don’t, I worry

it looks as if I am sloppy or lazy, that I have not given thought to my philosophical stance, nor have I allowed my readers to ‘know’ my research perspective.

I have made known my dreams of an integral paradigm: one that somehow blends and balances traditionalism, modernity, and postmodernity with an and/both acceptance; a paradigm that embraces a different level of consciousness; one that allows us to be informed by the personal and the collective, the old and the new, the invisible and the tangible; one that somehow embraces aspects of grand *and* individual narratives. And, I find myself worrying that the act of articulating a research approach reinforces traditional dances that may halt this progress. With this admission, I find myself balanced on the precipice that began this paper—our tendency to explore new ways of *doing*, instead of new ways of *being*.

I openly acknowledge these difficulties and my own hypocrisies. To reconcile these concerns, I wish it to be understood that I see myself—and this study—as *informed* by an interpretivist approach. This informed choice is not a rejection of the quantitative realm, rather a realization that this study is best *supported* and *understood* (but not *defined*) within a qualitative, interpretivist paradigm—a paradigm understood as aligning most comfortably with postmodernity. Ultimately, I hope to encourage an understanding that we no longer need to view these paradigms—nor these research approaches and orientations that are categorized by them—as opposing and mutually exclusive; rather, they can be understood as divergent, fundamentally intertwined, and interacting (Heile, 2002, p. 288).

Those caveats aside, I am tugged by a growing awareness of how my own personal experiences have impacted, and continue to shape, my “reality.” This awareness has called me to a study that engaged an existing body of historical and scholarly literature, personal experiences, and stories—examined with the intent of exploring, understanding, contextualizing,

and reimagining the findings from different perspectives, resonating with Merriam's (2002) description of an interpretivist approach which views reality as interpretation, in flux, and changing over time. According to Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, and Hayes (2009), who provided examples of theoretical and methodological choices that could be associated with particular theoretical research perspectives, both hermeneutic and (auto)ethnographic approaches fall under the broader category of an interpretivist research perspective.

Furthermore, my topic naturally aligned with this research orientation. The concept of empathy is connected to *I-Thou* encounters (further developed in Chapter 4), foundational to my conceptual framework. Empathy is also connected to the research orientation I have embraced; according to Holloway and Wheeler (2010), interpretivist methodology is rooted in empathic understanding, not in the “psychological sense as intuitive and non-conscious feeling, but as reflective reconstruction and interpretation of the action of others” (p. 25). In the same way that content and form cooperatively give meaning to a poem, it is important that my topic and supporting structures worked cooperatively—adding verisimilitude, rather than validity, to my study.

Methodology

These descriptions lead naturally into deeper conversation concerning methodology. The *SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry* defined methodology as “a theory of how inquiry should proceed...a discourse (a way of acting, thinking and speaking) that occupies a middle ground between discussions of method (procedures and techniques) and discussions of issues in the philosophy of social science” (Schwandt, 2007, n.p.). MaCaffery et al. (2012) further enriched my understanding; citing Laverly (2003), they described methodology as a “‘creative approach to understanding’ (p. 16) that can draw on *various approaches*” (p. 219, emphasis added). Therefore, I have engaged a methodology informed by Buberian-thought that asserts the

necessity and interplay between both *I-Thou* and *I-It* paradigms of relating and understanding—and of expressing the work in a way that I (borrowing Buber’s words in the initial anecdote) have “told out of my own being.”

Empathy and Buberian-informed research. Empathy also plays a central role in a what I am calling a ‘Buberian-informed’ research approach. Julian Stern (2013), a professor of Education and Religion at York University, has suggested that Buber’s work can inform the broad nature of social research by understanding research as a form of dialogue, describing dialogue as an act of the imagination—an imaginative act that requires empathy. Stern drew readers’ attention to the (Buberian-informed) importance of ‘imagining the real.’ This process rejects unqualified acceptance and agreement; rather, it makes the other fully present in a way that demands “the most intensive stirring of one’s being” (Stern, 2013, p. 68) while remaining firmly on one’s own side of the relationship (Friedman, 1965/2002).

Stern (2013) suggested that empathy (and feeling) have a place in research, sitting alongside healthy forms of skepticism, doubt and disagreement. He suggested that “research requires intense listening, whether to the voices of people being interviewed or to the ‘voices’ of documents” (p. 69) and a researcher who probes deeply to re-examine and re-explore might be skeptical, but also empathic. Furthermore, “though no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange, people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another” (Sennett, 2012, p. 19) because dialogic conversations are empathically driven, characterized by genuine curiosity and attention.

An emergent methodology. This background provided a helpful direction and rationale that encouraged me to develop an emergent research methodology aligned with my conceptual framework and topic: one that guided me, as a researcher, to ‘listen’ and engage conversation;

one that encouraged me to revise my perception of the world as solely limited to a collection of things and processes; one that believed in approaching my work with an attitude of openness that allowed the possibility of experiencing the world as “being and becoming;” one that valued the world of the *Thou*, but did not ignore the necessity nor importance of the world of the *It*.

Buberian-thought informs methodological choices that reject either/or approaches, and embrace both understanding *and* explanation. I suggest these are important foundations for this study and formed the basis of my methodology—the theory of how my inquiry proceeded (Schwandt, 2007).

Problematizing ‘Method’

Because I engaged research informed by a combination of research approaches, describing my ‘method’ of actualizing those methodological underpinnings is a challenging process. I find support from writers and thinkers problematizing qualitative research’s narrow understanding of—and traditional adherence to—the concept of *method* itself. Calling on Barthes (1984/1986) and Spivak (1974), Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2005) suggested the importance of “interrogating whatever limits we have imposed on the concept method lest we diminish its possibilities” (p. 967), reassuring us that we do not have to reject the concept (nor even the word), rather, to “use old concepts but ask them to do different work” (p. 968). The different work I asked of my method seems at odds with the way that graduate research design classes have led me to define and/or understand the concept; something that has sat equally uneasy in terms articulating “a” method to successfully meet the scrutiny of readers of this work—or a dissertation defense. Overcoming this dissonance has been part of my growing confidence and awareness of my topic’s demands, as well as my preferences and strengths as a researcher.

Published voices suggest that our qualitative research practices must continue to grow and develop; Polkinghorne (2006) described qualitative methods as “set[s] of activities that are thought to guide a practitioner to the achievement of a desired outcome” but warned that “information about what to do to achieve the goal of a qualitative study is drawn from a collection of methods devised in the *first generation*” of qualitative research (p. 73, emphasis added). He goes on to suggest that, because researchers themselves are the data gathering and analytic instrument, second-generation qualitative studies require a different focus. This focus should be on the “practice and a cultivation of a way of seeing” (McCaffrey et al., 2012, p. 219).

That said, I admit it is fair—and necessary—for readers to understand principles that have guided me, and how my own process and product has been an “individual mix” that has bridged hermeneutics with autoethnography, further supported through writing as a method of inquiry. This blend shaped how I collected, created, and interpreted the data. This blend also shaped what the study is, and what the study does.

Overview of Influencing Approaches

Introducing hermeneutics. In *Conducting Hermeneutic Research: From Philosophy to Practice*, Moules et al. (2015) noted that, although hermeneutics “defies definition, in a nutshell, hermeneutics could be described as the tradition, philosophy, and the practice of interpretation” (p. 3). According to Moules (2002), “hermeneutics is derived from (a) the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, which means to say or interpret; (b) the noun *hermeneia*, which is the utterance or explication of thought; and (c) the name *hermeneus*, which refers to the playful, mischievous, ‘trickster’ Hermes” (p. 1). In mythology, Hermes’ job was to deliver the messages of the gods. He was a rascal and creative—duplicious and inviting interpretation. Related to those Greek roots, hermeneutics is the process of interpreting information. In hermeneutics, the information

can take different forms, such as textual, linguistic, and non-linguistic experiences. Importantly, hermeneutics suggests that the interpretation of these various forms is contextualized; understanding cannot be isolated or objective.

Traditional research methods have a systematic approach. Data is collected, analyzed, interpreted, and then written up. It is important to note that a hermeneutic approach is not defined by a strictly articulated method. Rather, the inquiry is driven and defined by the call of the topic. As Moules et al. (2015) noted, “different topics call for different approaches...thus [hermeneutics] offers a substantive philosophy rather than a strategic method to guide the research” (p. 5).

Because data collection is guided by the “animation and illumination of the topic” (McCaffrey et. al, 2012, p. 220), when research is influenced by hermeneutics, this often entails interviewing individuals involved in the “life world” of the topic and includes engaging literature about the topic. Hermeneutic research also understands the necessity of a wide “definition” of what literature entails, an understanding that goes beyond a conventional “literature review both in content and style” (p. 220). Therefore, data collection requires broadly engaging sources that can expand an understanding of the topic, “which can include not only the obvious sources (as in the conventional literature review) but also whatever cultural resources can help shed light on the topic” (p. 220). Moules (2002) described this process of data collection as “a gathering and harvesting of experience” (p. 28).

Finally, in hermeneutic research, analysis *is* interpretation. In this approach, interpretation is a “movement through the landscape of the topic, such that perspectives change...and are informed by reference to disciplinary and other pertinent literature” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 118). Those considerations and interpretations result in a deeper understanding of

the topic, an understanding that allows for the topic to be seen—and practiced—differently (Moules, 2015). This approach also results in an “answer to a question which could have been answered differently (Gadamer, 1989)” (Moules, 2002, p. 29).

Introducing autoethnography. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) described autoethnography as an approach to research that “seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)” (p. 1). Autoethnography is a product of a postmodern influence that troubled the disconnection of researchers’ authentic voices in their exploration, and troubled social science’s conception of inquiry grounded on a single reality realized through methodological inquiry (Ellis et al., 2011). Importantly, autoethnography draws attention to the way research has privileged some voices and the way research has silenced others. Autoethnography serves to address questions of equality; it encourages multiple perspectives.

Autoethnography began from a desire for the product of research to reflect literary qualities. Scholars began to explore research possibilities that offered stories and embraced research that was transparently “value-centered rather than pretending to be value free” (Ellis et al., 2011, p.2). Autoethnography is produced by engaging reflexive stories of researchers’ experiences and “present situated, fragmented, and temporal representations of selves with others in culture and society” (Bolen, 2017, p. 2). The result of this type of research is understanding; the purpose of autoethnography is to help other people who are part of (and outside of) that specific cultural group understand it better.

Therefore, to engage autoethnography, the researcher must know the culture that is being studied; understanding a specific culture’s practices, values, norms and beliefs is necessary. Part of this process involves writing about experiential epiphanies and the effects that continue to

linger from those meaningful moments. Bochner (1984) described epiphanies as “recollections, memories images, feeling—long after the crucial incident is supposedly finished” (as cited in Ellis et al., 2011, p. 3) that result from being part of that culture. Autoethnography often involves both telling about the experience and (often) also analyzing the experience—sometimes in connection to research literature or other scholarly writing—thereby illustrating and exploring facets of a cultural experience. Autoethnography is both a process and a product.

The product of autoethnography does not take a single form. Although all autoethnography begins with personal experience, from there this research approach can take a myriad of forms. However, there are common qualities to those forms. Generally, the product is an artistically appealing text, includes rich description, and has an evocative nature.

Of the many possible forms of autoethnography, I was especially interested in the layered account. According to Bolen (2017), a “layered approach enables autoethnographers to engage divergent voices, including those from social sciences and creative writing styles [to] present a purposefully partial, fragmented and in many ways messy text to draw attention to juxtapositions between research and personal experiences” (p. 5).

Introducing writing as inquiry. Ethnographic writers Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2005) have asserted that writing is a form of inquiry and method of discovery. Richardson (2005) believed that writing is a field of play; she called upon Deleuze and Guattari (1980/1987) to suggest, “writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come” (pp. 4-5). Robert Yagelski (2011) echoed this assertion, calling to reject a “conduit view of language [that separates]...writing from knowledge-making” (p. 24). Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2005) articulated how writing might be

understood as inquiry—inquiry that is “accomplished in the writing because...writing *is* thinking, writing *is* analysis, writing *is* indeed a seductive and tangled *method* of discovery” (p. 967).

Writing can be a method of data collection as well as a method of data analysis—methods that admittedly overlap. St. Pierre provided helpful elucidation through her (temporary) distinction between—and examples of—the entwined methods of writing as data collection and as data analysis. St. Pierre (2005) suggested that writing as data collection can mean “gathering together—in the writing—all sorts of data [she] had never read about in interpretive qualitative textbooks, [such as] *dream data*, *sensual data*, *emotional data*, *response data*...and *memory data*” (p. 970). She went on to describe this data as fugitive and fleeting, identifying it as important data “that might have escaped entirely if [she] had not *written*; they were collected only *in the writing*” (p. 970).

St. Pierre (2005) also described how writing could be understood as data analysis—untangling it, briefly, from data collection. She described how she has used writing to think:

I wrote my way into particular spaces...in which I made accidental and fortuitous connections I could not foresee or control.... Thought happened in the writing. As I wrote, I watched word after word appear on the screen – ideas, theories, I had not thought before I wrote them.... I doubt I could have thought such a thought by thinking alone. (p. 970)

Influencing Approaches and My Work

The following section will describe my data, process, and choices—demonstrating the influences of hermeneutics, autoethnography, and writing as inquiry—resulting in a product that Richardson (2005) has broadly termed a “CAP [creative analytical processes] ethnograph[y]” (p. 962). CAP ethnography is an umbrella term that encompasses “new ethnographic species” that

take on diverse forms in which “the product cannot be separated from the producer, the mode of production, or the method of knowing,” and in which and the writing process and written product are “deeply intertwined” and “both are privileged” (p. 962).

A simple (but powerful) question-set that I have used to guide my own students’ research decisions has been “*What is your research question?*” followed by “*Who knows and/or Where can you find the answer to that question?*” I pause to return to my own research question: “How might an empathic-Thou lens inform ELA teachers’ values, decisions, and practices surrounding writing assessment?” Quite simply, I didn’t think teacher participants could answer this question. I suggest that tacitly held values and assumptions might be driving our way of being and doing—and one of the tasks of this study niggles at those assumptions, disrupts them, and posits what connection they might have to our current decisions and practice. The first step of this process was digging into the historicity and literature of the concepts that are rooting the question, to see what that investigation revealed. I believed it necessary that the “life world” of my topic was engaged through a variety of texts (informed by hermeneutics) —and a re-minded reflection of my own experiences (informed by autoethnography).

My data. This meant exploring the historicity of each of my main concepts as a starting point. Each concept I explored (empathy, writing, and assessment) was immense. It was impossible to read every possible scholarly or cultural text in any one of those three areas. To narrow it down, I began with seminal texts that grounded each topic; meanwhile, I also tried to limit the initial exploration to a historical overview of each concept.

Admittedly, deciding what was seminal in each field was a subjective process. That said, as is common in textual research—a general reading and a broad engagement was a necessary starting place, and through broad engagements, commonly noted authors and texts made

themselves known. From there, I followed where the reading trails led me. Often the journey was meandering and sometimes took me deeply into scholars' areas of specialty. Sometimes they led tenaciously back to (what became familiar) texts and scholars. Regardless, both those broad extensions and narrow engagements served to develop and more deeply inform my general understanding of each concept.

It is important to note that the process of narrowing and following reading trails is a limitation of my study. Each person who has read my study has suggested other interesting avenues of exploration. Admittedly, every one of these suggestions could have offered another angle, more information, and a fuller engagement of each concept. This exploration has unearthed questions and many more potential paths of exploration that could be continued in subsequent work.

My question was also rooted in areas where the core concepts combined and overlapped (for example: writing, ELA curriculum, and instruction; assessment and education; writing and educational assessment, writing and ELA assessment). That meant I had to create a foundation of understanding—for the purpose of connecting those ideas. This investigation required me to become more acquainted to the field of composition theory (although I would suggest generalist ELA teachers are not comprehensively-versed in this area), and writing assessment. Documents that guide and inform our curriculum and instruction practices in Alberta ELA classrooms were also important texts that I engaged; therefore, readers will see references to the *English Language Arts Program of Study* (Alberta Education, 1983); the Alberta Assessment Consortium (2018), the National Council for English Teachers (n.d.) white paper, and the Conference on College Composition and Communication (2014) position statement on writing.

Again, informed by both hermeneutics and autoethnography, an important part of the “gathering and harvesting of experience” (Moules, 2002, p. 28) was engaging my own work, stories, journals and experiences. Because I journal and have regularly shared my pedagogical journey in personal correspondence; published some experiential educational articles; post on social media, and have written (many) graduate university papers that have documented my thinking and my experience, some of this data was already written. There was already a pool of my own writing to draw on—and then reflect on. Other experiences (and considerations of those reflections) I newly wrote as part of the process of inquiry, incorporating St. Pierre’s (2005) suggestions. I wrote broadly—and didn’t censor or limit the types of writing as I engaged the process, rather collected and engaged in disparate writings to see where they took me and what I captured.

My process. The discovery and creation—as well as the analysis and interpretation—of this study was a fluid process. My own process involved a great deal of reading and re-reading, “an attempt to listen for echoes of something that...expand possibilities of understanding” (Moules, 2002, p. 29). Gadamer (1960/1989) stated that “understanding begins when something addresses us” (p. 299) and topics, texts, and experiences have the power to pull us up short. Buber’s ideas suggested that when engaging these calls our “attitude” or orientation is important. When we engage these entities (or data) with a subject-subject intentionality, the encounters have the potential to open up relational spaces that allow one to become “personally aware of the ‘signs of address’ that address one not only in the words of, but in the very meeting with the other...that sphere of the ‘between’ that Buber holds to be the ‘really real’” (Friedman, 1998, p. xiv).

At times, I tried to open myself to recognize unique offerings to the conversation. I attempted to engage encounters with research articles, historical texts, or personal experiences with a subject-subject intentionality—an intentionality that viewed each encounter as essential, valuable, and unique in the contributions it could offer. However, as Buber noted, the relational *Thou* is always in flux with the *It*.

This meant there were parts of the process where “I” was not always in receptive beholding of the text; *I* did not always engage a subject-subject mode of intentionality, rather I grappled with ideas and complexities in ways in which I try to make sense of them. At times, *I* sought meaning, instead of strictly and respectfully understanding the other; *I* engaged the world of experience—instead of relation—to search for understanding *and* explanation. The process also demanded *I* was defined in relation with *It*.

My research approach engaged a transactional textual encounter, aligned with a reader response approach [pioneered by Louise Rosenblatt (1995)]. This approach is reliant on a “fundamental tenet that ‘literature’ exists not as an artifact upon a printed page but as a transaction between the physical text and the mind of a reader... [founded on the belief that] literary texts do not “contain” a meaning; meanings derive only from the act of individual readings” (Kennedy & Gioia, 1995, n.p.). Although this approach remains subjective and relational, it moved the process into the world of the *It*, rather than *Thou*.

Transactional textual encounters require an awareness of what Gadamer identified as forestructures, or *prejudices*. According to Kepnes (1992), in this way, Buber “face[d] the problem of prejudgments in a manner close to that of Gadamer” (p. 74). Unlike other research approaches that suggest researchers or interpreters bracket pre-understandings and pre-suppositions, a Buberian-informed methodology (aligned with Gadamer’s approach) suggested I

did not hold my prejudices in abeyance, rather I was allowed to think with and to situate them in my understanding. I was reassured that my prejudices might allow me to “hear something [I] would not have heard otherwise, they determine[d] what [I] could recognize, and they provide our access to the world” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 121).

My work required me to enter the hermeneutic circle, the “generative recursion between the whole and the part” (Moules, 2002, p. 30; Moules et al., 2015, p. 122). It was a process of interaction with the data that involved reading, re-reading, reflection and writing. It was a process that brought implicit understandings explicit—and understandings that hid as much as they revealed. Tina Koch (1996) asserted that “‘getting into the hermeneutic circle properly’ means using [one’s] own experiences as data and being aware of [one’s] background, and whenever possible, showing how these [experiences] interact” with other data.

In relation to my study, I engaged a body of literature that included (but was not limited to) academic research, and my own personal stories and experiences, in an attempt to “reinvent the topic in light of [my] own constellation of relationships, readings, and fore-understandings” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 220). Additionally, an etymological or philological exploration of the language itself was sometimes necessary. Throughout this process, I have been challenged and rewarded by linguistic explorations that drawn me into different, fuller, nuanced understandings of the concepts that I was studying and the data that I was collecting, a process where “stories and exemplars merge[d] with contextual data, [and] literature [was] progressively incorporated to mediate understanding” (Koch, 1996, p. 179). These new understandings sometimes demanded I reclaim old words for new purposes. I found myself needing to pause—to explain to readers—what these familiar words now meant to me, through this different lens.

Obviously in study about texts (both as a data source and my research interest in student writing) the relationship of hermeneutics to textual information is important. What is equally important is hermeneutics' relationship to the interpretation of non-linguistic experience. In other words, as I stated earlier, my study explores our predilection to lean toward educational doing versus educational being (the big); and our decision-making and specific practices surrounding ELA writing assessment (the small). Hermeneutics allows for interpretation of both texts, and human ways of being and doing.

It is essential to reinforce that my process was not solely based on textual reading—or thinking. Writing played an integral role and was an essential form of data collection and analysis. Writing was my way *into* and *through* the processes I described earlier. My thoughts generated in the writing itself as I engaged, experienced, and reflected on the interpretive steps; analysis and interpretation has been accomplished through the very act of writing.

In summary, my approach has not been a single, prescriptive, easily articulable series of steps. Rather, it has been a *crystallization* of practices and approaches. Richardson (2000) described how crystallization—or cultivating different ways of seeing—is at the heart of CAP ethnographies, a process in which:

the scholar draws freely on his or her productions from literary, artistic, and scientific genres, often breaking the boundaries of each of those as well.... Crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know. (p. 934)

I have come to describe my own process as a form of crystallization. My work blends understanding with explanation; respects the necessity of both *I-It* and *I-Thou* paradigms;

involves collection and creation of data; and engages imagining, theoretical positing, explanation, and hermeneutic interpretation in a process that has offered me multiple “takes” on the same topic. Furthermore, my individualized approach has worked to embrace “and/both” engagements. This study has been approached from a dialogic, relational position while creating a space for understanding to be shaped thru explanatory and analytic engagement. These processes have been both directive and have allowed me the flexibility to serve the unfolding demands of my topic.

My choices. Because I have chosen to—in some small way—challenge the traditional research paradigm, these decisions also impact some of my choices. As I noted in the “Roadmap for Readers” section, each chapter begins with an anecdotal offering, a short narrative, journal entry, experiential snippet, or excerpt that is thematically related to the chapter. Similar anecdotal offerings are woven throughout the body of the work. My rationale to include these, and to include them in an interjected, fragmented form was informed by autoethnography’s layered account; these choices also connect to the concept of crystallization.

Building on Richardson’s (2000) concept, Ellingson (2009) described a product and process she referred to as *integrated woven crystallization*, the weaving of “several genres in small excerpts and pieces as a larger picture is constructed, much like the small pieces of a quilt or scraps in a collage together form a coherent work” (p. 104). According to Ellingson, structuring a mixed account that “presents a balance of showing and telling that does not necessarily accord equal length to each style but instead ensures a symbiotic relationship between the styles that serves to illuminate the central point” (p. 103).

Just as I have made purposeful decisions break from traditional norms regarding the form my dissertation took, I have also taken some liberties with my technical choices as well.

Readers will see that this dissertation is informed—but not governed—by APA standards. At times, I bend the rules. For example, readers will note my use of contractions throughout the work. I believe this decision imparts a conversational tone to the work. I want readers to hear my voice as well as see my words. I believe my writing has a vulnerability that doesn't lend itself to grammatical choices that distance the reader; I hope some of these simple choices help readers feel the *Thou* behind this text. To feel as if they 'know' me.

Readers will also note that I sometimes ignore the academic tradition of including only authors' last names when citing their work. Often, I will include authors' full names; sometimes I also give a short description about who the authors are, or their areas of specialty. Occasionally I also identify the text that I am drawing the information from. I have every confidence that readers can look up information in the reference section of my paper. However, my entire study is a call for educators to value contextual awareness. There are times where I think my readers would benefit from, or might be interested in, the greater context as well.

Adjudicating Value

During this research journey, I have been pregnant with possibility. Just as I imagined, hoped, dreamed, and planned while expecting my children, I was forced to realize I was integral *and* servant to their becoming. Likewise, I see myself as having been creator of *and* instrument to this becoming. I am a researcher/writer, but also was respondent to a call, “lead[ing] a form across—into the world” (Buber, 1923/1996, p. 60). I have been an *I*, called upon to honor a *Thou*—ever cognizant of the world of *It*. Here I grapple, aware also of the demands of this dissertation (and defense) that tether me firmly in the world of the *It*—issues such as the evaluation of this work.

Clearly, I desire my research to be experienced in ways that involve both showing *and* telling. I believe this experience is essential if this work can extend the type of invitation that, if accepted, might resonate with readers' experiences, or encourage someone to explore why it did not. This experience of resonance is an alternative to positivist truth. Buber suggested that there is no monistic truth to be found, rather dialogue should build a "logos which opens our ears to [a] variety of worlds," accepting the variation of interpretation "in the way two persons engaged in dialogue often have to accept their differences and conflicts" (Kepnes, 2002, p. 78). However, that does not mean a Buberian-informed approach would accept any interpretation, nor would all work be considered "good." Rather, Buber's work can shape an understanding of what we have traditionally described as research validity.

Adequacy. Once a researcher has developed an interpretation and assimilated those understandings into his or her reoriented perception of the world, Kepnes' (1992) believed a Buberian-informed approach would point toward an assimilation that must go beyond the world of the researcher. Because of Buber's foundational belief in the importance of relational spaces, application of meaning must push a researcher out into the world, "entailing dialogue with fellow human beings" (p. 76). Calling on Buber's admonishment, Kepnes urged interpreters not to "sit privately with your interpretation, but 'testify it in your communication with other men'" (p. 76). A Buberian-informed approach encourages me to share my research, suggesting that it should be testified; a Buberian-informed approach also suggests that it should be challenged for adequacy, refined through dialogue in a community of inquiry—dialogue that is made possible through the act of sharing.

Generally, questions of value or adequacy are defined as validity—an uncomfortable fit with Buberian-thought. Traditional understandings of validity are byproducts of positivist

thinking, understandings that equate validity with accuracy, “results coming from empirically grounded definitions that ‘get at’ a phenomena in ways that accurately reflect the facts of the situation” (Anderson & Cissna, 2012, p. 145). In addition to the classic social science conceptualization of validity, Stewart (1996) described two other approaches to validity; one alternative is a pluralistic understanding that takes on a different meaning with three different stages of research: in the preparatory stage, validity is equated to value; in the central data gathering, analysis, and interpretation stage, validity relates to correspondence or fit; in the final replication stage, validity can be understood as generalizability. Stewart (1996) asserted that the first two understandings of validity are “consistent with an Enlightenment or Cartesian ontology and epistemology” (p. 165); however, traditional understandings of research validity do not align with interpretive/qualitative research, demanding traditional definitions morph.

Alternatively, Stewart (1996) claimed that an interpretive approach to validity, aligned with “post-Cartesian philosophizing” in which “human ‘reality’ or the ‘human world’ is socially constructed or communicably accomplished” (p. 165) argues that validity is synonymous with trustworthiness. Importantly, this understanding asserts validity assessments are “situationally and communicatively accomplished” as well (p. 165). According to Stewart, Buber himself, when challenged on his own interpretations, extended this third, interpretive conceptualization of validity. Stewart termed Buber’s idea *resonance*.

Research resonance. Research resonance suggests that a phenomenon will not be factually reported; rather, it will be recorded in a way that engages others’ experiences. Buber’s gentle words re-mind one that his resonant approach is built on the concept of an invitation: “I say to [one] who listens to me: ‘it is your experience. Recollect it, and what you cannot recollect, dare to attain it as experience” (Buber, 1967, p. 693). In summary, “Buber invites us to resonate

with research or account for why we cannot” (Anderson & Cissna, 2012, p. 145). But how might one do this? Stewart (1996) articulated the process:

As one reads or listens to the claim one wants to test, one should initially and tentatively be open to its coherence and legitimacy. Initially enter, in other words, the world constituted by the theory or claim. Then search your own experiences (“Recollect it”) and juxtapose the claim the text makes against what your search of your own experience reveals. As you compare the claim with relevant parts of your experience notice the degree to which the claim and the experience “resonate” or “vibrate” in distinct but interconnected rhythms. If there is some dissonance, you may well want to reserve judgment and to continue juxtaposing the claim against your ever-widening base of experience. If you can find no experience against which to juxtapose the claim, consider searching out or at least opening yourself to such experience (“Dare to attain it as experience”). If on the other hand, if there is little or no resonance between your experience and the claim you are testing, it may be best to reject it as invalid. (p. 168)

I extend this same invitation to my readers.

That said, perhaps Stewart’s (1996) interpretation of Buber’s criteria is still not specific enough to guide a reader’s adjudication of this work. Therefore, I looked to the fields of hermeneutics, autoethnography, and writing as inquiry, which have offered readers more specific criteria that are compatible to Buber’s conception of “resonance.”

Suggestiveness and potential. As noted in Buber’s description of research resonance, Moules (2002) also suggested the importance of a reader’s experiential engagement. Speaking out of her own interest in hermeneutic inquiry, Moules noted “that hermeneutics does not report on meaning, but creates it, not by translating one’s subjectivity out of the interpretation but by

applying oneself to it with a sense of responsibility to deepen understanding” (p. 16), establishing the need for evaluating “good” hermeneutic work differently. Drawing on Madison (1988), Moules (2015) suggested we look beyond the traditional ideas of generalizability or transferability and instead explore issues of suggestiveness and of potential. Both concepts—suggestiveness and potential—“describe the extent to which the research raises more questions than are closed off, thereby demonstrating its capacity for understanding” (p. 175).

Moules et al. (2015) summarized Madison’s (1988) criteria. Indicators of “good” hermeneutic work are related to: (a) *coherence*, which asks if the presentation of the “picture” of the work—although possibly layered with paradoxes and complications—is free of glaring contradictions; (b) *comprehensiveness*, which questions the adequacy of the work, asking if the work explores and examines the topic deeply enough to extend understanding to the reader; (c) *penetration*, which asks about the work’s impact on the reader, questioning its impression or call to be heard; (d) *thoroughness*, which asks if the work has addressed, and not glossed over challenges and questions, exploring the work’s ability to see what is actually questionable; (e) *contextuality*, which asks if the work gives acknowledgment to the importance of the context of the topic, and if the writing and reading is situated with an awareness of that context; (f) *agreement*, which asks if the work demonstrates not the consensus of ideas, rather a demonstration of coherence and consistency; (g) *suggestiveness*, which asks if the “work is fertile and fecund...and stimulate[s] further research and interpretation” (p. 176); and finally (h) *potential*, which asks what ability the work has for further interpretation.

Credibility, verisimilitude, validation. Literature related to autoethnography also offered elucidation on the adjudication of “good” research. Once again problematizing the application of applying positivist research terms, Ellis et al. (2011) noted that it is important to be

aware that when reliability, generalizability, and validity are applied to autoethnography, “the context, meaning and utility of these terms are altered” (p. 8).

Autoethnography loosely engages ideas of reliability, but shapes those questions in connection to the narrator’s *credibility*. Citing Bochner (2002), Ellis et al. (2011) suggested the reader asks: (a) Is it likely or possible that the narrator has had—or could have had—the described experiences, given the evidence offered? and (b) has the narrator taken such liberty or literary license that the account is better viewed as fiction?

Instead of validity, autoethnography seeks to ask how the work has achieved *verisimilitude* and the degree to which the work allows a reader to see the world from the writer’s point of view, even if that is not the reader’s experience. Importantly, the work is judged in terms of “whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves, or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers or the author’s own” (Ellis, 2004, p. 124). Important questions include: (a) How useful is the work? and (b) to what uses might the work be put?

In many ways, autoethnography’s treatment of generalizability is similar to Buber’s idea of resonance as well. The focus of generalizability is on readers who determine if the writer can illuminate unfamiliar cultural processes. Citing Ellis (2004) and Flick (2010), Ellis et al. (2011) stated that “readers provide validation by comparing their lives to ours, by thinking about how our lives are similar and different and the reasons why, and by feeling that the [work] has informed them about unfamiliar people or lives” (p. 9).

Enlarged understanding. As a final offering, Richardson (2005) also addressed issues of criteria in CAP ethnographies—products resulting from the processes of writing as inquiry. Specifically, she recognized the “legitimate concerns” regarding how “students’ work will be

evaluated if they choose to write CAP ethnographies” (p. 964). Although she asserted she has no definitive answers, Richardson suggested the following criteria: (a) *substantive contribution*, which asks if the piece seems a credible account and contributes to a greater understanding of social life; (b) *aesthetic merit*, which asks if the text is satisfying and invites response; (c) *reflexivity*, which questions the author’s self-awareness, self-exposure, and accountability as a knowledge-holder; and (d) *impact*, which asks if the work affects the audience by generating new questions, or moving them to write, discover, or try new things (p. 964).

Because my work is influenced by a variety of approaches, I suggest that these various, but congruent criteria could help readers adjudicate the quality, rigor, and integrity of this work.

Transitioning Comment

This chapter has articulated the philosophical and methodological underpinnings my research decisions have been based on. I have also tried to transparently share and articulate the practices and processes that I engaged. This chapter brings *Part One: Answering the Call* to a close. The next section of the study, *Part Two: The Powers at Play*, is a deeper engagement of empathy, of writing, and of assessment.

PART TWO: THE POWERS AT PLAY

Chapter 4: Empathy Explored – A Journey Through Time, Research, and Potential

Anyone who knows me, knows empathy is my third child. Although I don't have a favourite, empathy is my neediest, continually demanding my attention. After three (going on four) years of this doctoral journey, empathy is the only family member who regularly keeps—or wakes—me up at night.

Like any 'good' parent, I am protective of my kids. However, I am reminded I can love without being blinded; things we love can be imperfect. Empathy can be a brat. Sometimes even dangerous. Just ask some feminists, cultural theorists, neo-colonial writers, or Paul Bloom. He wrote a whole book about the negative sway of my youngest.

However, I also have noticed that, suddenly, empathy is winning a popularity contest. In the past couple of years, interest in empathy waned (in many circles taking second chair to the power and importance of 'compassion'). Now, after the US election, it seems that an interest in empathy has been rekindled. It seems my third child will continue to tenaciously seek the spotlight. And, likely, will continue to keep me up at night.¹⁰

Roadmap Reminder

This chapter consists of a transactional engagement of the literature that both synthesizes research on empathy and conceptualizes how (and why) empathy can (and should) be used as a lens for educational inquiry.

The chapter begins with a literature review that explores the features and effects of the concept. Then, the historical overlap of *empathy* and *sympathy*, and empathy's broad historical and contemporary understanding is investigated. Understanding the entangled phenomena that have been tied into a single concept of empathy is important work; sharpening it to a definition that facilitates this particular topic is also essential. This process of broadening and narrowing serves to both acknowledge the critiques and concerns of empathy—while also proving a rationale to support empathy's place in this study.

Finally, the chapter engages empathy in relation to education. I combine the concept with Buber's philosophy to develop what I term an empathic-Thou lens. I suggest an empathic-

¹⁰ Personal reflection: Social media post, November 14, 2016

Thou lens encourages us consider the importance of (a) relationality, (b) rupture, (c) and re-minding in relation to education.

What ‘is’ Empathy? Features and Effects

The ‘concept’ of empathy has garnered enormous interest in the past few decades, appearing in the news (Baker, 2011; Diamond-Falk, 2005; Huffington 2013; Shellenbarger, 2013); TEDtalk presentations (Gordon, 2013; Halifax, 2010; Richards, 2010); RSA public events programs (Brown, 2013; Krznaric, 2012; Rifkin, 2010a); politics and justice (Ali, 2012; Rifkin, 2010c); psychology (Hoffman, 1970, 2000; Kohut, 1977; Rogers, 1975); education (Cooper, 2011; Krznaric, 2008, Rifkin, 2010b); and, neuroscience (Baron-Cohen 2003, 2008, 2011a; Gallese, 2003, 2001a, 2001b) – just to name a few. As Amy Coplan (2011), one of the editors of *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, suggested, “given its central role in so many discussions and debates it’s safe to conclude that whatever empathy is, it’s important” (p. 4).

Empathy has multiple meanings, definitions, and understandings—depending on the discipline and approach used to explore and understand the concept. Therefore, at this initial juncture, I will not settle on a specific definition; rather, as a starting point, my work will broadly suggest a variety of ways empathy has been conceptualized and described. Coplan and Goldie (2011) suggested that what empathy is depends on who you ask, warning readers that they have not “forced the term into a Procrustean bed” (p. xxxii). For that same reason, a broad and flexible beginning description is necessary to set the foundation for this study.

It is important to clarify that Coplan and Goldie’s (2011) position is not to encourage a *loose* understanding of empathy with a one-size-fits-all approach. Although they do not hone the definition “to regiment the term into one single meaning,” they clearly articulate the importance

of “sharpening the term in a way that facilitates the particular topic and stance of the particular researcher and his or her readers, but it is not necessary that all researchers should adopt the same meaning” (p. xxxii). I agree. Part of the work of my study will involve sharpening and honing the understanding of empathy in response to the call of my topic, especially in connection to Buber’s *I and Thou*.

Initially though, I begin broadly. According to Coplan (2011), empathy might be understood as a process (or several related processes) or a mental state that might allow one to:

- (1) feel what someone else feels;
- (2) care about someone else;
- (3) be emotionally affected by someone else’s emotions and experiences, though not necessarily experiencing the same emotions;
- (4) imagine oneself in another’s situation; imagining being another in that other’s situation; and/or,
- (5) make inferences about another’s mental state; or some combination of the process described [above]. (p. 4)

A journey through history will serve to deepen, complexify, and (hopefully) clarify these initially broad understandings.

A Historical Journey

Homo empathicus. In relation to the long history of humankind, *empathy* is a new term for a concept that continues to burgeon with growing understanding, and possibly misunderstanding. As Lanzoni (2015) noted, “empathy has been defined and redefined again and again. Ask your friends for a definition and watch its meanings proliferate” (para 3).

Although the word has only been in the English lexicon for around a hundred years, evidence of the faculty of empathy can be traced back thousands. A CBS news article shared findings from William Rendu's team, researching for the Center for International Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The team suggested that Neanderthals (who lived over 200 000 years ago) were more "intelligent and empathetic than previously understood" (CBS News, 2013, n.p.).

Previously, anthropologist Thomas Wynn and psychologist Frederick L. Coolidge had posited Neanderthals were "empathetic; possessed at least some language; were companionable; strongly attached to family; able but not skillful at planning ahead; and demonstrated impressive mechanical skills" (Bouton, 2011, p. C3). However, much of this previous work was based on conjecture. The findings of Rendu's team supported this previous hypothesis, concurring that "Neanderthals showed a high level of conscience for others" (CBS News, 2013, n.p.).

The work of evolutionary biologists also suggests humans have been "wired" for empathy. Early work by Peter Kropotkin (1902) and the more well-known work of primatologist Frans de Waal (2009) helped counter the dark story of human nature that Hobbes and Darwin told, a story that persuasively convinced society of the competitive and self-interested nature of humankind. According to Kraznaric (2014), we have been presented with a historically unbalanced account that "focuses on our egoist selves" (p. 7). But that is not the full story. In fact, according to Simon Baron-Cohen (2012), 98% of humanity is wired for social connection—and empathy plays a key role in this wiring.

These findings help us realize that empathy is far from a new development in humankind; rather, our signification of the word; conceptual understanding of the phenomena(s); and belief

in “*Homo Empathicus*,” versus “*Homo Self-centricus*” (Krznaric, 2014, p. 7) is only now catching up to an ability that has been around as long as humans.

Sympathy and empathy. In exploring empathy, it is important to investigate its connection to *sympathy*. Not only do these terms share related concepts, they are connected through a history limited by the English lexicon. Until the early 1900’s, the word *empathy* simply did not exist in the English language; instead, *sympathy* was used to broadly cover a range of similar concepts. The absence of a word resulted in historical ambiguity, borne from semantic limitations, and modern day confusion that has blurred distinction between the words, often conflating their meaning (Batson et al., 1997; Raines, 1990). Therefore, it is necessary to understand that original descriptions of *sympathy* were similar to early 20th century descriptions of *empathy*.

The word *sympathy* was first recorded in the sixteenth century and derived from the Greek word *sympatheias*, *syn* “together” + *pathos* “suffering” or in gentler translations, “feeling.” The understandings of the term sympathy have included agreement, pity, compassion, transmission of affect, and suggestibility (Agosta, n.d.). The word *empathy*—also derived from the Greek—comes from *empatheia*, the prefix *em* meaning “in.”

The Greek concept of *empatheia* suggested an experience of undergoing or being *into* one’s (or historically later—an ‘other’s’) pathic state. Plotinus, an ancient Greek philosopher, “treat[ed] *empatheia* as the opposite of apathy. His understanding would oppose *empatheia* to the condition of emotional neutrality, supposed by some philosophers—Plotinus not among them—to be the most desirable, even the definitive philosophical state” (Depew, 2005, p. 100).

The philosophical tradition involving translation and discussion from one language to the next is partially responsible for the ambiguity as well. According to Nussbaum (2001), “words

in one language that may initially have had different connotations from those in another get drawn towards one another by the practice of philosophical translation and discussion over the years” (p. 303). Modern understanding is contingent upon examining clear accounts of both, understanding how the word currently is used and its historical context.

Although our modern language now provides words—and accompanying signification—that allow English speakers to differentiate the concepts of sympathy and empathy, ambiguity still exists. Furthermore, Gerdes (2011) noted that “words that describe human social interactions and subjective emotions are especially vulnerable to misunderstanding” (p. 231). The challenge of articulating subjective understandings is further complicated by the fact that a concept of *empathy* has multiple definitions and indicators, and those understandings are highly dependent upon the discipline used to describe the concept. For example, Daniel Batson (2009), a social psychologist researching in the field of empathy, noted that empathy is applied to over half a dozen different phenomena. His work alone describes eight ways the word and concept are used (pp. 3-15).

On the most basic level, in contemporary times, sympathy can be understood as state of “feeling *for*” another person, whereas empathy suggests a state of “feeling *with*” (Singer & Lamm, 2009). Brené Brown (2013) described how empathy, unlike sympathy, requires one to make a vulnerable choice based on identifying and connecting with something within ourselves that “knows” that feeling of the other. This idea of intentionality directed toward the experience of others is foundational for phenomenologists Edith Stein (1917/1970) and Max Scheler’s (1954/1970) understanding – and exploration – of empathy as well.

Empathy and intentionality has also been explored by Lauren Wispe (1986). As Wispe suggested:

sympathy refers to the heightened awareness of the suffering of another person as something to be alleviated. . . . Empathy, on the other hand, refers to the attempts by one self-aware to comprehend un-judgmentally the positive and negative experiences of another self... using imaginal and mimetic capacities, and is most often an *effortful* process. (p. 317)

Although phenomenologist Max Scheler (1970/1954) would have contested Wispé's (1986) inclusion of empathy's "mimetic capacities," Scheler echoed an important differentiation highlighting empathy's *understanding* of expressive others in comparison to sympathy's *involvement* of care or concern.

Nussbaum (2001) concurred with this differentiation, including a pointed comment that sympathy allows one to recognize "that the other person's distress is bad" and that "a malevolent person who imagines the situation of another and takes pleasure in her distress may be empathetic, but will surely not be judged sympathetic" (p. 302). Lou Agosta's (n.d.) entry in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* also differentiates these moral distinctions between sympathy and empathy including how:

1. sympathy frequently refers to one's response to the negative affects of another leading to prosocial behavior toward the other; empathy responds to positive and negative affects without necessarily responding prosocially;
2. sympathy includes agreement or approbation; empathy is often (but not always) a neutral way of becoming informed about experience and affects of others;
3. sympathy entails a specific affective response (such as compassion or pity); empathy encompasses affects in general (including potentially negative ones such as anger or resentment). (n.p.)

This differentiation and definitions are not meant to lay value or judgment on either empathy or sympathy. Nor may all readers agree with these differentiations and definitions; I don't. What is important is that critics and supporters have called into question and celebrated the transformative power of both the different phenomena. Rather than weighing one "better" than the other, it is important to nuzzle out the nuanced differences allowing one to *historically* understand the birth of empathy as a concept and the historical (and contemporary) ways empathy is conflated and confused.

Sympathy as empathy: The Anglo American tradition. In the early Anglo American tradition, *sympathy* was used to explore "inter-individual relations... attract[ing] the interest of philosophers... as a distinctive feature of human beings" (Gallese, 2003, p. 175); *sympathy* (conflating what we now know as *empathy*) was in part understood to denote an affective response to another's emotional state (Agosta, n.d.; Bennett, 1979; Gerdes, 2011; Wispe, 1986). For example, eighteenth century moral philosophers, David Hume (2000/1739) and Adam Smith (1976/1759) both explored the mutual social bond created by the human capacity to be affected by the feelings of one another (Batson, 2009; Hoffman, 2000, p.123), and both Hume and Smith used the term *sympathy* to describe this phenomenon.

David Hume (2000/1739) suggested, more than 200 years ago, that humans shared visceral reactions in a mimetic process he called *sympathy*. Hume, exploring the idea of moral judgment, theorized:

the minds of all men (sic) are similar in their feelings and operations, nor can anyone be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible.

As strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all

the affections pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature. (p. 315)

Hume's belief that moral judgment ultimately depended on this visceral process, and was based on "the feelings of the person whose action is being appraised, and with the feelings of those who are affected by this action" (Hoffman, 2000, p. 65). Batson (2009) noted that Hume "suggested that these processes are the basis for all social perception and interaction" (p. 11), key elements of our social nature.

Adam Smith (1976/1759) also explored a concept similar to empathy, and he also used the word *sympathy*. Smith's phenomenological descriptions imply a form more similar to what we now know as empathy, moving beyond Hume's work to clearly identify a element of perspective taking that allows one to imagine another person's plight. Smith asserted:

by the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him... This is the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that it is by changing place in fancy with the sufferer that we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels. (pp. 47-48)

Grenier's (n.d.) exploration drew attention to the fact that "empathy and sympathy were overlapping terms even for those who sought to clarify empathy's aesthetic dimension [as we will see next] or to distinguish it from the moral sentiments associated with sympathy" (n.p.), such as the work of Smith and Hume.

Empathy: Etymology and early signification. The English word *empathy* began with the German term *Einfühlung*, a word meaning "in-feeling." In 1872, Robert Vischer explored

the psychology of the aesthetic response: Vischer used the term *Einfühlung* to name the process of projecting one's feelings into art, or an object (Depew, 2005; Krznaric, 2014; Rifkin, 2009; Wispe, 1987), and denoted "a mutual experience of exchange between the body and the perceived object" (Nowak, 2011, p. 305).

During the late 1800's and early 1900's, Vernon Lee (Victoria Page), an English novelist and critic, was also interested in exploring aesthetic response. In the late 1800's, Lee had used *sympathy* as the translation of *Einfühlung* to engage in joint work with artist Clementina (Kit) Anstruther-Thompson, "advancing a theory of aesthetic perception of form involving empathy though not (at first) so named" (Keen, 2007, p. 210). Together, they questioned the relationship between mind, body, and art. Their attuned awareness of bodily response—attending to changes in breath, balance, and muscular tension—in reaction to observed art, led them to "apparently independently, discover the basic idea of muscular mimicry and *Einfühlung*" (Wispe, 1987, p. 18). Lee and Anstruther-Thomas went on to contribute to the development of the idea that the responses of the body created "correspondent feelings and emotions... projected back into the object being viewed and experienced as if they belonged to it. The 'subjective inside us can turn in the objective outside' in a process Lee would later call 'empathy'" (Burdett, 2011, para 6). Lee, however, is not credited with originating this term.

Instead, around the turn of the century, aestheticist Theodore Lipps (1851–1914) had translated *Einfühlung* to *empathia*. From there, credit is given to psychologist Edward Titchener for first introducing the word *empathy* into the English language in 1909. By 1915, Titchener explored empathy in connection with the reading experience, describing how:

[w]e have the natural tendency to feel ourselves into what we perceive or imagine. As we read about the forest, we may, as it were, become the explorer; we feel for ourselves the

gloom, the silence, the humidity, the oppression, the sense of lurking danger, everything is strange, but it is to us that strange experience has come. (as cited in Maxwell, 2008, p. 29)

By 1924, Titchner had refined a definition of empathy as the process of humanizing objects, of reading or feeling ourselves into them.

However, Lipps' work on *Einfühlung* is credited with "transform[ing] empathy from a concept of philosophical aesthetics into a central category of the philosophy of the social and human sciences," recognizing empathy as the root of what allows humans to recognize each other as understood as "minded creatures" (Steuber, 2014, n.p.). Although Lipps' theory transformed throughout the course of his writings, his 1907 work provided a concise account that described the *instinct of empathy*, which involves a drive toward imitation and a drive toward directed expression. Lipps argued that humans have the tendency to reproduce observed expressions that, in turn, evoke feelings associated with the expression. The resulting feeling is then projected back upon the other's perceived gesture, leading to interpersonal understanding.

Empathy and phenomenology. Of all the categories and disciplines where empathy began to grow and present itself after those early beginnings, I think it is important, given Buber was working in Germany in the early 1900's, to comment quickly on empathy and phenomenology in Buber's era.

Lipp's "projective theory" of empathy was criticized by many phenomenologists. Max Scheler, Edith Stein, and later Edmund Husserl joined the discussion, all concerned that "the classical theory of empathy which considered it a kind of projection of one's own physical state into foreign bodies had to be replaced by a theory that took empathy to be a special kind of

perception of the psychical states as they are manifest in bodily expression” (as cited in Decety, 2012, p. 4).

Max Scheler, for example, rejected the view that our understanding of others is dependent on an imitative response. However, once again, terminology proves difficult. Because Scheler objected to Lipp’s definition of *Einfühlung*, Scheler avoided using terms related to empathy to discuss his ideas, instead labeling them *Nachfühlen* (Thompson, 2001). Although Scheler himself did not use the term in relation to his own work, contemporaries Edmund Husserl and Edith Stein describe Scheler’s ideas as a “theory of empathy.”

Edith Stein added an important voice to problematizing empathy. In 1916, under the instruction of Edmund Husserl, she prepared a doctoral dissertation called *On the Problem of Empathy*. Stein described empathy as the “experience of feeling led by an experience that is not one’s own” (Thompson, 2001, p.16), one which involved an intentional experience. Here, an other is understood not as some additive combination of sense perception and inference, but as a unified whole. In using empathy as a term to describe her ideas, Stein required readers to disregard other traditional connotations the term might have.

This early groundwork to the concept of empathy was a base that allowing more recent researchers to continue to articulate and problematize a human concept that was—and continues to be—broadly presented in philosophy, art, science, and religion. Early work also provided a complicated foundation to a concept that continues to be complicated.

Empathy: A Gordian Knot

Over the years, growing research in various fields has not helped to untangle the complexities of the early work. Rather, it has complicated it even more. Daniel Batson (2009) worked to disentangle and demonstrate eight different phenomena that have all been entwined to

form a modern understanding of empathy. Although these various phenomena have formed an empathy knot, Batson noted that these separate threads should not be conceptualized as all belonging ‘together.’ Rather, these “phenomena are related to one another, but they are not elements, aspects, facets, or components of a single thing that is empathy...Rather, each is a conceptually distinct, stand-alone psychological state...and that each have [also] been called names other than empathy” (p. 3). This point is important in differently understanding empathy.

According to Batson (2009), the following eight separate concepts that have been researched and termed empathy: (a) “Concept 1: Knowing Another Person’s Internal State, Including His or Her Thoughts and Feelings” (p. 4), also called cognitive empathy or empathic accuracy; (b) “Concept 2: Adopting the Posture or Matching the Neural Responses of an Observed Other” (p. 4), also called facial empathy, motor mimicry, or imitation; (c) “Concept 3: Coming to Feel as Another Person Feels” (p. 5), also called sympathy, emotional contagion, or affective empathy; (d) “Concept 4: Intuiting or Projecting Oneself into Another’s Situation” (p. 6), also called aesthetic empathy; (e) “Concept 5: Imagining How Another is Thinking and Feeling” (p. 7), also called ‘imagine other’ perspectives or other-oriented perspective-taking; (f) “Concept 6: Imagining How One Would Think and Feel in the Other’s Place” (p. 7), also called self-oriented perspective taking; (g) “Concept 7: Feeling Distress at Witnessing Another Person’s Suffering” (p. 7), also called empathic or personal distress; and finally (h) “Concept 8: Feeling for Another Person Who is Suffering” (p. 8), also termed pity, compassion, sympathy.

Furthermore, there is a culturally generalized understanding of mirror neurons (that cause reactions in which we can similarly experience another’s emotion almost automatically, without having to use our imagination) helped along by documentaries such as Tom Shadyac’s (2010) *I Am*, and short animates such as Rifkin’s (2009) *Empathic Civilization* and Krznaric’s (2012) *The*

Power of Outrospection. According to Coplan and Goldie (2011), empathy is now “often taken to involve more than just a conscious imaginative process... it is now often also taken to involve a more basic non-conscious process of ‘picking-up on’ another person’s thoughts and feelings” (p. xxxiii). In the research community, Goldman (2006) has differentiated these different kinds of empathy as *high-level empathy* and *lower level empathy*. These very different processes provide another example of the way differing phenomena are often joined under a single term, complicating an understanding of empathy.

Given all the possible things that empathy could—and still can—be, it is no wonder that Buber objected to the term. Similarly, it is not surprising that empathy has also been the subject of modern critique.

Empathy critiqued. I began this chapter with the statement that empathy has garnered enormous interest in the past few decades. Not all the interest has been in support of empathy, with positions that range between concerned contestation and distinct disapproval.

An example of a raging debate can be found online at an academic forum hosted by the *Boston Review*. Paul Bloom, Professor of Psychology and Cognitive Science at Yale University, opened the debate with his article “Against Empathy” (August 26, 2014). Bloom began with a critique of empathy—building a case as to why empathy is a poor compass to guide policy and behavior. He cited its deficits, including the tendency for empathy to cloud judgment, appeal to narrow prejudice, and misplace our emotions.

Twelve responses, written by academics from a variety of backgrounds, furthered the conversation. Many scholars argued Bloom’s assertions; some supported Bloom’s case. This written debate demonstrated that empathy is a topic of conversation—and not all positions

endorse it. Since then, Bloom (2016) has followed up with an entire book, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion*.

Critiques of empathy can also be found in the field of multicultural, postcolonial, and feminist discourse. Some scholars have voiced concerns that empathy is an egocentric emotion involving metaphoric substitution (Sommer, 1999). Some critiques suggest empathy encourages privileged sympathizing that ignores differences (bell hooks, 1992, Sommer, 1999). Other scholars worry empathy is a consumptive mode of identification and leads to appropriation (bell hooks, 1992; Boler, 1997; Spelman, 1990, 1997).

These are all valid concerns—and it is not surprising that empathy is on the hook for these critiques. Looking at Batson’s (2009) research and the eight disparate and conflicting processes that have *all* been understood and defined as empathy—conflated into what Coplan termed a “single broad disjunctive concept” (p. 4)—it is easy to see how scholars have concerns. For example, Buber’s (1947/2002) concern about the self being conflated with the other would happen in empathic engagement that is understood as Batson’s (2009) “Concept 2: Adopting the Posture of Matching the Neural Responses of an Observed Other” (p. 4), also understood as motor mimicry or imitation. If Buber would have known about mirror neurons, he would have also had a problem with being ‘swept away’ by processes related to lower-level empathy. Furthermore, Batson’s “Concept 3: Coming to Feel as Another Person Feels” (p. 5), also known as emotional contagion, or “Concept 4: Projecting Oneself into Another’s Situation” (p. 6), the state that Lipp’s was referring to as *Einführung*—and that Titchner called *empathy*—potentially enables the type of appropriation or disregard of difference that concerned bell hooks (1992), Boler (1997), and Spelman (1990, 1997).

Each of those different phenomena *is* empathy. However, just as there are many Nicole's in the world—each as genuinely Nicole as another, and each as different—so too are the various (and separate) phenomena that have been conflated and termed empathy. There are many understandings of empathy that individuals, communities, or disciplinary discourses (historically or contemporarily) might be speaking of—each as valid as the next. Each understood to be empathy.

To arrive at this understanding, an initially wide berth was necessary to appreciate the complexities and critiques surrounding the concept as a Gordian whole. However, it is essential to return to Coplan and Goldie's (2011) initial assertion that, although not all researchers need to adopt the same meaning, it is necessary to “sharpening the term in a way that facilitates the particular topic and the stance of the particular researcher and his or her readers” (p. xxxii). The next section takes on this necessary task.

Sharpening the Term

The understanding of empathy that I employ, and that fits this topic, is based on Amy Coplan's (2011) conceptualization of empathy. Her definition describes empathy as “a complex imaginative process in which an observer simulates another person's situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation” (p. 5). Coplan clarified:

to say empathy is ‘complex’ is to say that it is simultaneously a cognitive and affective process. To say empathy is ‘imaginative’ is to say that it involves the representation of a target's states that are activated by, but not directly accessible through the observer's perceptions. And to say that empathy is a ‘simulation’ is to say the observer replicates or reconstructs the target's experiences, while maintaining a clear sense of self-other differentiation. (p. 6)

I can already hear reader's concerned voices; they grumbled in my own head the first time I engaged this definition and Coplan's work. It took effort to quiet them to be able to openly engage Coplan's chapter; I almost didn't. Initially, I was concerned that 'simulation' came too close to aforementioned issues of appropriation; as importantly, I was repelled by Coplan's choice of terms. Targets. Observers. Reconstructions. How very un-*Thou*. I still dislike those terms. That said, I am glad I stuck with the chapter.

According to Coplan's (2011) definition, there are three essential features of empathy in the form she articulates: (a) affective matching, (b) other-oriented perspective taking, and (c) self-other differentiation.

Affective matching. Coplan (2011) stated that *affect* is a broad category generally related to feelings or emotions and noted that most empathy research recognizes an affective component. In her definition, Coplan specified that *affective matching* means that the observer must experience the same type of emotion as the other, although the experience does not have to be to the same degree.

Coplan (2011) acknowledged there is some disagreement about the types of emotions that humans experience, but suggested "there is a growing consensus among scientists that at least some emotional types do exist cross-culturally, typically identified as 'base emotions'" (p. 7). In her definition, it is important that the observer matches the same emotion. For example, if the target is feeling sorrow, neither concern nor pity would be an appropriate match if one were engaging in empathy. Sorrow is. This interpretation of empathy thus addresses critiques that call on empathy's moral ambiguity [see Nussbaum's (2001) concern noted on p. 86].

Furthermore, Coplan stipulated qualifications surrounding how this matching must be achieved:

affective matching cannot be the result of coincidental emotional reactions nor emotional contagion.

To ensure ‘appropriate’ affective matching, the match must be a result of other-oriented perspective taking (Coplan, 2011). This delimitation assuages concerns about appropriation or concerns in which personal distress distorts one’s understanding or judgment. Coplan noted that feelings initiated by direct *sensory perception* do not involve the imagination nor cognitive evaluation—necessary processes in empathic engagement. Alternatively, direct sensory perception encourages us to experience others’ feelings as our own and therefore react to them as our own. Affective engagement creates the possibility for other types of relational reactions to occur (such as emotional contagion)—but then it is not empathy, as Coplan defined it. Coplan clearly stated that “empathy is never fully unmediated because it requires perspective-taking” (p. 9).

Perspective taking. To Coplan (2011), “perspective taking is an imaginative process through which one constructs another person’s subjective experience by simulating the experience of being in another’s situation” (p. 9). In self-oriented perspective taking (our default mode of mentalizing), we imagine ourselves in an other’s situation; however, in other-oriented perspective taking, an individual “attempts to simulate [an other’s] experience as though she were [an other]” (Coplan, 2011, p. 10).

Coplan (2011) demonstrated that the results of other-oriented perspective taking have very different effects than self-oriented perspective taking; self-oriented perspective taking results in mistakes in prediction, misattributions, and personal distress based on our egocentric biases (pp. 10-13). Furthermore, Coplan (2011) noted, because of our egocentric bias, our tendency is to see greater similarity between self and others than what actually exists. Therefore,

it is possible to let our own values, beliefs, and experiences shape our understanding of another's experience. According to Coplan, we need to “stop assuming that we ‘get’ the other's experience when we do not” (p. 13); we need to “stay focused within the simulation on the other's experiences and characteristics rather than reverting to experiences based on our own experiences” (p. 13). Staying focused requires effort and regulation and demands that the observer attend to difference between self and other—not conflate them.

Self-other determination. Coplan (2011) suggested, “it is possible to experience affective matching and other oriented perspective taking and still not be empathizing” (p. 15). This process results when there is a breakdown between self and other (or Buber's concerns about relational encounters where participants do not hold their own ground). When this breakdown occurs, the observer can successfully adopt another's perspective, but the observer ultimately experiences the other's perspective as if the other's perspective were their own. This over connection—getting caught up in another to a point where our experiences become enmeshed and conflated, and where boundaries dissolve—prohibits empathy. Hoffman (2000) termed the ability to recognize self-object determination as ‘mature empathy,’ when participants “have a cognitive sense of themselves as separate...[having] identities and lives beyond a situation and can distinguish what happens to others from what happens to themselves” (as cited in Coplan, p. 16). Coplan doesn't refer to an ability to differentiate as *mature empathy*; she asserted that without self-other determination, the process simply no longer is empathy at all.

When I read the deeper explanation of Coplan's (2011) essential features of empathy, many of my concerns were assuaged. I believe the explanations and delimitations surrounding the concept as articulated by Coplan (and this used in this study) addressed many of the post-

colonial and feminist critiques. I would suggest they address some of Paul Bloom's (2016) critiques as well—and Buber's (1947/2002) too (as noted earlier).

Coplan's (2011) diction is another matter; in part, I note to myself that Coplan's chapter was included in a book that explored philosophical and psychological perspectives of empathy, and in a chapter that engaged empathy from the perspective of psychology, neuroscience, and philosophy of the mind. Coplan engaged positivistic terminology to describe a process that I value for its relationality. The diction makes empathy sound harshly instrumentalist. In part, it is an important reason to bring Buber's *Thou* into the empathic-lens that reminds us of the human call.

Empathy and Education: Content and Lens

In terms of education, I have been encouraged to consider how the complexity and power of empathy might encourage us to learn more about our curriculum(s), our educational practices, and ourselves as teachers. Specific to education, a significant body of research engages empathy as concept—focusing on how to 'teach empathy' to students.

According to Roman Krznaric (2008) writing for the *Oxfam Education and Youth Research Report*, a growing interest in empathy has been the result of three factors that have taken place since the 1990's. First, interest has been fueled by the positive impact of social and emotional learning, suggesting that empathy “can not only inhibit aggressive behavior and boost self-esteem, but also contribute to mental health, the disposition to learn, improve attendance, and contribute to general academic success” (p.12). Second, a growing popularity in wellbeing has fueled the rising interest in empathy-education. Last, Krznaric cited financial considerations as a driving factor that has led to an interest in empathy-education; he suggested that growing

social and emotional intelligence will help reduce youth crime, mental health problems, and family dysfunction, therefore reducing costs in the health and social welfare system.

Grounded in a growing belief that significant transformation will occur through holistically *engaging* rather than *rejecting* diverse threads of learning, I do not reject a movement toward empathy-education. However, I suggest an equally important reimagining of empathy's relationship to education. Rather than empathy-education aligned to fixated societal and curricular outcomes, I invite educators to *also* engage empathy as a 'lens' for inquiry.

My desire to bring something different to an ongoing pedagogical conversation has encouraged me to wonder how empathy, in communion with core pointings in Buber's (1923/2000) *I and Thou*, might shift our practice and our beliefs, a process that involves encouraging 3 R's: relationality, rupture, and re-minding. I term this an *empathic-Thou lens*.

An Empathic-Thou Lens Explored

Most mornings I settle into my beautiful studio; light a candle (always the same fragrance); kindle a fire in my woodstove; place a steaming cup of coffee on my glass desk that faces a wall of windows; burrow my feet into a dense sheepskin rug; and flip open my laptop—ready to work. Each day this lens—by now an old friend—is with me, as familiar as the process itself.

For years now, I have carried around the idea, before I even knew what it was. No matter what I was doing, this burgeoning possibility jangled around, like spare change in a pocket, speaking to me and becoming known. Now, it joins me in my daily writing process, integrally woven into the work, and more importantly, revealing some of my habituated ways of understanding the world. I am slowly becoming re-minded. It is hard for me to remember—or realize—that others do not yet know this familiar creation.¹¹

What it is. An empathic-Thou lens is my word for a concept that I believe has helped me (and could have the potential to help others) see, reflect, understand, consider, think-through and approach our work—and world—differently. In ELA, we teach our students that, when reading a text, engaging different critical lenses (informed by literary theories) will offer readers

¹¹ Personal Reflection: February, 2018

different understandings and insights; similarly, I suggest adopting different lenses when exploring our pedagogical practices and beliefs encourages different understandings and insights as well. Therefore, this work develops an empathic-Thou lens. Although I will explain more about what an empathic-Thou lens ‘does’ in the next section, it is a concept that weaves qualities associated with empathy—as defined by Coplan (2011)—in communion with some of Buber’s (1923/2000) core pointings from *I and Thou*. I think it is important to answer why both empathy and Buber’s work are necessary to inform this lens.

Some time ago, I heard myself telling a friend why this reflective lens could not be informed by empathy alone. I heard myself explain that empathy is a familiar concept to many people. Although familiarity can be a weakness, given the multiple understandings of the concept, familiarity is also an entry point for teachers. In many ways, empathy is familiar and has a practical application. As noted earlier, the fact that we see so many programs that teach empathy in schools demonstrates its practicality and applicability to educational settings. I do not mean to suggest that teachers are not theoretical or philosophical, but my experience also suggests that, as a group, we value ideas and professional learning that are practical—or applied.

In my experience, it wouldn’t be uncommon to hear a staffroom exchange like this: “*Great idea; how does it work?*” or “*Great idea; what does that look like in the classroom?*” Therefore, both the familiarity and the concreteness of the concept of empathy were persuasive in terms of informing the lens I was developing. In fact, in the initial stages of my study, it was my intention to explore the possibilities of an empathic-lens, without the addition of Buber’s pointings. (And, later in this study—at times—I still engage empathy somewhat autonomously from the *Thou*.) However, Buber’s pointings have become a necessary part of the lens.

Certainly, empathy offers a ‘way’ of seeing and listening relationally; it “involves the recognition of the otherness of the other” (Vetlsen, 1960)—but in it I did not find ‘the call’ to do so. Perhaps others have not either. The plethora of interest and research over the past 25 years has demonstrated that empathy has been a player in various disciplines and fields—education being one. Yet, it hasn’t seemed to encourage the shift in being or doing that I would have hoped to see. In part, I wonder if it is because empathy offers understanding, but teachers need a re-minder of our ethical or moral imperative to act relationally. Buber’s (1923/2000) *I and Thou* called me. His message implored and inspired. I believe it can do the same for others.

That said, I don’t think Buber’s (1923/2000) *I and Thou* can stand alone to inform a workable lens for this purpose of this study either. What *I and Thou* offers in the ability to call and inspire, it lacks in the application. It sets up a world in which relation is valued, but it doesn’t offer practical suggestions to achieve it. In fact, if I am honest, the very attempt to “use” the work in a practical application (such as this lens) is contrary to fostering a *Thou* engagement.

Buber’s work inspires with its philosophical and poetic call but purposely eschews method or articulation of how that can be achieved. To anyone who knows Buber’s work, it is important that I acknowledge that. Therefore, just as my research approach is *informed* by a variety of approaches to form my own, unique process, my lens is also *informed* by some of the core pointings found in *I and Thou*, but, admittedly I am ‘using’ them to inspire and create my own concept. I would hope that the potential greater good that might come out of this engagement might outweigh Buber’s (likely) concern about having his work ‘applied’ and ‘translated’ in this way.

Therefore, to create a workable lens, I suggest both Buber’s pointings and empathy are necessary. Buber alerts us to the need; empathy offers some ways to answer to answer the call.

What it does. For this lens to be approachable, encourage understanding, and inspire change, I suggest that *both* empathy *and* Buber's (1923/2000) pointings are necessary 'ingredients.' Together, I suggest these ingredients can help reveal—and heal—the separatist forces and concerning educational ethos that I articulated in Chapter 1. I believe an empathic-Thou lens has the ability to inspire and accomplish these goals by encouraging: relationality, rupture, and re-minding.

Encourages relationality. An empathic-Thou lens encourages relationality and values connectivity. Robert Yagelski (n.d.), exploring connections between nondualism and the writing process, identified:

two problematic versions of the enduring Platonic binary that inform Western thought... the mind-body split, in which the self is equated with mind and subordinates the body (the physical) to the intellectual; and the subject-object split, in which the self is defined in opposition to Other, that 'Other' being other humans or physical objects, including 'Nature'. (n.p.)

Buber's (1923/2000) work brought an equally sobering re-minder regarding the subject-object split. Society's post-war perspective makes it tragically clear what is possible when people can be reduced to objects; recent United States news events that detail immigrant families being torn apart are unfortunate, timely, and gut-wrenching re-minders. I suggest an empathic-Thou lens has the power to help darn what Yagelski labeled the 'Platonic snip' that severed our understanding of inherent connectivity, within and between beings.

In part, empathy informs an empathic-Thou encouragement of relationality. Empathy connects beings to and with each other and encourages individuals to understand the context of another while simultaneously encouraging an awareness of individual uniqueness. As noted

earlier, concerns have articulated the potential for some types of empathic engagement to collapse all difference between self and other—limiting one’s understanding of ‘other’ to a reproduced version of self. Although these are worthy concerns (as noted earlier), empathy doesn’t necessarily result in this flattening, prevented through a more nuanced understanding that differentiates between self and other-oriented perspective taking (Coplan, 2011, p. 9).

Rather, empathy—as defined by Coplan (2011)—and Buber’s ideas encourage us to honour ‘an other’ (sentient or otherwise) as something connected-to-but-different-than oneself, encouraging individuals to shift out of habituated ways of ‘seeing’ the world, and to consider how different perspectives offer different understandings. I suggest an empathic-thou lens encourages an exploration of the world through other perspectives, in other ways. An empathic-Thou lens encourages engagement to become more *other-wise*.

Buber’s core ideas also inform an empathic-Thou understanding of relationality. Admittedly, at times, an empathic-Thou lens might draw us into the world of the *It*; Buber noted that the worlds are always in flux and that a *Thou* will inevitably become an *It* (see Chapter 2). However, Buber’s points to the importance of *I-Thou* encounters, and turning—an inner transformation that that allows one to open to the presence of another—is what makes *I-Thou* encounters possible, ever mindful that we are in relation with subjects of inherent value.

Following a trail began in *I and Thou*, and continued in Buber’s later work, I have come to believe that empathy is a form of turning, resulting in inclusion, or “an act of imaging what the other person is thinking, feeling and experiencing (not as detached content but as a living process) without surrendering one’s own stand” (Galwick & Kramer, 2003, p. 203). Buber himself described this as *imagining the real* in *The Martin Buber-Carl Rogers Dialogue* (Anderson & Cissna, 1997, pp. 23-25). Buber asserted that ‘experiencing the other side’ in an *I-*

Thou relationship teaches us to meet others and hold our ground when we meet them; Buber articulated its tie to one's ability to remain on one's own side of the experience, a process in which there are two who remain two and meet each other in full presence.

Others (Bai et al., 2015; Kraznaric, 2015; Linsenmayer et al., 2013; Stern, 2013) have also suggested what Buber develops as inclusion can—indeed—be interpreted as empathy. If empathy is understood as a process that “*sets up, indeed helps produce and sustain a relation, a between or (per Gadamar) Zwischen... facilitates the first reaching out toward and gaining access to the other's experience*” (Vetlesen, 1994, p. 8, italics original), it captures “Buber's full awareness of the other... an activity of both naïve and conceptual presence to the other as a Thou of relation” (Tansey, 2008, p. 96).

Therefore, an empathic-Thou lens encourages one to gain understanding, not ‘knowledge,’ and certainly not agreement. An empathic-Thou lens allows us to “recognize that another is as deeply motivated and complex as oneself” (Zembylas, 2008, p. 65). Grappling with (sometimes conflicting) complexities is necessary to open deep engagement—encouraging educational inquiry that is meaningful, webbed, and complicated, rather than reductionist, fact-based and shallow. Buber, in conversation with Hodes (1978) concurred, stating learning “does not imply unconditional agreement between teacher and pupil” (p. 119). They are, however, in relation.

Furthermore, an empathic-Thou lens encourages *and* requires education to loosen its grip on an inflexible construction of self. An empathic-Thou lens encourages the *I* to be affected, impacted, shaped, challenged, mediated, understood by—and through—relational interactions with others and the environment. An empathic-Thou understanding does not require one to abandon a sense of self, but nor does the self live independently from others. One's ‘being’ is

understood in relation to other ‘*beings*.’ That said, this relationality is dependent on shifting from comfortable patterns; on experiencing ruptures that—ironically—heal.

Encourages rupture. In many ways, an empathic-Thou lens depends on and calls for rupture that allows the hard-shell of the self to become more porous. This experience is sometimes avoided in education; modern education builds walls; it does not poke holes in them. Therefore, it is not surprising that schooling (linked to the institution of childhood) places students in protective bubbles—sheltering society’s vulnerable members. That ‘protection’ can be understood as encouragement for students to focus on identity construction, strengthened by an educational effort to shield students from forces that might challenge those constructions. I suggest we are doing students a disservice when we prevent them from embodied engagement with catalysts.

In his doctoral dissertation, Charles Scott (2011) suggested that “education is virtually tasked with shattering worldviews by varying degrees, and that remains an emotionally charged venture” (p. 120); he also noted the need for liberating classrooms that must sometimes rupture respectful climates. I agree with Dr. Scott’s assessment that there is a (careful) place and a need for these ruptures; however, I am not sure schooling is tasked with shattering worldviews—the Progressive Conservative’s roll back of Ontario’s modernized sexual education curriculum, for example.

I suggest that, instead of shattering worldviews, there is a tendency to formalize curricular outcomes that result in careful predictability, or choices that reinforce the status quo. And, if the current balance is upset, education bandies around the importance of resiliency. Resiliency—a return to what was before—demonstrates an educational predilection to weather changes in ways that encourage reformation versus *trans*-formation.

In Thursday's throne speech, the Tories referred to the modernized curriculum as a "failed ideological" experiment. MPP Lisa Thompson, minister of education, said the reversion to the 1998 curriculum will remain in place until a newly revised curriculum can be put together after consultations with parents.

Roza Nozari, anti-violence initiatives co-ordinator at LGBT advocacy group The 519, said the Tories have sent a "clear message" to LGBT youth and families that they aren't accepted and don't matter.

"This [curriculum] predates the legalization of same-sex marriage, social media, and the addition of gender identity and expression as protected grounds in Ontario's human rights code," she added.¹²

Empathy, however, is rooted in rupture. An erosion of the hard shell-self allows and further encourages empathic engagement, facilitating and encouraging relationships, connections, and different engagement in-and-with the world. Buber's work is rooted in rupture too, although that word seems too harsh—too forceful for the gentle world of the *Thou*. Instead, depending on the English translation of *I and Thou*, it is referred to as mutuality (1923/2000) or reciprocity (1923/1996)—in which one is oriented for openness and the possibility of change. As noted earlier, Buber suggested that in an encounter each side must hold its own. Buber also believed that genuine meeting required mutual stand-taking—but also mutual self-giving; according to Buber (1923/2000) “[m]y Thou affects me, as I affect it.” This very act is reliant on being open to, and changed by, the encounter.

Perhaps it is important to note my awareness that, in the postscript to *I and Thou*, Buber (1958/2000) clarified a point regarding reciprocal mutuality. He suggested dialogues between students and teachers; therapists and clients; and pastors and parishioners, were not able to achieve full mutuality. Buber suggested that if the students, clients and parishioners were called to imagine the other side, the relationship would become one of friends (p. 122). During the 1957 dialogue between Buber and Rogers, Carl Rogers strongly articulated an alternative view

¹² The CBC Morning Brief Newsletter: July 13, 2018

regarding the potential for there to be ‘moments of mutuality’ between therapists and clients (pp. 29-68). Rogers based his ideas on his extensive clinical experience; Buber disagreed.

Regardless, Buber suggested it is still the educator’s (or doctor’s or pastor’s) role to engage an *I-Thou* relationship even if it is not fully reciprocated. The authority figure must be open to the influence of the *Thou*.

Encourages re-minding. The empathic-Thou lens encourages relationality *between* beings. The empathic-Thou lens also encourages relationality *within* beings. I call this re-minding. Empathy plays an important role in this process. Empathy fosters a holistic sense *within* a being, mending our awareness of ourselves as woven beings. When one experiences empathy, physiological processes merge, drawing one away from a split-Cartesian understanding of self. We are no longer *either* head-minded *or* heart-minded. Rather, the affective *and* cognitive perspective taking aspects of empathic-engagement holistically join *both* head and heart.

Simon Baron-Cohen (2011) pointed out the importance of recognizing both the affective and cognitive aspects of empathy. Baron-Cohen’s book *Zero Degrees of Empathy* demonstrated how an individual with a high degree of cognitive empathy, but lacking affective empathy, would demonstrate sociopathic behavior; whereas one with affective empathy, but lacking cognitive empathy, would be autistic. Is it not intriguing that we are finally exploring dis-eases as results of separations within our bodies? In terms of empathic-Thou engagement, the voice of science supports what our gut already suggests—empathy helps us become a re-minded whole.

Buber’s work informed the empathic-Thou encouragement of being *re-minded* as well. Although we have been conditioned to believe otherwise, objectifying our world instead of living

in relation, it is necessary to once again become other-wise, an *a priori* state, according to Buber (1923/1963) who suggested that:

In the beginning is the relation.

Consider the language of “primitive” peoples, meaning those who have remained poor in objects and whose life develops in a small sphere of acts that have a strong presence...In the history of the primitive mind the fundamental difference between the two basic words appears in this: even in the original relational event, the primitive man speaks the basic word I-[Thou] in a natural, as it were still unformed manner, not yet having recognized himself as an I; but the basic word I-It is made possible only by this recognition, by the detachment of the I. (pp. 69-73)

Being re-minded brings us back to our relational roots as human beings. Being re-minded encourages us to move beyond a conceptualization of mind-as-head and instead allows both our intellect and our emotions to guide and inform us. Being re-minded encourages us to call into question notions that suggest the rational mind should be trusted over unreliable feelings. Being re-minded encourages us to question the way we have been shaped to value objectivity over subjectivity. Being re-minded recognizes the *I* is shaped and understood in its relation to the *Thou—and* the *It*. The process of being re-minded relates to both “the big” and “the small” of this study because being re-minded carries special importance for us as teachers.

Teachers are special. Speaking to many teachers, over the course of many years, I would suggest our starting stories often have similar threads. Why did we get into teaching? We love kids. It would be cliché if the statement were not so important.

Teachers have been drawn to a job that grants us the privilege and responsibility of working with young people to help them write their own life stories. We don't just play with children. We are not their friends. We are their teachers. Ironically though, we work in a system that doesn't always trust humans with humans.

Over the years, I've encountered systemic roadblocks, professional development, and guiding practices that result in looking outward for authority and answers; forces that have encouraged me to concentrate more on my professional doing than our professional being.

My teaching experiences morphed and changed me from who I was when I began. I wish I could say that all changes were for the better. Although I became more proficient at aspects of my job, a bit like a finely tuned machine, I also became differently minded.

Duty doesn't always leave space for what really matters or what I really care about.

Over the years, a bit of who I was eroded. Then, a bit more. Suddenly, I realized that I was not the person that I thought I was, used to be, or wanted to be. I had been led away from my originally-minded self that had begun teaching.¹³

Being re-minded might allow us to regain what brought us to the profession in the first place. For me, exploring the concepts of this study and my own experiences through an empathic-Thou lens re-minded me of who I want to be, a process that has encouraged me to bring my experiences, reflective understanding, and courage to a re-minded vision of myself.

Pausing for Reflection

In 2011, I wrote an article on authentic engagement. It was long before I had encountered *I and Thou*; long before Buber awakened the importance of relational encounters and affirmed the importance of giving greater attention to subjects (in a society preoccupied with objects); and long before I recognized empathy held potential power. In 2011, I attributed the magic of an educational moment to the experience of stumbling on “authentic” engagement.

Authentic. In education, we hear that word often. Learning should be authentic. Assessment should be authentic. In 2011, I was echoing what I had heard and what I had been told. Now, an empathic-Thou lens encourages me to believe differently. Perhaps there is magic in authentic encounters; however, perhaps something is authentic because it is part of something bigger—something empathically-Thou.

I believe what I stumbled upon then, but didn't know, was that powerful experiences (both mine, and the students') were significant because we found our way into empathic-Thou engagement. This, I would now suggest, is the key to what makes something 'authentic'.

¹³ Personal Reflection: March, 2018

Each day, the bell beckoned my somewhat reluctant crew of grade 11 boys and one lone female to roll into my classroom like beads of mercury from a broken thermometer. Through the door, the pool of liquid silver breaks and splits into shiny, irresistible balls of energy, moving constantly in all directions—their chemical makeup fighting against containment and working as one. I liked these kids; I struggled with this class.

And so it began—like any other day. I had taken a deep breath and was preparing myself to herd cats. That afternoon, before a long weekend, a group of my boys rushed my desk, simultaneously and enthusiastically rambling about some YouTube video that “we had to watch.” All I knew was that it had to do with 9/11, and a poem by a child. We had been doing a unit on Identity; the clip sounded safe, and I hesitantly let them run with it. It was more a surrender than a decision when I allowed them to take over my computer. A teacher needs some trustful daring (some may say stupidity) to let a group of 16-year-old boys share an unscreened video—boys whose barometer of appropriate does not read the same as mine. I observed.

To my surprise, it was not what I had imagined.

It was about 9/11. It was about loss. It was about a child struggling with the things her father would never know. It was about her identity—how it was and will be shaped by that event. The choice couldn’t have been more perfect if I had chosen it with this unit in mind. However, that was not what resonated.

It was what came next. It was holding my breath and taking a back seat to be a part of—but not lead—the conversation that followed. The conversation revealed more in fifteen minutes than I had pulled out in the previous two weeks. The class was engaged—with their learning and with each other.

They felt; they shared; they supported each other. Boys talked about their fathers leaving before they were born, divorce, the challenges of feeling like parents cared more for their new spouses than their children. There were tears, a few curses, some laughing, and a lot of boys hugging.

That day, the class was immersed in an experience they would think about for hours and days. Perhaps it will be one of those moments—one dares to hope—they will carry with them always. I believed in a process that became one of those “affirming moments.” It was golden and, as a teacher, such moments make my heart sing.

Sometimes successes reveal themselves, a bit like stumbling upon a wild thing in a forest. Part of me knows that the magic is created because I have not scouted the terrain too hard, or made my foreign presence too known. I know how fragile moments spring from accidental engagement—fortuitous combinations of events that allow authentic connections and true learning to unfold. But the best moments are also ones that are relational. Moments that connect the students to each other—and to the learning.¹⁴

I have noted how, in education, we tend to focus much more on the doing. Historically, I have focused on the importance of ‘good’ unit and lesson plans; on the importance of being flexible enough to engage meaningful activities as they arise, but what I now think is important

¹⁴ Excerpt from “Allowing Authentic Engagement” that I wrote in 2011, published in *Canadian Teacher Magazine*.

is our orientation toward ways of being—with the text and with each other—that allows relational magic to occur. A “wild thing” might be spotted because I encourage an empathically-Thou encounter to unfold; I am beginning to wonder if this orientation, and openness to possibility is more important than any activity I can plan.

When I consider my experiences through an empathic-Thou lens, I see the building blocks of relationality, rupture, and re-minding singing through the memories I consider golden. There has been relationality. Students have connected with a text, with each other, with me, and I with them. Students have experienced rupture. They have found their way into raw, meaningful dialogue enabled by trust and a genuine interest in encountering each other and/or a text. They have been emotionally invested and engaged in something that had the power to change them. Students have experienced re-minding. They have been—even temporarily—brought back to self that includes head and heart, self and other.

My empathic-Thou lens suggests that when I have caught a glimpse of a wild thing, it has been something beyond authentic. My empathic-Thou lens re-minds me.

Transitioning Comment

This chapter engaged empathy—the first of three powerful forces that root my study—and built the empathic-Thou lens that I will engage throughout the rest of this dissertation. The next chapter engages writing, the second of the three core concepts.

Chapter 5: Writing: A Journey Through History, Research, And Education

Socrates: Writing, Phaedrus, has this strange quality, and is very like painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing. And every word, when once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect or help itself.

Phaedrus: You are quite right about that, too.

Socrates: Now tell me; is there not another kind of speech, or word, which shows itself to be the legitimate brother of this bastard one, both in the manner of its begetting and in its better and more powerful nature?

Phaedrus: What is this word and how is it begotten, as you say?

Socrates: The word which is written with intelligence in the mind of the learner, which is able to defend itself and knows to whom it should speak, and before whom to be silent.

Phaedrus: You mean the living and breathing word of him who knows, of which the written word may justly be called the image.

Socrates: Exactly.¹⁵

Roadmap Reminder

This chapter explores the concept of writing. Using the empathic-Thou lens built in Chapter 4, I engage historical references and scholarly articles to explore the history, power, and consider the theoretical underpinnings that root writing. The chapter then narrows to examine the role of writing in connection to literacy, education, and writing in ELA classes.

Specifically, this chapter includes: (a) a survey of the historical beginnings of writing that include an exploration of writing's theoretical underpinnings; (b) an exploration of the place and power of writing (as noun and as verb) in formal education; (c) the formation of the ELA discipline, in which writing is both medium and content; and finally (d) a pause for reflection.

The Power of Writing

¹⁵ Plato's dialogue Phaedrus 274c-277a: Retrieved from <http://en.antiquitatem.com/origin-of-writing-memory-plato-phaedrus>

At first glance, writing seems a clever but imperfect device to simply reproduce human speech. However, writing is much more than that. According to Fischer (2001), writing is: more than Voltaire's 'painting of the voice.' It has become human knowledge's ultimate tool (science), society's cultural medium (literature), the means of democratic expression and popular information (the press), and an art form in itself (calligraphy), to mention only some manifestations. (p.8)

Writing—as a form of communicating ideas—has been granted a privileged place in modern society (Bowman & Woolf, 1994; Das, 2004; Fischer, 2001; Goody, 1963; Janks, 2010; Shlain, 1998). Bowman and Woolf (1994) identified modernity's "obsession with the written word" (p.1), a phenomena they labelled *graphocentrism*. Bowman and Woolf discussed a bias in which "written documents count for more with us than does speech, whether we are dealing with business contracts or academic publications" (p. 1). Fischer (2001) hypothesized the root causes, suggesting that from far back in history, "communication through graphic art seemed more objective, substantial than linguistic communication" and referred to writing as a "solidifying symbolic system" rooted in "human beings fundamental need to store information in order to communicate, whether with themselves or to others, at a distance in time or space" (p.11). These predilections and driving values—to control and order—have partially resulted in our current graphocentric bias.

Society at large, and specifically Western education, has been deeply affected by this *scriptist bias* (Harris, as cited in Finnegan, 1988, p. 179). Our educational institutions are also obsessed with the primacy of the written word. Daniel Chandler (2014), a visual semiotician, explored the biases of the ear and the eye in a piece called "Visual Memory." Chandler explained our Western tendency to favour sight; he stated:

Whilst ranking reason over the senses, amongst the senses Plato accorded primacy to sight (Synnott 1993, p. 131). And when Aristotle decided that we had five senses, he explicitly ranked sight over hearing (Synnott 1993, pp. 132, 270; Classen 1993, pp. 2-3). In the first sentence of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle wrote, 'Of all the senses, trust only the sense of sight'. This general bias in favour of sight and the eye has persisted in Western cultures over the centuries. (n.p.)

Chandler (2014) drew attention to other commentators that have argued that literacy and the printed word have played a key part in the elevation of the eye to a primary way of knowing. Is alphabetic literacy valued because we trust the eye, or do we trust the eye because of the power of literacy? Anthropologist Edmund Carpenter (1976) asserted that “literacy orchestrated the senses under a single conductor: sight. It enthroned sight to the point where it alone was trusted. All truth was expected to conform to observed experience... Sight became supreme and all other sense became subservient to it” (p. 42). Regardless of causation, a connection seems clear.

Graphocentrism is deeply rooted in our Western psyche. Not only do we have a Western bias that encourages us to sort and rank (placing reason first, but ocular above oral input), research also suggests we have also been shaped by the medium. Following McLuhan’s (1967) theory, the technology of writing has significant power regardless of content, because “the medium is the message” (p. 152). McLuhan asserted that the medium of communication shapes and influences degrees and types of human association and action. He suggested that though the content the medium might blind us to the character of the medium, it is the medium itself that wields powerful consequences.

Although McLuhan asserted the power of all mediums, he called attention to the medium of print, and described it as “a transforming and metamorphosing drug that has the power of

imposing its assumptions upon every level of consciousness” (as cited in McNamara 1969, p. 175). Ong (1986) similarly explored the effects of writing, and suggested that the fact that “we do not commonly feel the influence of writing on our thoughts shows that we have interiorized the technology of writing so deeply that without tremendous effort we cannot separate it from ourselves or even recognize its presence and influence” (Ong, 1986, p. 24).

Explicitly identifying a Western graphocentric bias, as well as being re-minded of the power of the medium, was an important starting point to an exploration into the concept.

Writing does—indeed—have power.

It occurred to me that I have been an ELA teacher—which includes being a teacher of writing—for two decades. Yet, I never paused to contemplate the concept of writing itself; I didn't stop to consider the power of writing.

ELA teachers are often drawn to the content. We have meaty discussions surrounding literature and delve into the richness of the language. Like fine wine, we can mull over and savour various interpretations of texts; we enjoy the ways that our students' literary engagements allow us to revisit our own experiences and existing understandings with fresh eyes. We talk about how the experience of teaching literature to students (often pieces that we have loved for a long time) makes the common uncommon.

We also talk about the mediums—the six strands of language arts that we have been charged to teach and assess. We talk about reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing. However, we often speak of the strands in terms of skill development. We speak about how we teach students to be more adept at each of those strands—to develop multimodal literacy. We ask each other: How do we teach students to be more effective writers? More careful readers? Critical viewers? Expressive orators? Better listeners? And we talk of what learning activities engage and challenge our students to practice and demonstrate those skills.

Often, our conversation also veers toward questions of assessment. How then, after we have acknowledged and brainstormed activities that will center around these strands of language arts, do we assess the outcomes explicitly articulated in our curriculum? Our job holds us accountable to teach, assess, and report on our students' abilities to meet those learning outcomes. How do we fairly evaluate a student's performance and demonstration of these curricular obligations? We commonly speak of these things.

What has been absent from my own professional consideration, and twenty years of staffroom conversation I have been privy to, is a considered discussion regarding the theoretical underpinnings and values that might be implicitly shaping our instruction and assessment of the various strands of language arts. In particular, I have begun to wonder what roots writing. I wonder what power the medium itself might hold, and why I have never questioned it in a way that has explicitly explored that power.

A theoretical exploration of the concept has never been a point of consideration in my personal discipline-specific professional development, nor in my education to become an ELA

teacher. In my classroom teaching career, I worked at four different schools in three different divisions—within ELA departments that have been small and large. A consideration of the foundations and values connected to the concept of writing was never discussed. I now am aware it has been noticeably absent in terms of all of the professional development which I have engaged in terms of either writing assessment, or writing instruction.

I wonder what else I should be explicitly examining, instead of implicitly accepting?¹⁶

Features and effects. Like empathy, in the previous chapter, writing is difficult to define. On the most basic level, writing is a system of signs. However, “since one only knows what writing is now, it is difficult—perhaps even pointless to provide a definition of it that presumes to include all past, present, and future meanings... because writing has been, is, and will be so many different things to so many different peoples, in many different ages” (Fischer, 2001, pp. 11-12). Defining writing is also difficult because scholars disagree about when proto-writing became “true writing;” the definition of writing is largely subjective (Smail, 2008).

Fischer (2001) suggested for writing to be writing, it must fulfill three criteria, making it “complete.” Complete writing: (a) has communication as a purpose; (b) consists of graphic marks on a durable surface; and (c) uses those marks to relate to articulate speech in a way that enabled communication.

A historical perspective. Before delving into the birth of true—or complete—writing as an ideographic system, it is interesting to note that intentional graphic expression began (perhaps well over) 100,000 years ago. Martin (1994/1988) noted that Upper Paleolithic man demonstrated the ability for speculative thought and used scraping objects, colouring agents, and brushes to etch “series of lines, dots, or hatch marks” (p. 3); the prehistoric writer/artist “attempted to translate inner rhythms or an abstract vision of perceptible realities...[and] the oldest graphic manifestations resemble writing as much as works of art” (p.3).

¹⁶ Reflective writing: Writing as inquiry (July, 2017)

Although the oldest graphic representations may resemble writing, they are not representative of articulate speech; rather, they are intentional graphic manifestations that had purpose to store, or to help the user recall information. Fisher (2001) identified various historical examples including: 412,000-year-old pieces of notched bone found in Germany; cross-hatched ochre in South Africa; the Ishango Bone—called the earliest writing implement—from Zaire; clay tokens from Bulgaria; genealogical boards of New Zealand’s early Maori; and coloured designs on Azilian pebbles in southern France. These historical exemplars, ranging widely in geography and through various ethnic populations, demonstrate that for many thousands of years, humankind—in our earliest forms—utilized graphic manifestations to help prioritize, store, and place value upon information. The original purposes of graphic representation were related to order and structure.

In its broadest sense, some early graphic expression constituted writing because “communication was taking place, albeit of a limited, localized, and/or ambiguous nature” (Fischer, 2001, p. 12). Following the prehistoric era (between 35,000 BC and 25,000 BC), man practised figurative art depicting body parts and animal shapes—which gradually became organized into a form of realism that is observable in cave paintings at famous sites such as Lascaux, Altamira, and Niaux (dating between 15,000 BC and 8,000 BC). Although a connection to figurative art and issues of power and control might seem nebulous, Shlain (1998) has articulated that connection. He attributed this graphic representation to early man’s “desire to control the forces of nature” suggesting that “if the gods make the world, then graphic imitation was a godlike act that carried with it the illusion of power” (p. 45). Nevertheless, this early communication—and domination—remained incomplete; early representations are not true, pristine, or complete writing.

Shifting social context. In *The History and Power of Writing*, Henri Jean Martin (1988/1994) suggested that common contextual elements encouraged a shift that gave rise to complete writing. One factor was due to climate change and the end of the glacial era which allowed human focus to shift from adapting and surviving nature, to trying to dominate it—again suggesting a connection between writing, power, and control. When this happened, “communication techniques and ways to transit knowledge took on greater importance” (p. 7). Martin also suggested an interesting connection between settlement, the beginnings of a separatist ethos, and the rise of complete writing systems encouraged by the “greatest change human society has ever known, the ‘Neolithic revolution’” (p. 7), a wide-scale transition of many human cultures from a lifestyle of hunting and gathering to one of agriculture and settlement. Martin explained:

From that moment on, human thought was concentrated in towns and cities around which the exploitation of the soil had already been established. Henceforth space and time, which ruled human activities more and more strictly, were measured from fixed centers above which the celestial vault seemed to turn. It was certainly not by chance that the first known writing systems—systems that took the flux of words unfolding in time and transcribe them along a line in space—arose within societies in which that new form of organization was most accentuated. Writing arose amongst agricultural people...on lands whose intense cultivation required a clear division of labour and a rigorous hierarchy. And it arose in city-states dominated by a theocracy. (p. 8)

This shifting context resulted in writing systems that appeared on four continents over the span of three thousand years: in the ancient Near East, in Mesopotamia, around 3,000 BC; in Egypt around 3,150 BC; in China around 1,200 BC; and in Mesoamerica around 300 BC.

Although widely ranging in geography and chronology, a commonality amongst these four complete writing systems existed. Christopher Woods (2010), specializing in Sumerian languages and writing, described:

the germ of phoneticism — the rebus principal integrated into these systems.... The rebus principle is integral to writing, as it allows the writing of those elements of language that do not lend themselves easily to graphic representation, such as pronouns, grammatical markers, and, of particular importance for early writing, personal names and foreign words. (p. 20)

Therefore, although complete, these early writing systems were too complicated to foster widespread literacy (Goody, 1963). This resulted in writing becoming an instrument of power in the hands of small groups—a means to dominate and to establish hierarchy (Martin, 1988/1994; Fischer, 2001). From its earliest roots, writing has been connected to power.

Development of the Greek alphabet. The development of a writing system based completely on the representation of phonemes eventually led to the introduction of the alphabet proper in Greece, significant to this study's context because the Greek alphabet is a precursor to European alphabets. Compared to early writing systems, the Greek alphabet was a simplified method of written communication. As Goody noted (1963), “the success of the alphabet comes from the fact that its system of graphic representation takes advantage of [a] socially-conventionalized pattern of sound in all language systems; by symbolizing in letters these selected phonemic units, the alphabet makes it possible to write easily and read unambiguously about anything which the society can talk about” (p. 316). Although the Greek alphabet was developed by the 8th century BC, widespread diffusion of writing in Greece was slow. The extensive use of writing only became prevalent around the 7th century BC, and wider-spread

literacy by the 6th century BC, with evidence from Plato's essays that by the 5th century BC, a system of schools teaching reading and writing was in place (albeit only for the male elite).

Alphabetic literacy was the beginning of a great transition in writing's history.

According to Shlain (1998), no longer was the written word able to be coveted and fiercely protected by a small group of elite individuals; the rise of the alphabet ended the "hegemony of the literate elite" (p. 65). At this juncture, I find myself nodding along to the essence of Shlain's statement, agreeing that the development of alphabetic systems made it much easier for many individuals to learn to write. However, I am left questioning if wide spread alphabetic literacy ended, or perhaps merely shifted, the hegemony of the elite—something I will return to later. Undeniably, the development of the Greek alphabet was a significant historical event, one that has garnered a great deal of attention and debate regarding the cultural consequences of alphabetic literacy.

What writing does: Effect and affect. In what is now one of the most controversial, yet still widely influential theories regarding literacy (Collins, 2003; Fowler, n.d.; Halverson, 1992), the *Literacy Thesis* connects literacy to cognitive ability and social progress. The Literacy Thesis was first stated in 1963 by Eric Havelock in *Preface to Plato*, and fully developed in Jack Goody and Ian Watt's (1963) "The Consequences of Literacy." The foundation of this (problematic) theory suggests that the "development of logical thought (syllogistic reasoning, formal operations and higher psychological processes) is dependent on writing" (Halverson, 1992, p. 302).

Goody and Watt (1963) asserted that literacy allows for a separation from the past which is not possible in oral societies; according to Goody, what is remembered is important, and that "memory will mediate the cultural heritage... [and] whatever parts of it have ceased to be of

contemporary relevance are likely to be eliminated by the process of forgetting” (p. 307).

Therefore, in oral societies, the “individual has little perception of the past except in terms of the present, whereas the annals of a literate society cannot but enforce a more objective recognition of the distinction between what was, and what is” (pp. 310-311).

Conversely, according to Goody and Watt (1963), literate societies store history outside of the individual—separate—in the form of written documentation that cannot be discarded. This permanently recorded version of the past (and its beliefs) makes literate societies capable of historical inquiry that leads to skepticism, about the legendary past and the universe, resulting in syllogism, objectivity, rationalism, and logical procedure that are dependent upon writing.

One of the highly problematic (and significantly criticized) aspects of this theory is that it rests on dichotomies between orality and literacy, and suggests that oral cultures are pre-literate instead of differently-literate. One of the results is that the literacy thesis supports a racist, Eurocentric view that forwards Western imperialism and oppresses and denigrates other cultures (Fowler, n. d., Mazama, 1998). Chandler (2014) noted that Olson and Torrance (1991) believed that “decontextualization’ seems to be a distinctive feature of thinking in Western literate societies, he nevertheless insists that *all* human beings are capable of rationality, logic, generalization, abstraction, theorizing, intentionality, causal thinking, classification, explanation and originality. All these qualities can be found in oral as well as literate cultures” (n.p.). Clearly unconscionable was Goody and Watt’s (1963) implication of a bias aligned with great divide theories, of the savages versus the civilized. When criticizing the ‘Goody Myth,’ Cole and Cole (2006) questioned Goody’s belief that literacy is the “mechanism of change that heats up ‘cold’ homeostatic, amnesic, face-to-face non-literate societies, transforming them into rapidly

changing rationalized, bureaucratically organized, and possibly democratic societies peopled by rational, modern thinkers” (p. 306).

Two positions have come out of this debate. The humanist position asserts literacy, independent of social variables, as the single characteristic that initiates change (Bizzel, 1988) and the social science position that suggests that features of the social situation in which literacy is engaged is equally important. My purpose is not to solve the literacy debate. Jerrold Cooper (2004) asserted that writing is not “an obligatory marker for complex societies or civilizations. Rather, writing is a response, but not the only possible response, to problems raised by complexity” (p. 94). My goal is to explore some of the possible *impacts* of writing as a response to complexity. I am persuaded that the medium of writing has surely impacted individuals and societies; instead of settling on either side of the humanist or social science debate, it is more fruitful to explore scholarship from a position that seeks connection—rather than causation—between literacy and individual and social impact, to better understand the power of the concept we are engaging.

One of these connections is related to the concept of objectification. Eric Havelock (1986) suggested that, because the acoustic medium was not dependent on “visualization, [it] did not achieve recognition as a phenomenon wholly separate from the person who used it. But in the alphabetized document, the document became objectified. There it was, reproduced perfectly in the alphabet...no longer just a function of “me” the speaker but a document with an independent existence” (p. 112). Shlain (1998) and Rotman’s (2008) work begins from the same premise—that utilizing an objectified document as a primary means of communication has shaped individuals and societies. However, instead of glorifying the influences of writing as a celebration of the civilized and the rational as suggested by Goody and Watt (1963), Shlain

(1998) and Rotman (2008) differently question the role writing has played in shaping our human-becoming.

Shlain's (1998) *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess* suggested that alphabet literacy has fundamentally reconfigured the human brain, resulting in changes in history, religion, and gender relations—a shift that has subverted right-brained, holistic values in favour of separatist, objectified ways of being. Shlain's (1998) work has suggested that “when a critical mass of people within a society acquire literacy, especially alphabetic literacy, left hemispheric modes of thought are reinforced at the expense of right hemispheric ones, which manifests as a decline in the status of images, women's rights, and goddess worship” (p. viii). Although similarly aligned to Goody's assertion that literacy itself is a mechanism for change, the change Shlain described highlighted a darker side—one connected to patriarchy and misogyny.

Rotman (2008) has equal but different concerns. From a Deleuzian lens, Rotman explored the way that alphabetic texts are unable to “convey the bodily gestures of human speech: the hesitations, silences, and changes of pitch that infuse spoken language with affect” (p. xxiv). He suggested that by removing the body from communication, alphabetic texts enable belief in singular, disembodied, authoritative forms of being such as God. These theories encouraged me to pause; they suggested the writing has the power to differently shape individuals and Western societies, specific to objectification.

In a scathing critique on the Eurocentric discourse on writing, Ama Mazama (1998) explored this Western epistemological bias that links knowing with separation. Although Mazama questions writing's ability to *promote* critical attitudes and rationality—labelling it a “fantasy of the highest order” (p. 8)—she has cited multiple examples in which scholars have made that assertion, using the opportunity to reveal “the underlying epistemological assumption

that only through ‘reason’ can one know,” highlighting a Eurocentric “unrestricted and rather naïve faith in reason” (p. 4). Central to her critique was the work of Ong (1986) who suggested that “writing separates the known from the knower” (p.77) and described how:

Between knower and known writing interposes a visible and tangible object, the text.

The objectivity of the text helps impose objectivity on what the text refers. Eventually writing will create a state of mind in which knowledge itself can be thought of as an object, distinct from the knower. (p. 36)

Although Mazama’s (1998) thesis works readers through a series of arguments to de-bunk claims that suggest literacy is linked to cultured behaviour, her work highlighted the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of Eurocentric writing discourse that are “consistent with the European belief in objectivity which can be obtained only through the separation of the knower and the known accompanied with the objectification of the latter” (Mazama, 1998, p. 8).

Other researchers substantiate this line of thought. For example, Martin (1994) noted that ancient graphic expression demonstrated human’s need to “fix” interpretations and make them “concrete in order to define them better, to take possession of them, communicate with the superior forces, and transmit what [they] had learned” (p. 4). Martin’s choice of diction such as fix, concrete, order, and possess also introduce readers to his notion that there is a strong connection between graphic expression, separation, and objectivity. Rothman (2008) concurred, describing both the hierarchy and the inherent separateness between speech and what he labeled “disembodied writing” (p. 30).

Thus, as a teacher of writing in a school setting, I am re-minded of the multifaceted power of writing. Admittedly, my empathic-Thou lens has drawn me to these theories and these ideas, ideas that highlight concerns about separatist behaviour and writing’s potential connection

to theoretical underpinnings that may not *cause*—but certainly *reveal*—Western values. This investigation has also suggested the potential ability for writing to implicitly tug us toward an epistemology that connects knowing with separation, versus an empathic-Thou position that links understanding with connection. If nothing else, it is important that this implicit potential should be explicitly explored. This exposure has tugged the possibility into my awareness—and leaves me considering what this means in terms of how I then assess the writing that is connected to these values.

Writing, Literacy, and Formal Education

Research also suggests that writing is linked to power in formal education settings. James Collins (1995), anthropologist and ethnographer, drew on French social theory to frame his work and explored how the role of inscription has formed and consolidated power. Formalized education is one of these centralizing powers. Referencing Foucault, Collins described schools as disciplinary formations which have distributed individuals “into hierarchies of castes and classes” (p. 82). He narrowed his application to explore processes of standardization and connections between literacy, education, and power, and asserted that “schooling did not replace illiteracy with literacy, but rather these heterogeneous domestic religious and workplace literacies were replaced with that particular shaping and standardization of scriptal practices we call schooled literacy” (p. 82). Therefore, literacy in general, and writing in particular, has become a normalizing power in which heterogeneity is a deficiency.

Collins (1995) asserted that “how literacy is defined and who controls the content of and access to” shapes society (p. 83). Literacy is a broad concept and challenging to define. According to Hilary Janks (2010), author of *Literacy and Power*, some languages do not even have a word for literacy. Janks described the irony of attending a conference on literacy to

discover that neither the French nor German language had a word for the concept. Instead, the interpreters translated literacy as either communicative competence or alphabetic ability. Janks asserted that neither definition did the concept justice; Alberta Education (2018) seems to concur:

Literacy has traditionally been thought of as reading and writing. Although these are essential components of literacy, today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more. Alberta Education defines literacy as *the ability, confidence and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct and communicate meaning in all aspects of daily living*. Language is explained as a socially and culturally constructed system of communication. (para. 2)

Arguably, a broad definition of literacy, such as the one above, has the potential to emancipate rather than homogenize. Paulo Freire (1972) comes to mind. Freire described how learning to read and write was an act of knowing—and articulated the necessity “to reflect critically on the process of reading and writing itself” (as cited in Janks, 2010, p 13). Janks suggested that these “different ways of reading and writing the world...are a central resource for changing consciousness” but warned—like Collins (1995)—that “difference tends to be organized according to relations of power, into hierarchies, and it can lead as easily to domination as conflict as to change and innovation” (p. 25).

Using Foucault’s work to consider how discourses “produce truth, how they are produced by power, and how they produce effects of power” (Janks, 2010, p. 14), schooled literacy can be understood as one of these forms of domination, a “hegemonic project involving the displacement of nonstandard varieties of language and shunting aside or discrediting of alternative literacies” (Collins, 1995, p. 84). In a society with a scriptal bias—and one with a

narrow lens of what is considered “proper English” and “good writing,” I have concerns about how commonly difference is celebrated versus eliminated. Thomas (1994) noted the “conflicting reactions to the written word: it may open up possibilities...or serve only to reinforce the dominance of certain social groups” (p. 33).

Other scholars share similar concerns regarding the hegemonizing project of schools and the role of literacy in the process. Although literacy can raise consciousness and liberate, it has historically (and recently) also been used as a tool of domestication (Mazama, 1998, p. 12). Perhaps through my own experiences of white privilege, I am less caustic and cynical regarding the darker side of literacy. However, I am cautious and careful to ensure a critique of the power of writing and literacy is a necessary part of the conversation.

Furthermore, writing as a concept contains all these joys and sorrows noted. It is both binding and freeing, but how we drive that concept also determines its use. Therefore, the next chapters speak to my concerns about the ways that writing assessment has been a tool of the hegemony Mazama (1998) speaks of. I believe there are ways to liberate writing in students so it becomes more than duty-fulfilling action that ELA teachers grade. When that happens, the power and subversion of writing might be furthered explored as student learners engage it more richly—not in the poverty of vision exemplified by the way writing assessment is sometimes engaged—the work of later chapters. However, an important starting point is to recognize the connections to power that writing has—and has had.

In 19th century Europe, literacy was used to shape patterns of thought and behaviour to align the masses with industrial life; the connection between literacy and missionary work is apparent throughout the world; North America’s residential schools used literacy as a tool to commit cultural genocide; and the early 19th century goal behind Canadian schools was to “instill

appropriate modes of thought and behaviour into children” (Gaffield, 2013, p. 4). As Mazama (1998) suggested, “there is clear collusion between the much-vaunted benefits of learning to read and write, and the deliberate use of literacy as a means of indoctrination into ‘modernity’” (p. 14).

Canadian snapshot. In Canada, the family was the main setting for schooling during the 18th and early 19th centuries. However, Britain’s conquest of the French in the mid 1700’s shifted the educational context as the British government “looked to education as a way of promoting cultural identification with Protestantism, the English language, and British customs” (Gaffield, 2013, p. 2). By the 19th century, educational leaders (known as school promoters) worked to promote mass schooling; more importantly, the acquisition of academic knowledge was the modification of behaviour in an attempt to address social problems that school promoters attributed to “the impact of constant and substantial immigration; the transition from agricultural to industrial capitalism, and the process of state formation in which citizens came to exercise political power” (p. 4). Even in this early Canadian schooling context, language and literacy was connected to power, specifically the goals of the English-speaking British over the French and over the influx of immigrants new to Canada. However, perhaps nowhere can the darker side of writing and literacy be observed, in the North American context, than in the residential school settings.

In Canada, over the course of approximately one hundred years, under a policy of aggressive assimilation, approximately 150,000 First Nation, Inuit, and Metis children were removed from their communities and forced to attend boarding schools. These religious schools stripped indigenous children of their language and culture with the intention of assimilating them to dominant Canadian culture. Abuse, neglect, and horrific living conditions became tools of

cultural genocide. These children endured tremendous physical suffering at the hands of their oppressors. But language—and writing—was a colonial tool wielded against them as well.

The act of writing. Postcolonial researcher Laura Donaldson (1998) takes a unique angle on the role of writing as a colonial technology and weapon of appropriation. Donaldson explored alphabetic literacy—and specifically the act of writing itself—as a disciplinary technology. Like Collins (1995) and Janks (2010), she drew on Foucault and described how mastering basic graphological skills and the “ability to wield the pen in such meticulous ways not only produces proper writing; it also trains students’ bodies in the very attributes (docility, obedience, usefulness) crucial for the successful reproduction of bureaucratic, capitalist, and imperialist social structures” (p. 53). Citing examples specifically from residential schools and aboriginal students’ experiences, she described how English writing’s modes of production in school settings further resulted in segregation. Donaldson described how, unlike orality, writing can take place in single desks in classrooms; seating patterns have been designed to enforce each students’ isolation; cooperative writing has been interpreted as cheating; and single student homework assignments can be assessed. In the case of residential schools, she asserted that multiple aspects of “alphabetic literacy segregated individual Native students from their siblings, friends and other members of their tribe” (p. 54).

Centering the exploration of the power of writing back to the current day teaching of ELA, Janks (2010) drew attention to power, privilege, identity and diversity, matters central to teaching language arts. Janks suggested we must become more reflective about an educationally hegemonic view that places a different value on children’s various ‘ways with words;’ even though diverse ways with words are equally powerful resources for making meaning for students—we do not value them equally. She asserted that it is not possible to separate

literacy—of which writing is a significant part—from questions of power, that what is valued is “defined by institutions that favour the practices of the middle class; that literacy is privileged over orality” (p. 5). An empathic-Thou lens suggests that Janks warnings are necessary, and an essential starting point for the next chapters that consider issues regarding the assessment, or judgment, of that writing.

Writing-as-noun. Writing-as-verb. Interestingly, history reveals that in schools the *act* of writing was not always privileged over orality. Professor David Russel (1991) explained that, until the formation of discrete academic disciplines in the last third of the 19th century, there was little focus given to writing instruction past elementary school. Russel stated that “because the whole curriculum and much of the extra-curriculum was based on public speaking (recitation, declamation, oratory, debate), there was little need for systematic writing instruction” (p. 4). The limited writing instruction that existed was based on graphology, stemming from a belief that (the act of) writing was nothing more than formalized orality—a tool to help the speakers’ memories (Russel, 1991; Miller, 1990).

How, then, does the argument that asserts Western education’s strong scriptal bias make sense? To reconcile these seemingly contradictory suggestions, it is helpful to explore the separation of the act—from the product—of writing. A historical overview suggests that, in schooling, writing-as-noun has carried importance; but writing-as-verb has not always carried significance. Originally, a classical education included learning the Greek and Latin grammar for the purposes of allowing students to read the classics of Western civilization untranslated. In both England and America, Latin and Greek eventually shifted to vernacular English—as both the language of instruction and the language of study. However, it was the literature (writing as

noun) not the production (writing as verb) that schools advantaged to support social, spiritual and moral agendas to cultivate wisdom and virtue.

George Gordon, an early Professor of English Literature at Oxford, stated the multiple roles of literature in education included “to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the State” (The Academy, n.d., para. 3). In early days, “the elementary work of learning and teaching vernacular grammar, syntax and spelling would be valued only for leading students to reading closely and appreciating the ‘best’ ...examples of English” (Miller, 1993, p. 22), not to write well themselves. Thus, just as literature worked to civilize the students, the role of writing “its learning, or its chancy production... [was] linked to the duty to civilize the audience for literature” (p. 22). The written word, not the writing of the word carried the value. I am left to consider how this same focus on “the writer’s writing” and not “the writer writing” continues to impact the way we teach and assess writing today.

Although writing carries all the political agendas it does/and has, I am re-minded that these will never be engaged until we get past assessing only “the writer’s writing” and overlook curricula that encourages us to engaging “the writer writing.” This change of vision—one that has been initiated, but I suggest falls short of the articulated goal—recognizes writing as an act of learning, sharing, exploring self, creating knowledge and insights, and considering the world’s fullness—including the student writers’ insights and engagement with that world. However, I have concerns that many of our assessment practices have pushed students to want to gain information about how to get better grades on their writing; they have grown to see writing only as a graded activity and not—as I reflected in my own early experiences as a writer, what it could be. Writing can be an act that allows us to explore the world politically and gain discipline and power in sharing that exploration with others. However, we limit our students’ power if we

limit their writing. And, as I explore later, I believe we inadvertently limit the possibilities of their writing through some of our assessment practices.

The final task of this chapter is to investigate the historical background of the discipline of English—in Alberta known as *English Language Arts*—to help contextualize our current pedagogical and assessment challenges. Therefore, the final section of this chapter is dedicated to exploring the formation of the discipline of ELA, and the mercurial role of writing within the discipline area.

Writing and English as an Educational Discipline

Before 1870, “English as we know it today was a non-existent subject in the high schools” (Hays, 1936, p. 10). Although Hays was speaking of the American context, the Canadian school system, significantly shaped by our neighbour, seems to share this history. Neither composition/writing—nor English—was a legitimate discipline area until the late 1800’s. Around that time, an educational shift was beginning. Private colleges with classic curricula taught in primarily in Latin were giving way to the birth of modern research universities with specific discipline areas taught in vernacular English. In this new setting, “English as well as many other now familiar subject areas competed for space” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 437).

Unlike the sciences, in which the subject matter was acknowledged and valued, English was a new curricular area, moving into an area left open by its “discredited predecessor, classical rhetoric” (Fitzgerald, 1996, p. 437). Professional debate raged about what should fill that gap and form the foundation of the new English as a discipline. Various strands such as philology, literary appreciation, linguistics, literary genres, aesthetics, elocution, and composition became

possible contenders that could fall under the subject area of English (Fitzgerald, 1994, 1996; Nelms, 2000). This shift in university education created ripples in the secondary school as well.

By 1890, two important factors had formalized and shaped the developing secondary school discipline of English and the role of writing within. One influential factor was the changing requirements to the college entrance exam. Prior to 1874, the only languages tested for college admission were Latin and Greek. However, with the rise of vernacular English as the mode of instruction, students' written English began falling under scrutiny.

As early as 1864, the president of Harvard identified a necessary refocus. Calling attention to the "prevailing neglect of the systematic study of the English language" and calling on the words of philosopher John Locke, he suggested that "if any one of us have a facility or purity more than ordinary in his mother-tongue, it is wing to chance, or his genius, or anything rather than to his education or his any care of his teacher" (as cited in Fitzgerald, 1994, p. 440). By 1874, Harvard required each candidate to write a short English composition based on the works of an acceptable English literary canon; this initiated a trickle-down effect into the secondary schools to prepare students for these exams.

The second factor that shaped the formation of English as a discipline was the 1890's work of a group university representatives, known as the Committee of Ten. In a special issue of *The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)* labeled "Our History, Ourselves," Nelms (2000) described their task:

to reconcile the disparate strands (grammar, rhetoric, analysis, philology, literature) that were brought together as one discipline and focus the efforts of teachers at different levels (secondary and college) toward uniform standards in English. The extent to which

the subject they invented still stands, in virtually the same form, and is required of all high school students is dramatic testimony to the success of their effort. (p. 51)

Although the work of the Committee of Ten articulated a unified discipline area, Applebee (1999) has cautioned that the unity may be superficial. He has noted English Language Art's historical tendency for the strands to become unglued and "separate into the myriad of individual studies from which they were assembled" (p. 49). Nelms (2000) also called attention to the continuing need to unify English and has stated that there continues to be an acute need to reconcile the disparate strands that have "fragmented our discipline into separate and unequal sub-disciplines" (p. 50). Two of these areas are communication and literature—writing as verb, and writing as noun. Although the work of the committee conjoined two separate disciplines—communication and literature – together in the study of English, Nelms has described this as a marriage of different and unequal partners, and noted that "literature has usually emerged the master, at least with older, college-bound students; communication skills the handmaiden—with all the inequity those gender laden terms imply" (p. 50).

This unequal partnership highlights our educational tendency to separate, segregate, and place value as we chunk and chop our learning, attitudes, and understanding. It also suggests the separation, inequity, and disharmony between literature (the writers' writing) and rhetoric (the writer writing) is consequential in terms of conceptualizing the role writing currently plays in secondary English Language Arts.

The role of writing in English Language Arts. As suggested above, in English Language Arts classes, literature (or writing as noun) has often been given a primary role. In Alberta, a shift that changed the course name of English to English Language Arts included a curricular shift in outcomes to reduce the primacy of literature. The explicit intention was to

take a literature-focused program of studies and shift it to a program that combines the study of literature with using and manipulating language, reflecting a broader understanding of the importance of engaging language contextually while (mainly) using literature as a springboard for further inquiry. Although change has happened, I would suggest that we are still reluctant (or possibly unable) to completely let go of those beliefs that tie us to conceptualizing literature as a written form of knowing, and strongly valuing our students' ability to understand, interpret (and perhaps become civilized through) the literature we expose them to.

Alberta ELA Program of Studies. Although this section focuses on writing, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge my awareness that the Alberta ELA curriculum also directs teachers to focus on all six strands. As I noted earlier: reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and representing are all considered the 'language arts' that we are charged to engage and teach. These six strands—and the revised curriculum—encourage and draw awareness to the importance of valuing multi-modal literacy. This shift has encouraged us to widen our conception of text, in terms of the texts that are 'studied' as well as the texts that students create. The landscape of ELA classes has certainly changed in that regard. From my own experience, compared to my beginning years teaching, a much greater focus has been given to these various literacies.

In ELA classes, these shifts have been supported by advancing technology that allows and encourages us to engage and produce previously unimaginable 'texts' (podcasts, movies, you-tube videos, e-posters, webpages; the list is endless). I don't mean to suggest that teachers are stuck in the dark ages, or that these various literacies and strands are ignored. They are not. Quite simply, I suggest that even though we are engaging and adopting all six of these strands,

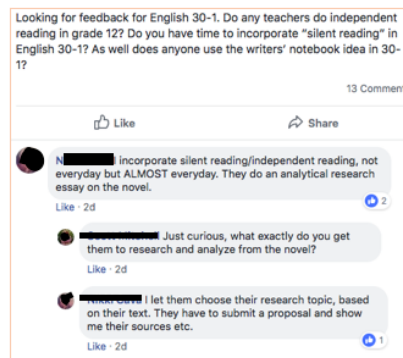
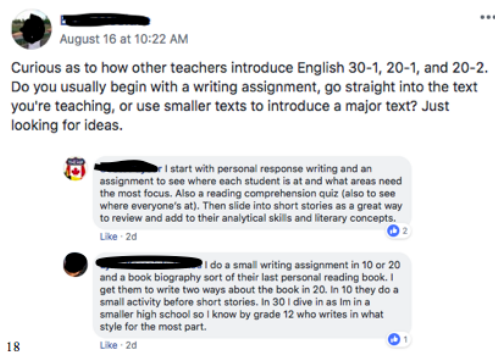
‘writing’ (both as a noun and a verb) has continued to play a more central role than the other strands.

I just read a book on dyslexia where the author talks about finger reading, eye reading and ear reading. His point is that while we would never suggest that blind people must eye read, we are perfectly happy to have dyslexic people do so, when in fact, ear reading (audio books basically) is much better for them.¹⁷

We simply need to look to any ELA standardized test and observe which of the six strands are tested. Furthermore, even when students receive accommodations on these exams, the written word is still valued. For example, one student accommodation allows the use of a scribe. A human (or sometimes now computer program) transcribes the students’ oral ideas into a written form. I have often wondered why the student’s ideas are transcribed. Why is an oral recording not an acceptable—and possibly even more valid—representation of that students’ ideas? Again, I don’t mean to suggest that other literacies and strands are not valued nor given attention in ELA classrooms, but I would suggest that writing has a privileged place.

I also acknowledge that within that privileged place, we have improved at teaching writing in classrooms. We teach the writing process. We teach exploratory writing. We encourage creative writing—although in my experience, more often at younger grades, and more often in non-academic streams. Certainly, writing teachers talk about the different audiences, purposes, and contexts for writing. However, writing *also* continues to be a primary medium to demonstrate student knowing, especially in summative assessment situations (as explored next).

¹⁷ A personal message from a friend/colleague whose son has dyslexia: July, 2017



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There is a reason there is an ongoing stereotype of the ELA teacher carrying home a pile of writing to grade. We still do. Perhaps this point circles back to research that began this chapter regarding our graphocentric bias—and our cultural tendency to value sight above the other senses. That said, as I have come to see it, carrying home the pile of essays is not the issue; it is what we do to engage these essays. I wonder how the theoretical underpinnings of writing itself, closely related to Western values (as a solitary activity in a system that values separatist, objectified ways of knowing and demonstration of knowing) have unwittingly tugged us to where we have arrived. What, then, does this also mean in terms of assessment – and how might a different perspective on the value or method of assessment shape the value and instruction of writing itself?

Pausing for Reflection

At times, as I wrote this chapter, I found myself garnering more confusion, instead of finding greater clarity. I had a feeling that I was onto something, but it was fleeting. I have come to realize that the lived engagement of researching, writing, and reading has unearthed the complexities of a hermeneutic exploration of a concept such as writing. In this spirit of *aletheia*,

¹⁸ Public Posts: Alberta High School Teacher Resources Facebook Page

what was revealed in one engagement covered up an understanding I thought I had grasped in a previous one.

This is the challenge and the magic of exploring ‘things’ with such mercurial nature. Janus-like words, constructs, and concepts can be slippery and elusive. It has been part of my challenge in this chapter. Conceptualizing writing as both noun-and-verb separately (and together) has demanded purpose and intention. Engaging this chapter and exploring writing as verb shows something. Engaging this chapter and exploring writing as noun shows something else entirely. Like a hologram, if I hold it in one direction, the picture that is revealed is different than if I hold it in another. Holding it as a conjunctive – that allows both meanings to exist simultaneously—has been my greatest challenge. I believe this is also the challenge of conceptualizing writing in terms of how to teach (and assess) writing as well.

The creation of this chapter has revealed my own bias; I go more easily to the consideration of writing-as-thing. The academic in me pauses as I reflect on the written counts and amounts—in everything from scholarship proposals to job applications—that represent my academic worth. The teacher in me pauses as well; I reflect upon my old gradebooks that privileged structured writing assignments above other ‘ways with words’ (Heath, 1983) in which students demonstrated their knowledge. The pedagogical crusader in me pauses, too, throat catching at the thought of a single high-stakes standardized test that takes the form of an essay. Writing has been given a lauded place in our society and school systems. However, within that lauded place, I wonder if we continue to default towards the writer’s writing versus the writer writing—and what that means in terms of the effect on both our writing instruction, and writing assessment.

I wonder if my challenge in articulating and justifying a research method is an exemplar of writing’s difficult transition—of the struggle to shift from the document (noun) to document

(verb). Documenting to discovering. When I think back to my research methods classes during both my masters and my PhD, I realize that writing as a method of inquiry was implicitly present, but not identified.

In fact, through no fault of any of my instructors, my own experience of “planning” my research method pushed me in directions that felt like they did not fit. We spoke of quite traditional ways of gathering data and the concept of writing came up only when discussing the literature review, again as a tool to document and articulate the academic conversations that were happening our field of study, or when we spoke about writing up our findings. We did not speak of writing our way into our findings, nor about how the writing could be the data itself. We spoke about the process as if we had already identified ideas that we would then document. These ideas were always rendered distant.

These simple experiences reveal deeply rooted ideas regarding the role of writing in academia, research, and generally in education. If this is what we value—and believe—then these values and beliefs undoubtedly drive the assessment practices of writing as well.¹⁹

This chapter has also re-minded me of the insidiousness in which our Western epistemological foundations reinforce our separatist ethos, and the role that writing might inadvertently play in that reinforcement. Once again, I am encouraged to question why hot is better than cold (or warm), to wonder why rapid change and rationalization is valued above homeostasis (or small shifts) and face-to-face relationality. Instead of asking if writing has been the change mechanism that has *caused* this shift in thinking, I wonder if exploring the roots of writing has further encouraged (and continues to reveal) Western society’s *value* of these qualities at the expense of differently-literate ways of knowing and being and how the way we teach and assess writing might be affected by these values. My belief, at this juncture of my engagement, is that these questions remain important and should be examined by writing and sharing them as political humans who care about the world in which they live. I believe we need to dialogue more about it, and I trust my work here might—in some small way—extend such dialogue.

Empathic-Thou re-minding. In the spirit embracing a dialogical hermeneutic, I am left to consider how our value of cognitive abilities such as syllogism, objectivity, and rationalism

¹⁹ Personal reflective writing: Writing as Inquiry

are revealed through an examination of writing discourse. Perhaps unearthing the connection between writing and our “European epistemological obsession with separation” (Mazama, 1998, p. 8) is the more important lesson for ELA teachers. If we were more aware of this epistemological obsession, and the role writing might play in its continued hold on us, could we loosen its grip? How might we treat writing more as a *Thou* and less as an *It*? These questions again lead me to ask how an empathic-Thou lens, one that calls attention to relationality, rupture, and re-minding, might encourage a shift to reimagine the way we assess writing.

An empathic-Thou lens encourages me to wonder too about how my experience—and my current reality of writing a dissertation—is connected to my own feelings of isolation versus relation. A few years ago, we moved from Alberta. At the time, it seemed to be an ideal moment to move because I had finished my course work and the writing of my dissertation could be done from anywhere! I have noted, over the past couple of years, I miss my colleagues and cohort of academics that were part of my doctoral experience when I was taking classes. Now that my course work is over, the writing is a lonely experience. Although I have heard myself say it multiple times, it is only through this very moment of writing that I have realized the full impact of that idea in relation to my experience of separateness. It is possible that the writing of my dissertation is partially rooted to this experience—that writing itself can lead people further into isolation and separation.

At this very moment, I am sitting in my office. I say that I work best here because I am alone. The act of writing (either to document or to discover) is—for me—a solitary activity. The ability to write allows me, ironically, to share what I am thinking with others though a process of being entirely by myself. My husband, a fellow academic, suggests that the act of writing is an act of putting the writer in communion with others, but I am not sure that is always the case. I would suggest the act of reading puts one in communion with others, but the act of writing places the writer in isolation.

Here I sit, by myself, documenting and discovering my ideas. There is no guarantee that anyone, beyond my exam committee (and my husband), will read them. The 'technology' of writing has facilitated a type of separation and is not dependent on the relation relied.²⁰

Writing, perhaps, also encourages a type of separation through silos of thought. The written word has allowed banks of information to be both written and collected. This bank has been made even greater and more accessible through the internet. Our separateness in our learning is also encouraged or enabled because we can become so specialized in our fields. Writing has allowed us to immerse ourselves in our learning in ways that lead to expertise and specialization. I suggest that these silos are isolating in themselves. They reside in what Buber has wonderfully considered an *I* and a *Thou*, and I am seeking a *between* that doesn't always flow.

Writing allows us to create something that stands outside of ourselves. Because it can be disconnected from the creator, and literally becomes a tangible artefact, it can encourage us to objectify it and see *It* as finished and complete—like a butterfly pinned to the board. I acknowledge that technology is slowly eroding this perception. Students are able (and encouraged) to change and transform their writing; even when words are written, they are easily edited and adapted through computers and word editing programs. The papyrus scroll was not so easily changed; those ideas still linger. Once writing is written, the text has an “end” and stands outside oneself. I think these sometimes-unexamined traits that writing has—abilities that allow the creation of a literal object (an *It*)—might be swaying and affecting our assessment of writing as well.

Admittedly the idea of constancy in relation to writing is changing. Social media is a powerful force that is changing students' perceptions of writing. Clearly, it is a form of writing

²⁰ Personal reflective writing: Writing as Inquiry

that puts people in immediate communion with others. There is also nothing butterfly-on-a-board about writing in social media. We can post something, people can react, we can immediately edit our posts and the meaning can change in an instant. I would suggest, though, that writing in this genre is more like orality than writing. Although I have heard many teachers complain about the negative effects that texting, tweeting, and posting has had on students' grammar and writing, there is something to be remembered about what writing is capable of. Something we sometimes forget when we apply or consider writing in an academic setting or in the ELA classroom. The tool—and technology of writing—is morphing and changing, but I would suggest the classroom writing, the writing of schools in general, and English Language Arts classes has strong ties to traditional forms and is possibly tethered through tacit values and assumptions. I am left wondering, too, the role of assessment in these tethers.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I have also paused—re-minded—to differently explore the value we give to the concept of literacy, of which writing is integrally intertwined. Especially as an ELA teacher, I have found myself being a cheering advocate regarding the importance of literacy. I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the powerful ways that literacy has emancipated individuals and groups; Freire comes immediately to mind. However, I worry we have reached a tipping point where we instinctively celebrate literacy's power to free.

Blind agreement recalls Paul Bloom's (2017) similar concern about empathy; he suggests the concept of empathy is generally lauded and celebrated. He causes surprising ripples when he asserts that he is against empathy. Powerful concepts are complicated in their effect and affect; literacy is no different. It has tremendous power to emancipate – but we can't forget the ability it holds to confine. In what ways is literacy, and specifically writing's unique role in literacy,

acting as a force of hegemony that is confining some students in our care? And, how might an empathic-Thou lens be able to shift or change that?

Transitioning Comment

The work of the final chapters seeks to engage some of the questions posed above. (I also suggest there is simply power in the asking.) However, before the concepts of empathy, writing and assessment are woven together—and applied more specifically to ELA classrooms, the next chapter will explore assessment with the goal of (a) understanding its power and (b) explicitly exploring some of the values that our current assessment practices are based on.

Chapter 6: Assessment: A Journey Through History, Research, And Education

Jim, my husband, was blessed with an ability to remember text on pages and picture that text as he was taking exams—always an advantage in factual, from-the-book exams in content courses.

One day, Jim received his results from an exam in his Introduction to Anthropology course. One exam question that Jim answered confidently, because he could “see” the page and text where the answer was, had been marked wrong. When Jim checked the page to see if he had pictured the answer incorrectly, he found he had not. He made an appointment to see the professor and presented the textbook page where the “incorrect” answer was written. The answer was correct.

The professor looked at the answer, took the book, and turned to another page where the “correct” answer—the answer that was keyed on the exam—was written. The book had an error; there were two different and conflicting answers to the same question. Jim had used one sentence in the book to answer the question: the professor had used another.

Both professor and student agreed that the book had erred—there was no confusion on that point. Jim asked if he would receive the one-point credit for answer he had chosen, clearly correct, from the page shown to the professor. Certainly, his careful reading of the text would prove his carefulness and sincerity as a student and be worthy of a single point on a large exam? Ironically, those seemed the very attributes of a good anthropologist. The professor pointed to the text and said, “But this is the answer I wanted.” Jim’s “correct answer” was still “incorrect,” and he did not receive the point.²¹

Roadmap Reminder

Beginning with a research assumption that assessment (a) reveals our values and (b) has the ability affect great change (what is assessed is taught), to explore possible answers to this study’s central exploration—how an empathic-Thou lens might differently inform our values, decisions and practices surrounding English Language Arts writing assessment—it is necessary to examine the concept of assessment, similar to the previous chapter’s engagement of writing. Therefore, this chapter explores assessment as a concept, including its (a) history, its (b) connection to power, and (c) its place in the classroom.

Setting the Stage: Background Considerations

²¹ The event happened in 1965, during Jim’s first year as an undergraduate student. Fifty years later, he remembers.

Until the 1980's, there was a dearth of research regarding assessment; and, the limited research conflated the idea of testing or educational measurement with a much broader concept. In fact, “prior to the mid-1980's the assessment literature focused almost exclusively on large-scale standardized testing” (Ghaicha, 2016, p. 219). Over the past 30 years, assessment has revealed itself as a field of study with growing popularity, both in research and practice and in consideration of the connection between assessment and learning (rather than simply of learning), an important area that has garnered significant attention. And, within the field of study, a fuller investigation regarding what assessment is, and what assessment does, has emerged.

Defining Assessment

It is important to begin by grappling with a definition of assessment. I use the word *grappling* because defining—and discussing—assessment is a surprisingly difficult task. Assessment has been used so widely, and in so many ways, there seems to be little consensus about what it is—or means (Boud, 2007; Ghaicha, 2016; Joughin, 2009a; Taras, 2010). Furthermore, “assessment is often defined in ways that either under-represent or conflate the construct” (Joughin, 2009a, p. 6.). Assessment is a term that is used with a variety of meanings; often related terms (such as evaluation, measurement, testing) are used interchangeably. A lack of consensus about the definition is not the only factor that complicates our understanding of assessment; the power and emotion related to the construct complicate it, too.

Boud (2006) suggested, “assessment probably provokes more anxiety among students and irritation among staff than any other feature” of schooling (p. xivii). Boud followed this assertion with a later study involving biographical essays of students who reported “few instances of positive experiences of assessment in their past education, but many examples of

bad experiences which had major impacts on their learning and self-esteem” (Joughin, 2009, p.14). Furthermore, it is not just students who are deeply affected. Assessment concerns negatively impact teachers, too. Teachers continue to be affected by their past experiences of assessment while they were students; feel stress and anxiety connected to their current assessment workload; and worry about the emotional reactions of the students because of their assessment decisions (Joughin, 2009a).

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I will engage a simple working definition aligned with Joughin’s (2009) assertion that a simple definition might “facilitate our understanding of assessment itself and its relationship to other constructs” (p. 9). This study places more exploratory weight on the function, purposes, values, and power inherent in assessment, than on the definition itself and defines assessment as: “any act of interpreting and sharing information about students’ performance, collected through any of a multitude of means or practices” (p. 9).

Implicit within this definition of assessment is its potential communicative value with students. Such “sharing” can provide students information, who “share back” to the teacher in changed (hopefully improved) learning performance. Here, an empathic-Thou lens comes into play. From a teacher’s perspective, assessment is the act of an *I* engaging with a *Thou* (a student learner’s Other). Foundationally, assessment is dialogic: there is always a back and a forth between teacher and student. And, within this back and forth, empathy might play a powerful part in building communal relationships between teachers and students and, even perhaps, between students.

Previously, I realized that my professional development as an ELA teacher failed to include the power of writing as a concept; nor had it fully explored the theoretical underpinnings and accompanying values that might have been implicitly shaping the instruction and assessment

of the various strands of language arts that I have taught. I wonder if similar concerns might apply to our collective consideration and understanding of assessment.

ELA teachers talk about assessment. We talk about how we can ‘best’ evaluate a student’s performance and a student’s demonstration of curricular obligations; we also now talk about how we use assessment to direct and inform our teaching. Our assessment practices are evolving. The past three decades have prompted us to consider educational assessment differently—moving from an emphasis on summative to formative models, and substantial support and emphasis given to ‘assessment reform’ in Alberta schools.

Although assessment conversations are happening, and an educational shift is taking place, I am left to contemplate our tendency to center more fully on the practices rather than the theories and context that root reform. Or, maybe more (or most) importantly, the ethics that should steer us as well.

My sense is that we might be limiting our conversations to the processes and ignore the important aspect of philosophy. That is, to what end are we engaging the processes we engage? I worry too that our professional learning is not always situated in the larger context.²²

A Brief History of Educational Assessment

One immediate challenge I faced when researching the history of educational assessment was the newness of the term. Assessment is now used to describe a wide variety of educational practices that pre-date its semantic application to educational contexts. In a philological exploration of assessment, Nelson and Dawson (2014) suggested that it wasn’t until after World War Two that the term assessment came into use in an educational context, pointing out that “the newness of assessment as a term in education is not just a linguistic accident. Many languages struggle to find a word for assessment” (p. 195).

Nelson and Dawson looked to ancient Greece, the language that gave us other educationally related words (such as school, academy, syllabus, and pedagogy) and found no equivalent. Therefore, this brief history explores a variety of educational practices (including feedback, grading, measuring, testing, evaluating) before the term assessment was used to describe them collectively. A second challenge was the difficulty of knowing where and when to

²² Personal reflection: April 2018.

begin this historical overview. Teachers have been assessing students before educational assessment was ever a field of study—where does one begin?

Assessment insight and the ancient world. Nelson and Dawson (2014) began their exploration of assessment in the ancient world by describing educational practices that involved teaching and learning. The authors discussed the dialogues of Plato and described Socrates' discussions with students, noting that the point of the dialogues had nothing to do with assessing the learners; rather, the purpose was to advance the thinking of the students. The authors also described depictions of educational iconography on Greek vases and suggested the vases depict "learning that seems too conversational for a process resembling assessment today" (p. 196). However, they admit they "do not know if there was assessment in ancient education because philology does not tell us something that never happened just because it was not spoken about" (p. 196).

Nelson and Dawson (2014) were transparent that their research was driven by concerns over education becoming assessment-led rather than learning-led in "an ugly judgmental spirit whose moral underpinnings deserve scrutiny" (p. 195); thus, part of their job was to scrutinize the ethics and attitudes embedded in the language of assessment. In unpacking assessment related terms such as *test* and *exam*, they drew awareness to the idea that the linguistic and social roots of language reveal to us that originally "the concept of examination was not only far from the delights of learning, but is also associated with stressful situations" (p. 167). The authors cited philological examples of exams that were related to stretching and the application of pressure to determine authenticity, or in other cases, to be tried and judged.

Nelson and Dawson (2014) closely examined the philology of assessment in connection to the language of trials and trying as well. They articulated concerns that, in schools, we

attempt to encourage students ‘to try’ but asked readers to remember the point of student trying is to produce something that will then be tried itself. In a reflexive exploration, they revealed that “to try, as in try on a shoe is to see if something fits...presupposes a template or standard against which another item or person is measured” (p. 197).

The history of the Greek word for ‘trying’ also connects an attempt to do something while being tested, as revealed in Homer’s *The Odyssey*. To try in French is *essay*; the essay is also a genre of assessment in which one attempts to reveal knowledge about a theme; then, that attempt (the students’ ‘try’) is submitted to judgment. According to Nelson and Dawson (2014), “uncanny reflexiveness of assessment is installed in language: when you try you are yourself being tried” (p. 197). Richard Stiggins (2002) brought this same concern to modern-day schooling and suggested that, until recently, these ‘trials’ have been purposefully anxiety causing because it was pedagogically believed that “the way to maximize learning was to maximize anxiety and that assessment has always been the great intimidator” (p. 760).

The investigation of Nelson and Dawson (2014) identified a historical tendency that “highlights one structural truth about assessment, namely that assessment is mainly for the benefit of the assessor, not the assessed” (p. 196). Modern-day assessment is not understood in such binary ways. As this chapter will suggest, dangers and inequities are still connected to assessment; however, disrupting and exploring the roots, beginning with the inherent language of the concept is an important re-minder of the power assessment has (and continues to have) as a form of gatekeeping (Williamson & Huot, 2000). Assessment is equally capable in driving and shifting instruction and decision-making in ethical directions that forward teaching and learning.

Pre-20th century assessment. Fast forwarding many years, and moving the investigation to Europe, McArthur (1987) called on Sylvester (1970) to cite an early example of

an educational assessment describing how—seven hundred years before—an English college was criticized because its graduates were unable to express themselves accurately in the learned languages. Although McArthur (1987) was unable to describe the assessment method that made that determination, the historical event is early evidence of educational assessment taking place.

In those early years, assessment literature was synonymous with testing, and testing originally occurred in an oral form. In a chapter dedicated to “Educational Assessment: A Brief History,” McArthur (1987) suggested the earliest written exam might be dated to the early 1500’s. This finding similarly aligns with Nelson and Dawson’s (2014) philological investigation that suggested that, in the English language, only since the 1600’s has the word examination been commonly used in an educational context. From these early roots, it took another 200 years for written exams to take hold.

A historical look at assessment shows that, over the years and for a variety of reasons, learner assessment began as a “close” activity between teacher and student and morphed to become a more distant activity that worked to separate teacher and student. For many years, the tradition of oral—versus written—assessment held firm; however, at Cambridge in 1750, answers began to be written. Hoskin (1979) suggested that these written answers were, at first, a matter of expediency. Due to growing numbers of students taking exams, written answers to oral questions—in combination with oral questioning and explication—became part of the test form. These mixed methods and large amounts of ‘data’ initiated problems of evaluation and differentiation due to “a mass of material, oral and written, to integrate and all of it evaluated qualitatively” (p. 143).

During this time, candidates were evaluated on a ranking system and placed in achievement brackets; however, cases of partiality on behalf of the examiners and the

disproportionate influence of some examiners caused problems (Hoskins, 1979). Therefore, in 1792, it was decided marks should be assigned for individual questions on the exams:

This was in retrospect, a momentous step, perhaps the major single step towards a mathematized model of reality... the science of the individual was now feasible, for the principle had now been articulated that a given quality could be assigned a quantitative mark, it was therefore possible to both weigh up the individual and to compare him to others. [Qualitative scoring] yielded to the precision tool of the mark. With this quantitative step, the old oral system became outmoded. (Hoskin, 1979, p. 144)

The introduction of both ranking and the mark also led to changes in the types of questions being asked on exams; “[f]actual right answer questions...designed to measure technical competence in specific subject areas replaced questions aimed at rhetorical style across the entire curriculum” (Madaus & Kellaghan, 1993, p. 6). Writing had begun to be appropriated for test-taking.

Testing developments impacted North American education as well (Madaus & Kellaghan, 1993). In the 1800’s, schoolmasters used a type of assessment called ‘recitations’ (Giordano, 2005). Students were called to the front of the class to perform recitations of passages, spelling words, facts they had memorized, and to calculate arithmetic in their heads. If students answered to the teacher’s satisfaction, they were promoted to the next grade or level. If not, they were retained for more practice.

However, in 1845, written examinations began taking place and becoming part of the regular educational practice in primary and secondary schools (McArthur, 1987). These written examinations began when Horace Mann, an American educational reformer and politician dedicated to promoting public education, abolished the *viva voce* (oral) examination in Boston public schools and replaced it with the printed test (Hoskins, 1979; Madaus & Kellaghan, 1987).

Soon after, “the essay exam spread to the rest of the country and became the predominant mode of testing for the remainder of the century” (Madaus & Kellaghan, 1993, para 5). Again, we see evidence of the appropriation of writing for test-taking and reinforcement of the role of writing as a form of documenting, rather than creating, knowledge. Although oral exams were still employed, paper tests became popular assessment tools and it became commonplace for students of the mid-1880’s to sit at a desk and take tests.

These significant changes altered both the method of assessment—and the value given to the judgment of the teacher. In schools, the judgment of the teacher was, originally, paramount. Indeed, teacher judgment was all that was needed to determine promotion from grade to grade. According to Cubberly (1934), the rise of the test and measurement was “largely an attempt on the part of a few students of education to find a means for transforming guess work as to school progress into procedures having scientific accuracy” (as cited in Giordano, 2005, p. 22). Teachers’ judgments began to be questioned and replaced by an objective numerical interpretation of the students’ progress. Success or failure was judged on a written exam, and scored as a percentage. Interestingly, Alberta’s early educational history seems similarly aligned. Although Alberta was not yet a province, an ATA report on educational reform stated that school “grading” was also introduced (in what is now Alberta) in the 1870’s (Matsumoto, n.d.).

Although paper testing became commonplace in the United States, this assessment reform was not fully embraced by the public, nor all professionals in the field of education. Pre-dating Ken O’Connor (2007) by over a hundred years, a Chicago superintendent noted, “the person best qualified to judge of a child’s ability to go on is his teacher... To say that any other test is necessary is a travesty on common sense” (as cited in McArthur, 1987, p. 4) and

prohibited testing for the purposes of grade-level advancement. A century later, O'Connor's (2007) *A Repair Kit for Grading: 15 Fixes for Broken Grades* echoed this same idea, suggesting the necessity of subjective judgment and stating that "the only aspects of learning that can be assessed objectively are such elements as the correctness of factual content, spelling, and calculation" (p. 11).

According to McArthur (1987), "by the end of the nineteenth century, educational testing had indeed achieved a bad name. Where testing was still used for advancement, teachers were 'teaching to the test' devoting weeks of preparation and drill to extant editions of upcoming exams, and the public was not pleased" (p. 4). From these early roots, both a measurement and judgment model of assessment were evident, and were colliding.

Disciplinary power and testing. The intense power of testing and the effects of teaching to the test can be seen specific to the discipline of English. In fact, as noted previously, the 1874 Harvard English composition entrance exam, based on the works of an acceptable English literary canon, initiated a trickle-down effect into the secondary schools to prepare students for these exams. The very fact that English became a discipline that specifically teaches writing is because writing began to be tested. As always, what is tested is taught. And, what is valued is tested.

Furthermore, playing on the word *disciplinary*, Hoskin (1979) drew on the work of Foucault to assert that the modern written examination has had one of the most significant transformations in the history of educational practice. He also stated:

It is arguable that the structure of the English university exam has changed very little on the whole. Students' answers reflect the legitimate manner of using the legitimate culture, and at their best are informed and witty polished jewels of the rhetorical art. And, of

course, the outstanding essay answer is still accepted by many intelligent people as the sign of a first-class mind. (p. 141)

Although the written essay examination fell out of favour for a short time, replaced by objective multiple choice tests, essay exams returned and Hoskin's description resonates.

Assessment and the 20th century. Moving to the 20th century, David Conely (2015) noted that some types of assessment commonly used throughout the early 1900's could be loosely thought of as performance assessment. Although he admitted that those assessments were not in a form readily recognizable to teachers today and that "recitations and written examinations (which were typically developed, administered, and scored locally) were the primary means for gauging student learning" (p. 7), other assessments were present. These other types of assessment allowed students to show what they could do with what they've learned. However, in this era, it was not just the teachers' subjective personal recommendation for grade advancement that began to be criticized. Subjective and locally developed assessments began to be scrutinized in general.

Critics began looking to examples of teachers' evaluation of their students' written work. Questions of equity and reliability began being raised. A 1912 study by Starch and Elliott revealed concern over multiple teachers assigning radically different grades to the same English paper (Giordano, 2005; Williamson & Huot, 2000). This early case noted a concern regarding the lack of inter-rater reliability. Other critics had concerns that mere opinion was controlling school practice.

As a result, the field of psychometrics encouraged testers to develop indirect measures that consisted of tests designed with multiple-choice questions (Williamson & Huot, 2000). Standardized testing was proposed as a way of achieving fairness for students and for creating

uniform curricula in schools. According to Giordano (2005), “the movement to set standards and the movement to standardize assessment became politically as well as philosophically entwined” (p. 28). This movement—aided by developments in the field of psychology and objective measurement—became significantly shaping forces that continued to move assessment away from performance-based and locally developed forms, and toward standardization. These values were demonstrated by the 1913 *National Council of Education Report* which articulated the importance of “applying scientifically derived scales of measurement to many systems of schools... to describe accurately the accomplishment of children and to derive a series of standards” (Strayer, as cited in McArthur, 1987, p. 9).

Beginning with the implementation of intelligence testing during the World War I, by the 1920’s objective testing formed the core of educational assessment methods. Marks (1976) described how “the objective measurement of intelligence swept America, and to a lesser extent Canada, like an educational crusade... the critics were numerous but few in comparison to the advocates” (p. 10). Not only did the rise of objective tests change the types of assessment used in education, it changed the role of assessment. Instead of simply measuring performance, standardized testing brought about the comparison of student to student – a sorting and ranking system that significantly changed the face of educational assessment. A (Canadian) National Issues in Education Initiative report titled *Standardized Testing: Undermining Equity in Education* (1999), prepared by the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, explained the difference between achievement and standardized achievement tests in the following way:

Generically, an achievement test is designed to assess the knowledge and understanding a student has acquired of a school subject. A standardized achievement test is further defined by its being given and scored in the same way, whenever and wherever it is used.

Standardization means that the scores of all students tested can be fairly compared, one against the other ... the essential requirements are that the conditions of administration and scoring be the same for all the students who are tested so that their scores can be compared. (Traub, as cited in Froese-Germain, 1999, p. 3)

It is essential to recognize that, although the definition describes students as “fairly compared,” those tests have been used to determine students’ mental abilities and access to education—tests that have been demonstrated to be ethnically biased. Furthermore, although standardized tests are useful for sorting and ranking students, they are inadequate tools to assess student learning.

Canadian context. By the early 1900’s, it became easier to trace the assessment trends specifically in Canadian schools without looking to Europe and the United States. A look at Western Canada’s 20th century educational reforms suggests that Canadians were not immune from the testing culture that impacted and took hold of our neighbours to the south, but our assessment history also encompassed a broader variety of practices. That said, Canadians too had—and continue to have—a predilection to value the test.

The first major review of the British Columbia school system was published in 1925 and revealed the values and approaches to education and assessment that were prevalent at that time. The report suggested that, in terms of teacher training, there was emphasis on lesson preparation, teaching, and classroom management. ‘Good’ teachers were described as individuals who “emphasized the fundamentals, drilled frequently, tested often... [and] ran no-nonsense classrooms” (Glegg & Flemming, 2004, p. 124). Interestingly, this era in British Columbia—and a few years later in Alberta (between 1935 and 1940) —was the beginning of an educational reform that ushered in a progressive education model. It is impossible not to take note of the disconnect between the stated values of the 1925 report and the discrepancy between the core

values of the new progressive education model that advocated a progressive, child-centered approach to teaching.

In Alberta, this progressive education model began around 1930 and lasted until the 1950's; however, the literature regarding the degree progressive assessment practices were implemented is also discrepant. Glegg and Flemming (2004) suggested that, "in spite of officially changing views on assessment, the old ways prevailed: tests were there to make clear how much or how little students knew, and not to help identify better teaching strategies or encourage awareness of different learning styles" (p. 125). Alternatively, Amy von Heyking (2012) argued the negative assessment of the implementation of progressive education articulated by historians is deeply flawed and suggested that a range of evidence indicates success of "the efforts the teachers in rural, one-room schools made to implement the new activity program" (p. 94). I would suggest accepting *and/both* positioning to recognize both might have happened.

The progressive revision. In Alberta, the progressive revision of 1935 was an attempt to modernize the curriculum and make learning more flexible and relevant for rural students. The program was based on a project approach called the *enterprise system*, and asserted that learning "activities should be such of a nature as to cultivate the natural disposition of the student to express their ideas by speech, free art, dramatization, construction writings and movement. Their activities should be as life-like as possible, so that the learnings acquired through them will be integrated and unified" (von Heyking, 2012, p. 96). Although von Heyking does not specifically engage the topic of assessment in her article, she does state that annual departmental examinations were eliminated for all grades except nine and ten, and that the programs outlined

school subject expectations to be engaged within the enterprise system by multi-age divisional student groupings.

The Alberta Department of Education Annual Report from 1936 described how “the pupils discuss problems more than they did under the old course, engage in core research and receive more training in generalizing and forming judgments” (as cited in von Heyking, 2012, p. 99). That description is aligned with the idea of performance-based assessment, and the described ‘training’ is suggestive of formative assessment practices. Although neither the philosophy nor concept of formative assessment was semantically born into common educational discourse, evidence of the practice can be observed.

Furthermore, published teacher reminiscences and memoirs from students during that era describe educational experiences such as debates, and creating deliverables that included picture shows and booklets. According to students at the time, they were encouraged to gather resources to demonstrate their ‘best efforts’ that included activities requiring students to “look up reading reports and read them out to the class ... to get used to standing in front of crowds without being scared” (Von Heyking, 2012, p. 102). This description of progressive schooling in Alberta also suggested classroom assessments were directing teacher practice. Von Heyking described how rural teachers adapted curriculum because “students were generally not reading or writing at the grade level typical for their age. Teachers had to assess their students’ grade levels and often focused on literacy and numeracy lessons” (p. 107), evidence of diagnostic and formative assessment practices that seemed to tug practice away from a focus on tests.

In Alberta, the progressive focus didn’t last; and, over the next twenty years, education experienced pendulum-like shifts. According to the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s history of educational reform, Matuzumo (n.d.) described how *The Cameron Report* of the 1950’s

enshrined core subjects, highly-specialised curriculum, standardized testing, direct teaching methods and was described as “the antithesis of the education policies and practices of progressive education” (para. 7). However, the 1960’s and 1970’s saw a return to progressive education that included non-graded classrooms, individualized programs, integrated programs of study, and advocated a culture of risk-taking. *The Worth Report* of 1972 described schools that were: student-centered, featured team teaching, cooperative learning, and had open-area classrooms. The abandonment of standardized testing was also encouraged. These recommendations and relaxed model of schooling did not last; legislated standardized testing in Alberta schools followed within a decade after.

In 1981, Alberta formalized standardized tests for English, math, science and social studies in grades three, six, nine, and twelve. And, in 1983, Grade 12 exams became compulsory and counted for 50% of a student’s final grade. These testing structures stood firmly in place for almost 40 years and it has only been recently that the Grade 3 exams were abolished and Grade 12 exams’ weight was reduced to 30—rather than 50—percent. It was a small dent in the continuing exam fortress of today’s schools, but a dent at least.

In Canada, the 1980’s and 1990’s were also precursors to important shifts regarding the role of assessment—and a formalized movement toward assessment for learning (sometimes called formative assessment). Earl, Volante, and DeLuca (2015) described how assessment for learning has been an informal activity in Canadian classrooms for a long time and became a formal practice over 40 years ago. That said, it is difficult to know how much, and for what purposes; because, prior to the mid-1980’s, “assessment literature focused almost exclusively on large scale-standardized testing” (Ghaicha, 2016, p. 219).

The 1990's were the beginning of an important shift that drew emphasis to learning more about assessment practices in classroom settings. In 1992, Stiggins and Conclin (1992) had serious concerns and questions about the state of assessment and engaged a large-scale study in the United States. That study—one of the first of its kind—revealed the prevalence for teachers to test; the tendency for teachers to use the results for summative purposes involving ranking rather than demonstrating mastery of subject material; and teacher concerns about their own assessment practices. Inquiry into assessment as a field, and how to improve teachers' practices, were becoming more prevalent.

This brief historical overview suggests some key points. First, the history of assessment suggests evidence of a cultural bias that has tugged us toward objectivity and skepticism of the role of teacher judgment in our assessment practices. Second, in assessment, writing became a tool to document and demonstrate what students 'know.' Writing was appropriated for test taking. Finally, education and society became hooked by assessment practices that "made it possible not only to objectify individuals, but to form, describe, and objectify groups" (Madaus, 1993). But what does our modern, systemic adoption of *assessment for learning* really mean? What are the theoretical underpinnings and power structures inherent in assessment in general—and its specifically related concepts? Finally, what do the answers to these questions mean for the practice of writing assessment?

Assessment: What it Is, and What it Does.

As a starting point, let's return to our basic definition of assessment. Assessment is *any act of interpreting and sharing information about students' performance, collected through any of a multitude of means or practices*. I have noted that this definition of assessment naturally engages Buber's inclusion of (I) teachers engaging with (Thou) students in relational ways that

include – specifically in writing assessment – all the possibilities of writing as an activity of knowledge-building and world-engaging. That said, this simple definition of assessment also invites a closer look at the purposes and paradigms that are broadly encompassed. In assessment, it is important to connect our methodological choices to our epistemologies if we are to glean clearer understanding of what assessment is, and what it does.

Summative assessment. In part, in summative assessment, we see evidence of the positivist paradigm that suggests learning can be measured and that assessment is capable of measuring the degree or the extent of that learning from the position of a traditionally one-way hierarchical perspective, from teacher (curriculum or test) to student(s). The theoretical underpinnings—and coinciding beliefs—suggest that measurement can and should be understood as objective or context free, and that educators are capable of—and that it is important to—find ways to report these measurements in quantitative forms. The values inherent in this model, ones that value counts and amounts and students as distant others, have resulted in educators reporting on student learning numerically, and decision-makers valuing the statistics and quantitative data amassed from these measurements. The scale of these decisions range from educators’ evaluations regarding individual students passing a unit or course; the effectiveness of programs and teachers; and national reporting on the general learning of the overall population.

The positivist paradigm and this type of reporting is most often associated with the educational practice of summative assessment. Summative assessment is commonly described as assessment *of* learning. The *Alberta Assessment Consortium* (2018) defined summative assessment as “judging student performance in relation to curricular outcomes” (para. 1). Teachers are instructed that student performance is “based on what the student demonstrates

relative to curricular outcomes. While other factors such as behavior or work habits can be reported, these factors must be kept separate from the demonstration of outcomes” (para. 3). The positivistic paradigm foundational to the values of summative assessment seeks to decontextualize, objectify, and bracket out all factors other than a demonstration of what had been decided from a distance as outcomes. The paradigm that roots this model allows and encourages students to be evaluated against a normative standard and sometimes against each other.

Earl, Volante, and DeLuca (2015) noted that both Alberta and British Columbia have a longstanding history of large scale testing that has created an emphasis on highly-valued summative classroom assessment, designed and implemented in relation to provincial test content and criteria. These standardized tests have shaped our classroom assessment practices and have made it challenging to move away from a diagnostic-formative-summative assessment sequence. Not long ago, research suggested most teachers used the results of assessment to rank students, rather than demonstrate mastery of a subject (Ghaicha, 2016).

Although summative, or at the end of the learning cycle, David Boud (1995) noted that all assessment, not just formative assessment, leads to learning. He asserted that summative assessments for accreditation or certification cannot be separated from assessment for learning. “Assessment always leads to learning – but the question is – what kind of learning?” (p. 2). Boud encouraged us to ask what our acts of assessment communicate to students.

These important questions reveal that there are difficulties inherent in summative assessments; an empathic-Thou lens suggests that it is problematic and hegemonic to separate the demonstrated outcome from the student, the context, and the work and highlights concerns that tests have been used—and continue to be used—for gatekeeping purposes. An empathic-

Thou lens suggests that this process has conflated (and sometimes confused) assessments' three goals of validity, reliability, and fairness. Furthermore – and admittedly, an empathic-Thou lens brings up a problematic and highly debated issue regarding standards and the place of standards in assessment. Like Williamson and Huot (2000), I have concern for “access of all students to the cultural power and personal empowerment of literacy in societies where a specific form of the written word in an integral part of the political and economic life” (p. 193) when that specific form of the written word is legitimized and summatively assessed. These complicated issues are ones I will try to engage more fully in the final section of this study: An Empathic-Thou View on Writing Assessment.

Formative assessment. Current educational assessment practices also demonstrate theoretical underpinnings aligned with constructivism, where knowledge is understood as provisional, subjective and context dependent (Boud, 1995, Hager & Butler, 1996; Joughin, 2009). These theoretical underpinnings and values are inherent in the process of formative assessment—commonly described as assessment for learning. Black and Wiliam (1998a), seminal thinkers and advocates in the field of formative assessment, characterize formative assessment as “all those activities undertaken by teachers and/or by their students [that] provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (p. 7). Trumbull and Lash (2013) explained:

Formative assessment does not take the form of a particular instrument or task (Moss, 2008), but is defined by its purpose (Shepard, 2009), which is to help form, or shape, a student's learning during the learning process. Some suggest that formative assessment is better described as a *process* (“using assessment formatively” [Frohbeiter, Greenwald,

Stecher, & Schwartz, 2011, p. 3]) than as a type of assessment (see also McManus, 2008). (p.2)

In 1995, the professionally persuasive work of Black and Wiliam championed the importance of assessment for learning—and education began to listen. But it has been a difficult journey. Studies suggest that assessment for learning “is taking hold as a key feature in educational assessment programs in Canada” (Earl, Volante, & DeLuca, 2015, para. 5), helped along, since 1999, by government funding which has allowed Alberta school divisions “to engage in cyclical professional development projects aimed at improving student learning and performance, with many of these projects focused on [assessment for learning]” with an intention to “build capacity in assessment at classroom and school levels...to encourage systemic adoption of [assessment for learning]” (para. 17).

The practice of formative assessment moves us—as teachers—from the front of the class to at-elbow with the students. Formative assessment encourages, requires perhaps, pedagogical practices to shift from instructing a class, to coaching an individual. In many ways, formative assessment is philosophical; or it could be. Formative assessment has the potential to shift us away from a hegemonic standard, and toward individual understanding. That side-by-side work invites teachers to have a different perspective. Instead of a global standard, we differently see our students – their strengths and weakness. We see them as individuals versus “a class.”

That said, formative assessment is still guided by our professional judgments; these judgments, in turn, form or shape a student’s experience during the learning process. Therefore, these judgments hold great power. As I suggested previously, we must recognize that “assessment is the site where we marshal evidence about what we value globally as a society and more locally as teachers, researchers, and administrators” (Huot, 2002, p.8). Formative

assessment is a powerful tool that can change the assessment purpose and result, but new tools can be used in traditional ways.

Furthermore, formative assessment fits into my work because, at its philosophical roots, it calls for relational conversations between teachers (as coaches) and student writers (as learners). This “at elbow” pedagogy is a distance breaker: it creates a geographical space and context whereby teachers engage—in conversation—with students who are invited to engage in action; and, the conversation continues perhaps infinitely in ways that make the distant Other of curriculum standards become a player to the Thou of the student learner. The result is not a *It or Thou*, but an *It and Thou*.

However, we need to be more aware of philosophical positioning that roots our pedagogical tools. If we aren't wisely aware, new tools can be used in old ways. Computer word programs, for example, offer me amazing flexibility as a writer. I can write, move chunks of text, delete or save, embed, embellish, and experiment. That said, I remember a time in my life where I used my computer (a tool with amazing capacities) like a traditional typewriter. I wrote drafts on yellow, lined memo pads. Then, I read them over and made corrections. My final step was taking my draft and typing it up on my computer, running spellcheck, proofreading it for errors, and printing it off. My point here is that, just because a tool gives us the potential to perform innovative or transformative acts, it doesn't mean we will always use the tool to do so.

I have concerns that teachers are using formative assessment, a powerful tool, in ways that are potentially causing us to change lanes without changing destinations when it comes to trans-forming our assessment practices. Yes – we now engage formative assessment. However, I suggest that our preoccupation with standards, rather than empathic-Thou judgment, might be

limiting our formative practices. We assess students' work; and we then give them multiple chances and the ability to make multiple changes, to learn and grow through feedback.

Worrisomely, I believe that feedback remains based on standards that we feel students must demonstrate—and those standards are dictated in part by testing.

I believe teachers who engage formative assessment are on the right track, but if we are not wisely aware and question the standards our judgments are based on, then we are simply giving students multiple chances to reach a standard that might not be 'fair.' Further assessment conversations are necessary—and I suggest exploring our writing assessment practices through an empathic-Thou lens could inform our conversations differently, to move away from hegemonic leveling and possibly a greater embracement of diversity, part of the next section.

Assessment as empathy. As a starting point, I suggest a new conceptualization of assessment that is connected to empathy. Rowntree's (1987) commonly cited definition of assessment suggested that assessment is a process of interpreting information about what another knows, understands, or is able to do. He included the idea that, "to some extent or other, [assessment] is an attempt to know that person" (p. 4). If assessment is an attempt to know another, it becomes a relational encounter in the way Buber may have imagined; we have a responsibility to return to the concept of perspective-taking (coming to an empathic-Thou understanding of the Other) discussed in Chapter 4.

An empathic-Thou lens suggests that our default method for writing assessment is connected to Chapter 4's discussion of a self-perspective taking. This mode limits both what we can understand about the writer writing and the powerful learnings a student writer might consider if the fullness of writing as could be engaged. The alternative, other-oriented perspective-taking, might promise to more powerfully engage student writers' knowledge-

building, self-understanding, and world-engagement that is a full possibility of a writer writing. But, this trans-formational shift is important and takes decided effort. As I have come to believe in my own work, here an empathic-Thou framework, philosophically reinforced by Buber's (1923/1996) *I and Thou* might encourage us to trans-form our beliefs and approaches to writing assessment.

I suggest that exploring our assessment practices through an empathic-Thou lens would offer a different perspective from our default. David Boud (1995) agreed. He called for a holistic view of assessment that requires us to look at the total impact of assessment and learning, not simply fragmented parts. According to Boud, this “means we must inevitably look at the profile of assessment as students see it” (p. 5).

What it does: Assessment drives student learning. Whatever assessment *is*, what is clear is that assessment *does* drive student learning. In a seminal text on assessment, Rowntree (1987) stated that, “if we wish to discover the truth about an educational system, we must look to its assessment procedures” (p. 1). Joughin (2009) suggested:

This dictum has been echoed by some of the most prominent researchers on assessment, in recent times. Ramsden, for example, states that ‘from our students’ point of view, assessment always defines the actual curriculum’ (Ramsden, 2003, p. 182); Biggs notes that ‘students learn what they think they will be tested on’ (Biggs, 2003, p. 182); Gibbs asserts that assessment frames learning, creates learning activity and orients all aspects of learning behaviour’ (Gibbs, 2006, p. 23); and Bryan and Clegg begin their work on innovative assessment ... with the unqualified statement that ‘research of the last twenty years provides evidence that students adopt strategic, cue-seeking, tactics in relation to the assessed work’ (Bryan & Cleff, 2006, p. 1). (p. 17)

Assessment, in general, as well as the specific classroom processes of summative and formative assessment, have great power to drive and direct student learning. Powerful tools can have powerful results; thus, it is imperative we question and are explicitly decisive that we are engaging the tool in ethical and productive ways that forward education and help our students.

Pausing for Reflection

Joughin (2009) asserted, “a shift has occurred toward the conceptualization of assessment as the exercise of professional judgment and away from its conceptualisation as a form of quasi measurement” (p. 1). I agree with Joughin’s assertion that a shift is occurring; however, at the same time, this study attempts to draw attention to a few important points. First, an empathic-Thou lens encourages us not to ignore the continuing role (and significant impact) of testing, measurement, and reporting in both classroom and large-scale, governmentally legislated forms of assessments. I am hesitant to agree that a shift away from measurement and toward judgment has fully occurred.

History serves us an important re-minder that originally assessment was firmly rooted in local, teacher designed, subjective assessment. Assessment began as professional judgment. The forces that pulled us away from those historical starting points are still in play. Unless we explicitly recognize some of the theoretical underpinnings and values that drive our practices, I think we will continue to (perhaps unknowingly) reject alternative way of being as teachers of writing, in its fullness of possibilities, and will remain thoughtlessly entrapped by the bonds of a positivistic paradigm that have grounded us in numbers, measurement, and firm objectivity.

Rowntree (2007) noted that “it is easy to get fixated on the trappings and outcomes of assessments—the tests and exams, the questions and marking criteria, the grades, and degree results—and lose sight of what is at the heart of it all (Rowntree, 2007, para 6). Respectfully,

those trappings are impossible to ignore. Because learning is at the heart of assessment and conversations between teacher and student is how learning in writing takes place, we need to be re-minded that we should not fixate on any lesser goals that—in fact—tend to impoverish the way we teach and learn about the potential and power of writers writing.

Rarely does “the heart” drive or guide our educational decision-making. Therefore, although learning is at the heart of it all, an exploration of the trappings and outcomes of assessments might help us understand—rather than lose sight of—what is (and potentially could be) causing some of our challenges in changing our practise. A historical glance suggests our value of the measurement aspect of assessment; an exploration of current day practices reveals we continue to be tethered, if not rooted, to those same values.

I think to my own experiences that reveal these tethers. I have certainly had assessment conversations with other teachers, students, parents, and administrators regarding learning, but many have been about grades.

It’s a Friday morning. Yesterday, a class set of essays was submitted to my inbox. By morning, students have already been stopping me in the hall—asking me if the grades are ready. By class-time, instead of having to stand in the hall—to snag and usher—students are flowing in, forgetting to say good morning before eagerly asking the status of my marking. My desk is swarmed.

By Monday morning, word has spread. The essays are graded and will be handed back. The usual start-of-class hubbub is subdued. Students are ready—eager to receive their papers. There’s nervous anticipation. After a few minutes of introductory blather, I can tell no one is listening. Their eyes flit to the stack of ‘graded’ essays, ready to be returned. They attempt polite engagement but the hypnotic lure is too much. The stack is a black hole. Students are immune from its gravity. I give up and return the papers.

There is a flurry of flipping past pages of careful comments and detailed feedback—to the rubric stapled to the back page. I hold my breath, and count... do I even reach 20? A student voice rises above the classroom mummer, “What was the highest mark?”²³

In each of the three school districts—and the four different schools I worked in—I recollect times when I felt pressured to justify a student’s ‘grade’ on an assignment; articulate the

²³ Personal anecdote: Writing as inquiry

reason I had assigned classroom grades the way I had; and explain the way my grades correlated to government exams. Implicitly, my “effectiveness” as a teacher was entwined in the mix.

It was 1996. The first school I worked at was a small charter school. I once wrote a story about my experience there; I called it “Third Rock from the Sun.” When I went for my interview, I knew that the school was operating under an English as a Second Language charter; what I didn’t know—until I strutted out of my car in a knee-length pencil skirt and entered a hallway filled with girls conservatively cloaked in hijabs—was that it served a primarily Muslim population. That was the first (of many) experiences that made me realize I was the alien and strangely out of place in my own land. It was also the start of a wonderfully tumultuous, difficult, and inspiring learning curve, personally and professionally.

When I began, the school was in its first year of operation. The continuation of the charter itself was dependent on students meeting certain standards on the grades three, six, and nine provincial achievement tests. I was a new teacher, with a conditional contract, teaching Grade 9 English Language Arts—in a school in which the charter itself was language focused. I felt immense pressure, directly and indirectly, for my students to perform well.

The focus of our entire scholastic year, and professional conversations, centered around the students’ performance on these tests. In a highly-contentious directive, we were instructed to assign significant weight to the provincial exams as part of our summative course mark. The stated rationale was that, if we didn’t, students would not take the exams seriously and the charter would be in danger.

Not only was the entire school’s evaluation of success related to the one high stakes test, the students’ summative course grades were significantly impacted by that test as well... a site-based, decision at that. I cringe still – thinking of those ESL students and the pressure they must have felt to perform on that test.²⁴

Granted, some of my early experiences are over 20 years ago. Some could argue that pedagogical decision-making has changed significantly since then. Certainly, formative assessment (or assessment for learning) was a burgeoning field 20 years ago; times do change. However, not all my assessment experiences that link the assessment to Rowntree’s trappings are twenty years old.

I used to work at a very large school in Calgary—in a very large ELA department. At one point, there were 16 of us in our department alone. In one of the first department meetings of the term, we were handed a spreadsheet that compared our course assigned grades to the provincial exam mark. We were told that we would have a few days to prepare, but that each of us was to be called into a formal conversation with the school administrators to discuss the

²⁴ Personal reflection: Writing as inquiry

correlation (or lack-thereof) between our classroom assigned grades and the diploma exam grades.

For years, I remember the pressure for those marks to be related—and the numbers (as representation of the learning) was the focus. Thankfully, with rise of formative assessment and belief that students should have multiple chances—with support—to demonstrate their learning in the classroom, we began to be able to better justify and provide rationale for why the classroom and exam mark should not necessarily be correlated. Slowly the expectation to do so eroded as well. However, from my experience, the focus on the exam did not.²⁵

It would be nice if the focus on “tests and exams, the questions and marking criteria, the grades and results” (Rowntree, 2007, para 6) were things of the past. However, even recent teaching experiences suggest otherwise. Admittedly, I have not been teaching in a high school classroom for six years; that said, I believe I stay relatively connected to my practitioner roots through my work teaching a graduate cohort of practicing teachers here in the Comox Valley—some of whom are also high school English teachers. I also teach another cohort on campus at Vancouver Island University. It has been recent experiences with this group that has revealed continuing tethers and tendencies to reduce learning to Rowntree’s “trappings.”

In this case, surprisingly, it has been the students who desire a connection to these familiar trappings. The past two years I have been experimenting with a course based entirely on formative assessment, with no grades (only feedback) attached until a—collaboratively determined—summative grade. I have witnessed confusion, concern, and consternation. Students are so used to associating learning with grades that they flounder without marks. Instead of settling into the learning and the feedback, they desire to know where they are “at” – whatever that means to them.

Therefore, being aware of these values, questioning them, and asking how they are influencing classroom practices remains important. Changing practice requires us to disrupt foundations upon which assessments are developed and implemented. There is power and

²⁵ Personal reflection: Writing as inquiry

importance in naming the theoretical underpinnings and coinciding values that root our education practices.

Years ago, it stopped being common practice to place the class average on report cards; however, that information was regularly requested in learning conferences with students and parents. I became accustomed to telling parents that the grades represented a student's ability to demonstrate the course outcomes and had nothing to do with the learning of other students; meanwhile, the grades of diplomas continue(d) to be used to sort and rank students, determine or deny access to programs, and evaluate and rate schools in ways that were publicly reported.

Furthermore, my last few years as a public-school teacher allowed me to observe parental dismay and rejection of an attempt to change to outcomes based reporting. I was baffled that parental criticisms suggested that the in-depth description of the students' strengths and areas of growth, comments that revealed how teachers 'understand' their students, failed to inform them because the reports were lacking a grade. I hear similar concerns now, as a parent, from other parents.²⁶

There is also essential importance in grappling with a conceptualization that engages assessment as a form of professional judgment versus quasi measurement because it also begs us to carefully make judgments that question if we are “measuring” the correct things. This question is more than a question of validity. If we dig deeper, it forces us to ask – in our classroom practice, what those “judgments” are founded upon. According to whom? According to what? And, what are the tacit values and power structures that might be implicitly guiding those judgments? These are important questions. If our assessment practices are to be more wisely-decided, these wonderings must also accompany a shift from a measurement to a judgment model.

Additionally, what is inherent in our educational reality and what we must recognize and speak about is the powerful position teachers hold. Rowntree (2007) directly stated that assessment conversations must call attention to the fact that “teachers are in a position to reward students according to how far they approve of what they say and do – whereas students have no reciprocal powers” (para. 7). I am aware of the reality of schools. Schools are formalized

²⁶ Personal reflection: Writing as inquiry

institutions that demand teachers to be more than a wise mentor who guides and encourages. Every province has documented official legal responsibilities that articulate both instruction and assessment (in terms of judgment and reported evaluation) as part of teachers' roles. I am not trying to avoid the responsibilities that come with assessment. Rather, I am calling attention to the ways that entrenched assessment practices might be founded on societal tendencies to value objectivity, allowing us a feeling of safer distance to hold this power.

I remember working as an AISI lead; I was part of a team sent to an assessment conference in another province because our school had performed “poorly” on the diploma exams. There was significant irony inherent in being sent to listen to Thomas Guskey, advocating how assessment could be useful for both teacher and students, and Douglas Reeves, proposing we replace the bell curve, when our attendance there was a result of a government assessment in which our school had failed at meeting the bell curve.²⁷

Finally, although we can (and should) question the role of testing and large-scale assessments, we have tremendous power in our classrooms to change our own practices and ways of assessing students. These changes can impact the way we assess student writing. This is where the greatest power of assessment lies and where an empathic-Thou lens can play a powerful role. Relationality, rupture, and re-minding suggests a value in *being* differently—of facilitating and valuing interactions that encourage these “dialectically related aspects of human understanding” (Moules, et al., 2015, p. 12)—significantly impacting what we *do* in terms of our pedagogical practice.

Transitioning Comment

This chapter has explored assessment, including its (a) history, its (b) connection to power, and (c) its place in the classroom and brings “Part 2: The Powers at Play” to a close. The next section of the study, “Part Three: An Empathic-Thou Lens on Writing Assessment” focuses more specifically on the ELA classroom and explores borders that join empathy, writing and

²⁷ Personal reflection: Writing as inquiry

assessment. In this final section, the empathic-Thou lens continues to inform my study, and empathy (as a process and possibility) is also engaged separately, to offer alternative approaches to ELA assessment practices.

PART 3: AN EMPATHIC-THOU LENS ON WRITING ASSESSMENT

Chapter 7: Empathy and the Writing Classroom

I want you to remember who I am when you read my writing. Could you try to help me out here, be on my side and work with me to figure out what I am saying instead of picking it apart? I wish you could act like an ally instead of being difficult. This is hard for me; I am not as good at this as you are. I don't have the words, the life experience, or the confidence to write like you would write. I come from a different place.

Although you have never said it, I know you believe in gay rights and feminism. Well, I go to church. It is my community. I love it, and it has guided me. I know you would rather I write about abortion from a liberal perspective, but it is not what I have been raised to believe. I am not even allowed to believe it, even if I wanted to entertain the thought...

Does that make me wrong and you right? Does it make my points shallow and superficial because I am sixteen and think about the world differently? What would you say to me if I were writing from a different perspective? Would you say different things to me if you agreed with my ideas?²⁸

Roadmap Reminder

This chapter begins to connect the three concepts I explored separately in the last section. First, I explore the connection between empathy and composition (writing) studies. I (a) engage a short review of literature that reveals empathy's historical role in writing studies, as well as (b) summarize ways that composition theorists have suggested empathy might inform the teaching of writing. Next, I join writing and assessment and (c) explore the guiding documents that inform our ELA writing assessment practices. Finally, I (d) engage the literature and my own experiences through an empathic-Thou lens and explore a need for important re-minding.

In this chapter, empathy is engaged as both a *tool* (used to inform specific classroom practice), as well as a continuing empathic-Thou *lens* (that reveals insights about our pedagogical beliefs and choices).

Empathy *in* Rhetorical and Composition Studies.

As I suggested previously, programs of study for senior high school 'English' courses are commonly rooted in the fields of composition and rhetoric. These programs of study join

²⁸ Fictive scenario: Writing as inquiry

rhetoric—drawing on a history of the study of persuasion (that began with Aristotle), with a newer field of composition that involves the pedagogy of writing. Within this joint field, empathy has played a historic role. Historically, Aristotelian Rhetoric encouraged an understanding of the influence and power of emotions. Originally, this powerful and difficult-to-name concept focused on what a speaker should do in oration; it was also used for *winning* a logically constructed argument, not for incurring deeper understanding in communication.

By the 1970s, the power and effect of empathy was specifically being explored in the field of composition and rhetoric. Within this discipline, an epistemological shift was on the horizon, one that involved exploring “alternatives to the ‘argument as war’ metaphor” and, instead, “negotiated inquiry into common grounds for belief” (Brent, 1996, n.p.). Much of this shift was explored and actualized using the work of psychologist Carl Rogers.

Carl Rogers (1902-1987) believed that individuals could achieve their goals, aspirations, and desires, and that the driving motive behind individuals was to self-actualize. Rogers’ work explored the concept that, “for people to ‘grow,’ they need an environment that provides them with genuineness (openness and self-disclosure), acceptance (being seen with unconditional positive regard), and empathy (being listened to and understood)” (McLeod, 2007, n.p.). In the field of composition theory, Young, Becker, and Pike (1970) adopted Rogers’ ideas and developed a new form of rhetoric—the Rogerian Argument—serving to bring the concept of empathy to the foreground.

Young, Becker, and Pike (1970) adopted Rogers’ therapeutic strategies and applied them to written communication, suggesting that (1) writers must first demonstrate that the audience’s position is understood and, (2) only after a fully considered statement of the audience’s viewpoint, assume the audience might be willing to consider alternative perspectives. According

to Bator (1996), the Rogerian writer “seeks to establish shared grounds of communication ... pointing out plausible circumstances under which both the writer’s and reader’s positions could be valid” (p. 420). Central to the concept of a Rogerian encounter is the belief that the communicative exchange will result in both parties changing.

Although some—such as Lunsford (1979)—have disputed the distinction between Aristotelian and Rogerian rhetoric, others (Bator, 1980; Brent, 1996) reinforce the fundamental differences in approach. Unlike Aristotelian rhetoric, Rogerian rhetoric is based on the premise that logical persuasion will not work on individuals who feel their opinions are explained away; they will not shift their points of view—and perhaps will not even be open to hearing an alternate view. Specifically, if we consider our classrooms, our students will shut down if they feel they are not listened to, feel their ideas are debunked, or feel unaccepted as people. And, it would follow that those who are beginning to explore meaty topics through writing, where they either feel vulnerable or uncertain, might be especially susceptible.

If we fast-forward to modern day, evidence of both Aristotelian (empathy for gain) and Rogerian (empathy for shared understanding) ideas are present in teaching students to write more effectively. In a doctoral dissertation that explores the role of empathy in composition studies, Janet Lucas (2012) suggested that today’s composition teachers often “call on student writers to anticipate the needs and concerns of the readers” (p. 36). However, playing with Lucas’ phrase, I assert an equal importance for *teachers* to anticipate the needs and the concerns of their *students*.

Nathaniel Teich has also explored empathy specific to writing in the classroom; Teich (1994) described empathy as a process that involves “tuning our emotions to the thoughts and

feelings of other individuals as well as relationally understanding and articulating those thoughts and feelings” (p. 145).

Empathy and the Effective Teaching of Writing

The combined ideas of Susan McLeod (1995, 1997), Mina Shaughnessy (1976), Peter Elbow (1993, 2000), Nathaniel Teich (1994, 2008-2009), and Maxine Hairston (1982) suggested that an empathic stance relates to effective teaching in three key areas: (a) teacher expectations, (b) liking and believing, and (c) being careful. These factors lead to a logical consideration of how empathy might also differently inform our classroom writing assessment practices and encourage a conceptualization of assessment as empathic-Thou judgment and response (engaged in Chapter 9).

Teacher expectations. Teachers’ attitudes and beliefs impact student performance. McLeod (1995, 1997) highlighted the impact of teacher expectations in the writing classroom. Citing the research of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968), McLeod introduced readers to the now classic “Pygmalion Effect” research findings that suggest positive teacher expectations positively impact student achievement. What is more persuasive (and worrisome) is research regarding the effect of negative teacher expectations. McLeod suggested, “while teacher expectancies do have an effect on students, the effect is more likely to be negative than positive [and] a teacher’s low expectancies can have what researchers have termed a Golem Effect, lowering students own expectations for themselves” (p. 372).

McLeod (1995, 1997) identified empathy as the most effective way one can prevent the “Golem Effect” and encourage the “Pygmalion Effect.” Just as Wilson and Fitzgerald (2012) asserted the importance of empathy between individuals in a writing tutorial, McLeod asserted the importance of empathic exchanges in the classroom. That said, an empathic stance could be

practiced beyond exchanges in face-to-face interactions. Research suggests that a teacher's ability to take a more empathic perspective when responding to students in person is crucial; research also suggests an empathic stance when responding to students' writing.

Liking and believing. The work of Mina Shaughnessy (1976), Peter Elbow (1993, 2000), and Nathaniel Teich (2008-2009) supported the importance of engaging an empathic stance through positioning oneself on the side of a writing student. Elbow's (1993) word for this empathic stance is *liking*. He stated, simply and persuasively, "good writing teachers like student writing (and like students) [G]ood teachers see only what is potentially good, they get a kick out of mere possibility—and they encourage it" (p. 200). This statement resonates with Mina Shaughnessy's (1976) earlier call for teachers to "sound the depths" (p. 236), encouragement for teachers to look past surface errors, allowing us to be empathically positioned to see beyond such distractions, to "sniff out"—as Elbow (1993) says—student potential (p. 202).

Furthermore, like McLeod (1995, 1997), who grappled with a growing concern over teacher *disbeliefs* and beliefs, Elbow (2000) articulated the importance of teachers playing the *believing game*, "a more roundabout route toward testing [ideas]: searching out connecting ideas and seeking strengths in them—instead of looking directly for weaknesses" (p. 78). Among others, Elbow's work was explored in depth by Nathaniel Teich (2008-2009), who described how Elbow's "believing game can function as a profoundly ethical stance within a larger conceptual framework of what I have called for some years 'the rhetoric of empathy'" (p. 12).

Maxine Hairston's (1982) work suggested that Rogerian communication could be used to help teachers understand the importance of communicating with students in non-threatening ways. Hairston articulated her empathic realization that few students write well out of fear.

Thus, she has adopted Rogers' theories not only to teach her students to become better rhetoricians, but to create a classroom atmosphere more conducive to writing.

Being careful. Arguing for the seven of principles of Rogerian communication, Hairston (1982) engaged an empathic stance in the teaching of writing. According to Hairston, this stance: (a) relaxed the rule- governed approach that leads writing teachers to believe that their primary function is to catch mistakes; (b) reduced threat by reducing criticism; (c) avoided problems of preconceptions by abandoning modelling in form and process—modelling that leads to conformity; (d) suspended judgment by abandoning early draft grading; (e) demonstrated an understanding of another's point of view through empathic exchanges; (f) avoided strong statements of teacher opinion; and (g) adopted neutral—versus biased—language.

These choices align with Teich's (1994) description of empathy; they encouraged teachers to attend to the thoughts and feelings of students, as well as relationally understanding and articulating those feelings. Hairston (1982) hoped these choices would enable students to “develop as writers into the equivalent of what Rogers calls the fully-functioning person; that is, an autonomous and creative writer who functions well in a variety of writing situations, making appropriate responses to each” (p. 52).

However, once empathy has been practiced to encourage, nurture, and support our students to write ‘better,’ does empathy currently play a role in the assessment of the writing that they produce?

The *Conference on College Composition and Communication* (CCCC), the world's largest professional organization that researches composition, and *The National Council of Teachers of English* (NCTE) and the *Council of Writing Program Administrators* (WPA), created position statements and a white paper on writing assessment. Although directed toward

assessment at a post-secondary level, the positions, values, and assumptions on writing assessment are equally applicable to a secondary setting and serve as a logical and legitimated guide to our practice. It is clear the organizations advocate valid, appropriate, reliable, and fair uses of assessment. We also see practices and principles that are student-centered and based on language-learning (versus testing) research. My reading and research leads me to believe an empathic stance is embedded in the articulated positions.

Positions on Writing Assessment

The CCCC (2014) prepared a position statement on writing assessment, identifying the general principles that undergird writing assessment:

Assessments of written literacy should be designed and evaluated by well informed current or future teachers of the students being assessed, for purposes clearly understood by all the participants; should elicit from student writers a variety of pieces, preferably over a substantial period of time; should encourage and reinforce good teaching practices; and should be solidly grounded in the latest research on language learning as well as accepted best assessment practices. (para. 3)

The organization also asserted a position that articulated specific guiding principles for assessment.

A summary of these guidelines include:

1. Writing assessment is useful primarily as a means of improving teaching and learning. The primary purpose of any assessment should govern its design, its implementation, and the generation and dissemination of its results. As a result:
 - A. Best assessment practice is informed by pedagogical and curricular goals, which are in turn formatively affected by the assessment.

- B. Best assessment practice is undertaken in response to local goals, not external pressures.
 - C. Best assessment practice provides regular professional development opportunities.
2. Writing is by definition social. Learning to write entails learning to accomplish a range of purposes for a range of audiences in a range of settings. As a result:
- A. Best assessment practice engages students in contextualized, meaningful writing.
 - B. Best assessment practice supports and harmonizes with what practice and research have demonstrated to be effective ways of teaching writing.
 - C. Best assessment practice is direct assessment by human readers.
3. Any individual's writing ability is a sum of a variety of skills employed in a diversity of contexts, and individual ability fluctuates unevenly among these varieties. As a result:
- A. Best assessment practice uses multiple measures.
 - B. Best assessment practice respects language variety and diversity and assesses writing on the basis of effectiveness for readers, acknowledging that as purposes vary, criteria will as well.
 - C. Best assessment practice includes assessment by peers, instructors, and the student writer himself or herself.
4. Perceptions of writing are shaped by the methods and criteria used to assess writing. As a result:

- A. The methods and criteria readers use to assess writing should be locally developed, deriving from the particular context and purposes for the writing being assessed.
 - B. Best assessment practice clearly communicates what is valued and expected, and does not distort the nature of writing or writing practices. If ability to compose for various audiences is valued, then an assessment will assess this capability.
 - C. Best assessment practice enables students to demonstrate what they do well in writing.
5. Assessment programs should be solidly grounded in the latest research on learning, writing, and assessment. As a result:
- A. Best assessment practice results from careful consideration of the costs and benefits of the range of available approaches.
 - B. Best assessment practice is continually under review and subject to change by well-informed faculty, administrators, and legislators. (CCCC, 2014, para 4-24)²⁹

The NCTE-WPA White Paper reinforces similar principles and guidelines. This statement articulates general agreement on the following areas: (a) the connections among language literacy and writing assessment; (b) the principles of effective writing assessment; (c) the appropriate, fair, and valid use of writing assessment; and, (d) the role and importance of reliability on writing assessment.³⁰

The guiding principles of both documents—agreed upon by three influential organizations—share common points of emphasis. First, each document reaffirms the importance of assessments that are “highly contextual, and adapted or modified in accordance

²⁹ For access to complete CCCC Position Statement:
<http://www.ncte.org/cccc/resources/positions/writingassessment>

³⁰ For access to complete NCTE-WPA White Paper:
<http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Positions/WPAwritingassessment.pdf>

with local needs, issues, purposes, and concerns of stakeholders” (NCTE-WPA, n.d., para 3); an assertion, which is echoed by the CCCC (2014) position that declared “the best assessment for any group of students must be locally determined and may well be locally designed” (4.A).

Additionally, the concept of diversity is emphasized in both documents as well; engaging diversity includes sensitivity to language variance, cultural factors, and recognizing that literacy is “socially contextualized and socially constructed, evolving as people, exigency, context and other factors change” (NCTE-WPA, n.d., para 7). It is possible and likely that our students’ values, competencies, and experiences can conflict with what they are taught or told to value in school; therefore, writing assessment must “account for these contextual and social elements of writing pedagogy and literacy” (para 7). Furthermore, it emphasizes “the very nature of writing as complex and context-rich interaction between people” (CCCC, 2014, 2.C). Assessment that simplifies writing can “mislead writers to focus more on structure and grammar than on what they are saying by using a given structure and style” (2.C); effective writing assessment goes beyond grammatical and surface level errors and engages rhetorical and stylistic choices. Finally, a key assertion is that writing assessment should engage multiple measures—and multiple perspectives—to make decisions about teaching and learning.

But if we explore our actual classroom *practices* (versus organizational positions) through an empathic-Thou lens, are our classroom practices following the guidelines that are suggested? This is what is stated we should be doing. But, is this what is happening? In what measure are these guidelines being followed?

Pausing for Reflection

As I engaged this body of research, I started to worry that I was exploring yesterday’s news. The more I read, the more straightforward it seemed. Aren’t we *already* doing these

things in our classroom and approaching response and assessment in this way? I know at the University of Alberta we are encouraging pre-service ELA teachers to engage methods that address the ideas in those guidelines. Furthermore, the students' 'methods' text, *Bridging English* by Milner, Milner, and Mitchell (2012), has two entire chapters (pp. 331-389) dedicated to writing instruction that aligns to those guidelines.

Maybe we have already heeded the position statement of the CCCC (2014), the NCTE-WPA (n.d.) White Pages. Perhaps we have applied the ideas of Elbow, Hairston, and the like—and reformed our practice. I began to worry that I was arriving hours late to a party that was already in full swing; maybe everyone was already in the groove, feeling the rhythm.

However, my empathic-Thou lens encouraged me to take pause. Instead of fretting about being the bearer of old news, I am encouraged to wonder how teachers might still be drawn into traditional dances, moving to familiar rhythms and established beats.

I finally manage to carve out an afternoon. Unlike some of my colleagues who transition quickly from one activity to the next, utilizing snippets and free minutes to pick away at a class set bit-by-bit, I need a solid chunk of time. It's not always possible, but I prefer to complete an entire set of assignments in one sitting.

I settle in. I am only a few papers into my marathon when I become aware of sighs breaking the silence. They are my own. Before an hour is up, I find myself barging into the main house. Before I am even at the threshold of husband's work nook, I've already started complaining.

*"Seriously Jim. Seriously! The entire class had every chance possible to clean up their work before this was due. They even had access to the writing tutor. Anyone who wanted to submit the work to Morag—before it crossed my desk—was given an extension. And, we just did an APA workshop. You should seeeee these papers. Why is it that I care more than they do? It's their work! I don't get it. Simple things. Like, how about just putting a darn space after a period? Or using a capital letter—even once in a while. Ugh."*³¹

Although my research topic and my empathic-Thou lens should serve as a constant reminder of who I want to be—and how I want to behave as a teacher and human being—I still catch myself. I find myself bothered by what I interpret as laziness or inattention to the work,

³¹ Narrative reflection: Writing as inquiry

and exhausted by second language students who, through no fault of their own, struggle with clarity and conventions. My focus can be siphoned into one specific direction; one small part of what I should be providing feedback on. My attention can easily be tugged toward error correction, my assessment no longer a full—or fair—engagement. These old patterns have been deeply ingrained. Furthermore, although it is acceptable to voluntarily share specific anecdotes of my own professional pitfalls, I would suggest I am not alone.

Sometimes it is sheer exhaustion that leads teachers astray. Sometimes it is our best intentions—the desire to give the student the skills they need *to go somewhere*—that drag our attention, focus, and feedback toward error correction. We want our students to experience success in their school work and in their lives; and, we believe that “good” writing is one key to improving their potential success. However, even good intentions can result in moments of temporary insanity—as if ‘bad English’ rips away teachers’ better judgment, resulting in us channeling some terrible grammar god, flaying student papers with red pens (or multi-colored “track changes”). And I believe, from my own experience, this temporary insanity can strike any of us—even the very best of us.

Many years of practitioner-based experiences (that have included teaching in the classroom, acting as a curriculum leader of a humanities department, and working at-elbow with teachers in the role of an instructional coach) have led me to believe teachers’ collective stories riff similar themes. I have witnessed common exclamations running the “usual gamut,” voicing irritation over the poor grammar and *bad English* these days—the type of “bad English” that Elbow (1999) explored in “Inviting the Mother Tongue.”

Admittedly, when teachers get together, we vent. It seems we share stories of fights we lost more than battles we won; something about sympathetic company encourages us to revel in

story-ing the mire in the trenches. The challenges. The disappointments. Although these stories may be false bravado—perhaps necessary catharsis—they *also* reveal (and reinforce) existing attitudes that shape us to doubt rather than believe, and to look for gaps rather than strengths. Our students cannot write well. Surprise-surprise, but that is why they need us teachers—right?

This pause for reflection re-minds me that some of teachers' self-described expectations of student writing and articulated gut-responses to encountering errors suggests we may not be engaging empathically. An empathic-Thou lens steers us toward Mina Shaunessay's (1977) argument found in *Errors and Expectations*—an argument that suggests teachers ought to approach errors made by “basic writers” in a more positive light, remembering that developing writers often have not had exposure to textual models and experiences that more developed writers have had. Therefore, they are not as adept with the conventions more experienced student writers have mastered. Furthermore, Shaunessay suggested that many errors developing writers make result from an over application of “rules” as they are experimenting with, in an effort to become more polished, proficient writers. This process parallels a child learning to speak.

Nor are my examples limited to stories about focusing on bad grammar and poor punctuation. Encountering student ideas that severely challenge one's paradigm poses a different challenge. For years, with the best intentions, I assigned papers that encouraged students to engage meaty, contentious issues—topics that, theoretically, had enough heat to drag the most reluctant student through the writing process. I wanted my students to explore content that allowed their passions to drive them through the ruts and quagmires they would inevitably encounter as they struggled to write.

Hindsight reveals a fault in assigning that type of work. Although I had hoped the topics would drive my students forward, an empathic-Thou lens re-minds me I demanded them to reveal deeply held convictions; convictions that students' limited life experience might have made difficult to engage in a complex or mature way. The assignment was not the only problem; an empathic-Thou lens also reveals my pedagogical shortcomings regarding how I might have been assessing students' work that dealt with contentious, passion-filled topics—especially if their views conflicted with mine. Sadly, I now realize that these expectations and responses might have impacted their performance and learning.

Honest reflection exposed my own pattern; when the work challenged my own paradigm, I tried to take a step back, to gain perspective that “distance” might offer. However, there might be strength in a different approach. Engaging student work distantly—instead of relationally—can result in barriers to communication and student learning. It can inadvertently position teachers against students, creating dynamics where teachers have expectations that students must prove and persuade, requiring students to hope for reluctant acquiescence from teachers who may be positioned neutrally, at best.

Finally, let's not ignore the elephant in the room—standardized writing assessment. I reflect on my own experiences evaluating diploma exams, arguably the epitomic example of constructed ‘objectivity’ in evaluative practice—piles of purple booklets, assessed by how well they aligned to the standards. A process that forces markers to translate students' holistic written work into separate—numerically assessed—writing traits, penciled in to evaluative scantron bubble sheets.

The previous chapters have articulated my own experience of ways that standardized assessment drives instruction, especially when “schools are ranked in the media each year based

on how well students have performed on these tests... [and] school administrators encourage teachers to examine test results and provide plans for how they will improve in the coming year. This also drives teachers to put a significant emphasis on preparing students for the test” (Slomp, Graves, & Broad, 2014, p. 544). But what happens when the test itself reflects a “radically narrow set of writing values” (p. 544) that force students to “write first-draft answers to two unfamiliar questions in unrealistically tight timeframes?” (p. 544), something that I explore in-depth in the next chapters.

We need to be re-minded about the importance of revisiting conversations regarding how assessment tools drive practice; these tools affect our assessment choices but they also affect the way writing is conceptualized in the classroom. An empathic-Thou lens re-minds me about the importance of reconciling our commitment to teach and value writing in a manner that prepares students for life, with our responsibility to prepare students for the test. An empathic-Thou lens re-minds me to question if we have fallen unwittingly into reinforcing traditional forms of writing, and are focusing on using writing for traditional purposes. Is our classroom writing encouraging students to seize and gain power, emancipating and allowing them to find their voices? Or is our classroom writing an example of a legitimate manner of using the legitimate culture?

These personal examples realign me—mid-stride—to the importance of this topic.

Transitioning Comment

This chapter began to explore places where the three initial core concepts overlapped in the context of the writing classroom. My personal experience suggested that there seems to be a knowing-doing gap between what the literature tells us is good practice, what our guidelines suggest we do—and what might be happening.

The next chapter explores some of the influences that might be tugging our assessment judgment in other directions.

Chapter 8: Influences on Teacher Judgment in Writing Assessment

I should pin the Hillegas scale, Katherine thought, at their eye level. But then she remembered that these were high-school juniors, not the elementary school children she was used to teaching. Her students were nearly as tall as she.

...The Hillegas scale would be useful for its defined writing specimens and for its implicit lessons: classify and follow through; describe vividly; avoid error; and offend no one. (Science, she mused, tells us that subjectivity is to be avoided. Politics tells us that the voice of the many is superior in judgment to the few. And never, ever, show weakness in navigating these two worlds. There were lessons here for all.)

It was 1913, and Katherine knew what there was to know as she prepared to pin the scale on the wall of her classroom.³²

Roadmap Reminder

This chapter continues the exploration of writing assessment that began in the previous chapter. Asserting that understanding the history is a necessary component to understanding our present, the history of writing assessment is engaged, revealing a powerful focus on reliability and fairness. In an important pause for reflection, an empathic-Thou lens reveals the ways reliability and fairness have negatively impacted my own teacher-judgment and pedagogical choices, leading me to advocate for subjectivity to play a greater role in writing assessment.

History of Writing Assessment

Huot (2002) asserted that “writing assessment is a complex historical subject because it is an area that remains multidisciplinary, drawing scholars and interest from across disciplines and fields” (p. 32). Research and work in this specialty field, as well as professional organizations such as the CCCC, WPA, and NCTE, inform and guide our practices as Canadian classroom English Language Arts teachers. Within those guiding fields and organizations, the concepts of

³² Excerpt from Elliot, 2005, pp. x111-xvii

validity and reliability have driven writing assessment (Elliot & Perelman, 2012; Huot 2002; Kelly-Riley & Whitehaus, 2016; Yancey, 1999a, 1999b; White, 1993; Williamson & Huot, 2000). I suggest epistemological and theoretical underpinnings that continue to push the field of writing assessment towards validity and reliability are also driving our classroom judgments and decision-making. Therefore, if we are to ‘re-mind’ ourselves, we must work explicitly to shift what is compelling our classroom judgments and the way we respond to those judgments.

Reliability and Validity Driving Judgment

Kathleen Yancey’s (1999a) “Looking Back as we Look Forward: Historicizing Writing Assessment” and Edward White’s (1993) retrospective essay titled “Holistic Scoring, Past Triumphs, Future Challenges” have both suggested that writing assessment can be told as a 50-year story in which the college English and composition teachers have challenged educational (psychometric) testing experts. Within that story, Yancey (1999b) used a metaphor to suggest that changes have occurred in overlapping waves and that writing assessment reform could be understood through the change in *method* of assessment, but she also suggested alternative ways of understanding that same history. The waves can be thought of as a “movement into the classroom: multiple choice tests standing outside of and apart from the classroom have become the portfolios composed within” (p. 484). Or, alternatively, Yancey suggested that one could conceptualize the history of writing assessment in terms of the twin defining concepts – validity and reliability. Yancey stated, “[s]een through this conceptual lens, as Brian Huot suggested, writing assessment’s recent history is the story of back-and-forth shifts between the concepts, with the first one dominating the field, then another, now both” (p. 484).

The first wave. In Yancey’s (1999a, 199b) account, the first wave began around 1959, also the time the influential *College Composition and Communication* journal formed. In those

early days, Yancey suggested that assessment took the form of objective tests. During this period, writing was assessed through indirect means; the content of the multiple-choice tests that dominated practice included testing usage, vocabulary, and grammar. During these early years, writing assessment research didn't question "why testing didn't include writing samples more often and why people who knew well how to read and value texts would turn to test history when it came time read and evaluate student texts" (p. 485). Since the 1960's, shifts have happened in the field of writing assessment; however, I believe some important questions have not trickled down into the high school classrooms.

The second wave. According to Yancey (1999a, 199b), the second wave of writing assessment began around the 1970's. This wave changed the method of assessment and reintroduced direct measurements of student writing in the form of essays. It was this era that White (1993) began his historical description. In the 1970's, Edward White, among others, was instrumental in initiating an assessment shift, seeking a way for testing to come under the control of teachers through the creation of a writing test that met psychometric reliability requirements. These classroom-implemented essays met those standards through "explicit procedures: (1) using writing prompts that directed students; (2) selecting "anchor" papers and scoring guides that directed teacher-readers who rated; (3) devising methods of calculating "acceptable" agreement" (Yancey, 1999b, p. 490).

The reintroduction of direct writing samples was celebrated by English teachers, who had long asserted that writing could not be assessed through indirect means. Furthermore, White (1993) believed that the change directly benefited teachers. White suggested that the new assessment procedure empowered teachers because it offered a method of scoring student writing that was (back) under the control of the teachers versus testing companies; holistic scoring was

done on-campus in faculty-run scoring sessions. Huot (2002) described White's belief that congenial and collaborative grading experience benefited teachers; additionally, White believed that the necessary training and grading procedures this new method of testing required shaped teacher practice by "provid[ing] them with a model for assignment construction, fair grading practices, and the articulation of clear course goals" (Huot, 2002, p. 32).

Huot (2002), however, provided a cautionary tale. Although he acknowledged the victory won by teachers to reintroduce direct writing samples for testing purposes, he noted that the breakthrough was a result of the decades of research by the educational measurement community who had long criticized the unreliability of direct writing samples due to poor interrater reliability. The development of holistic scoring was:

devised to ensure reliable scoring among independent readers, since reliability as a 'necessary but insufficient condition for validity' (Cherry and Meyer 1993, 110) is a cornerstone of traditional measurement that spawned multiple choice tests and the entire testing culture and mentality that has become such an important part of current ideas about education. Although the advent of holistic scoring permitted student writing to once again be part of the tests in English and writing, we must not lose sight of the fact that holistic scoring is a product of the same thinking that produced the indirect use of tests of grammar, usage and mechanics. That is, like multiple choice tests, holistic scoring was developed to produce reliable scores. (p. 24)

Huot's caution directs readers to question the roles of reliability and validity. Yancey (1999b) asserted that reliability was the focus in the first wave of assessment, and that validity—defining it as "measuring what you intend to measure" (p. 487) was the focus of the second wave, agreed upon by White (1993). However, Huot (2002) questioned their findings; he

suggested that a focal shift to validity is not supported in the assessment literature of the time, and that reliability continued to dominate research and scholarship.

The third wave. Yancey (1999a, 1999b) suggested the third wave that began around 1986 involved the use of portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment was built on the belief that it was a method of assessment that would offer greater validity. Unlike a single direct sample in a test situation, portfolio assessment offered an ability to demonstrate different genres and multiple texts and connection to the classroom writing environment; Yancey (1999b) suggested this wave was also a shift to a focus on teacher practice.

When writing assessment is located within practice, its validity is enhanced, to be sure. But equally important, it reflects back to us that practice, the assumptions undergirding it, the discrepancy between what it is that we say we value and what we enact. It helps us understand, critique and enhance our own practice, in other words, because of its location—in practice—and because it makes that practice visible and thus accessible to change. (p. 494)

I wholeheartedly agree with Yancey's assertions. But what if we are not aware of the assumptions undergirding our practice, nor the full implications that those values have on our pedagogical choices?

Again, Huot (2002) offered readers a cautionary account, asserting that the transformative power of portfolios is dependent on our ability to be re-minded of the theoretical framework that drive our values and our practices. Huot suggested:

the way portfolios are used is a key feature for harnessing their potential. For example, it is possible to use portfolios within the same theoretical framework that underlies testing and grading by assigning separate numbers or letters or individual papers within a

portfolio. This is a common practice because while it is relatively easy to switch to portfolios, it is much more difficult to alter the assumptions behind out practices. (p. 73)

In terms of my own experience using portfolios in the ELA classroom, I admit I was guilty of the lack of awareness that Huot (2002) suggested. Believing I was engaging progressive assessment strategies, I clearly remember engaging portfolio assessment for units of study in my classes. In retrospect, I realized that the portfolios inadvertently became a different tool that performed the same task as my other summative writing assessments. My own classroom practice involved students choosing and reflecting on portfolio pieces. Once identified, I ultimately assessed those pieces with the same (or similar) rubrics that I used to assess other single-sample writing assignments.

What took me even longer to realize was *why* I made those decisions. I had little awareness of the influence of the theoretical frameworks linked to testing and grading that also swayed me to believe that portfolio assessment should be engaged in the same manner. I switched method, without calling my assumptions into question and, in reality, it changed very little.

Modern issues. Yancey's (1999a, 1999b) historical account ended with her papers being published in 1999. It is important to draw attention to the articulated absence of the concept of "fairness" as a dominating pillar that drove those initial waves. Back in 1999, Yancey (1999b) called on Moss to inform future direction, identifying the necessity "to take on the central question that doesn't seem to surface often enough: whose needs does this writing assessment serve?" (p. 498). According to Yancey:

Moss focuses on the power of naming and of forming that assessment wields: how, she asks, do students and others come to understand themselves as a result of our

interpretations, our representations, our assessments? How does such an interpretation impact students' 'access to material resources and [how does it] locate them within social relations of power.' (p. 498)

I believe these questions are similarly rooted in my own concerns regarding assessment practices, and my simple desire for classroom teachers to recognize the importance of these questions. We are easily steered by forces of authority that push us to focus more fully on what our best practices are 'doing,' than those questions that encourage us to ask who we are being and helping our students to be. Those same forces that push us to assess our students against externally legitimizing standards, which legitimize the way we assess them as well. Fairness, and the ethics surrounding fairness, as a pillar of assessment, is entwined with these concerns and these questions. An empathic-Thou lens re-minds me that the forces that are legitimate might not be fair.

According to Kelly-Riley and Whithaus (2016), editors of a special issue of the *Journal of Writing Assessment*, there is still a lack of focus on the pillar of fairness. This special issue brings us (almost) to current times, and there are still concerns about "how fairness has been underplayed in the research literature on writing assessment" (p. 1) or rather that fairness is conflated with either validity or reliability. This modern call is a need for us to "enrich our understanding of the ethical complexity of evaluation" (Detweiler, Mathison-Fife, McEarchern, Coulter, 2000, p. 214). The authors of the special issue call for greater concern with fairness, and specifically, the ethics surrounding those choices by building a theory of ethics for writing assessment. I suggest an empathic-Thou lens might be a good starting place to identify and guide those ethical decisions.

Empathic-Thou Realizations

What we now more fully know, that we didn't in the first waves of writing assessment, is that assessment is not simply a by-product of teaching; assessment is necessary activity interwoven into the act and philosophy of teaching. It is a defining force. It is a central activity. Assessment shapes our instruction. Assessment shapes students. Thus, 'good' assessment necessitates our awareness of the other—our students' *Thou*. Worrisomely, the leftovers from measurement epistemologies (that root Western thought) tug both our assessment and our teaching away from the *Thou*. These forces encourage us to hold our students' work—the writer's writing, and their writerly selves—the writers writing—against a standard that relegates both the writing and their writing to an *It*. Our teaching judgments and by extension our (un)ethical decisions are shaped by these assumptions and epistemologies from the legitimizing structures of tests.

Yancey (199b) noted that changes in writing assessment have occurred in “overlapping waves, with one wave feeding into another but without completely displacing waves that came before” (p. 483). In English Language Arts classrooms, I suggest these “early waves” continue to be tidal forces that batter teachers and erode our belief in the legitimacy of subjective or relational judgment.

Pausing for Reflection

As an Alberta teacher, my pedagogical reality involved teaching courses that culminated in diploma exams or provincial achievement tests. I would be dishonest if I did not admit to the power that those tests held and the ways they guided my decisions in what would be taught and emphasised in my courses—as well as how I would assess my students. Furthermore, the power of these exams did not only affect the courses that culminated in them. Although these exams only occurred at the grade 9 and 12 level, there was a trickle-down effect to the other grades.

We regularly held departmental scope and sequence meetings that created plans and bridged responsibility from one grade/course to the next; these meetings were part of our collective responsibility to ensure we adequately prepared our students to be successful on the tests. This preparation impacted students' multi-year ELA classroom experience and this preparation plan directed many parts of my teaching and assessment.

The tests impacted what I emphasized. When we would meet, we would look at our broad range of curricular outcomes and, recognizing our limited time, pick the “big rocks” in terms of responsibility and focus. Certainly, our curricular stated directives drove our decision-making. The Alberta ELA curriculum dictates what is required and emphasised both regarding content and production of texts, but the tests dictated focus as well. We began building the skills and emphasizing the strands that would be tested, and facilitating practice and learning opportunities for the students to use those strands in ways that would be assessed.

Therefore, those learning opportunities and practices impacted how I designed my writing assignments. Although I believed in teaching the writing process and embedded opportunities for creative and exploratory writing, as well as the variety of textual productions that the curriculum requires the students to produce (scripts, reports, poetry, narratives), if we had to choose a big rock, the types of writing samples required on the tests took priority.

Ultimately, this cycle also serves to reinforce the kind of writing we value. I previously suggested that the concept of writing has the power to reveal our Western obsession with objectivity and that we often use writing to pin the butterfly to the board. These tests suggest that the job of writing is to document what we already know—and we require students to demonstrate that knowledge in a single sitting, timed, keyhole essay.

The simple fact that, in Alberta, a 30-1 diploma exam requires a critical response continues to reinforce an inequity where critical and analytical writing is emphasized. Furthermore, the personal response to text on the diploma is designed to be written first—with the intention that it will help students formulate thoughts about the critical response. The value of both types of writing are numerically identified—and the critical writing is valued more. Furthermore, personal writing is not valued in its ability to stand alone. Its value is connected to its role as handmaiden to the critical text. These attitudes and values splash into our thinking and our way of being.

Reflection also suggests that I often replicated the conditions of the test. I know that a timed, independently written, single audience writing prompt is contrary to the conditions that should be in place to guide composition. Writing is social. Writing is best contextualized and should come out of tasks and situations that are both appropriate and meaningful to the students. I know that, in the classroom, there should be a period of ungraded work that receives formative feedback and that writers should have more than one chance to demonstrate the identified outcomes. However, to adequately prepare students for this test, I replicated the conditions of the test in which writing was an isolated and time bound activity. I justified these choices and framed them in a rationale that students need to practice these single chance, high-stakes productions that results in a grade.

Granted, I also provided students situations multiple opportunities to practice and demonstrate other types of writing, designed other types of assignments, and offered formative feedback along the way. However, in reflection, these summative essay test assignments stick in my mind. And, I know they carried significant weight in my gradebook. I would suggest if they stick in my mind, they probably stuck in my students as well.

The tests also impact how I assessed writing. Although I began to engage formative assessment more fully and regularly in my classroom practice, the standards and rubrics from the summative tests still drove my formative assessment decisions. The perceived validity of those rubrics, and what they were valuing, overshadowed the myriad of ways I could have been assessing that writing. Assessing writing skills through a structured trait approach, with similar rubrics that were used on the exams dominated my practice. Part of our collective departmental focus also took those rubrics and ‘re-normed them’ for the various grades. In a process similar to the work of Alberta Education, before large marking sessions, we took samples of student work from different grade levels and matched them to the rubric. In creating these exemplars, we believed we were being fair in making our standards transparent. We were also trying to make our practices as objective as possible, believing that was also fair.

Although I would suggest this feeling of legitimization was even more pronounced for those of us who have marked the provincial and diploma exams, I suggest that the impact of this narrow assessment method is ubiquitous. I wish I could say that the impact of these tests steered my judgment only in the early years, when I was young and inexperienced. However, that is not the case. I believe I am not alone; I believe teachers in general are swayed by what large-scale tests are measuring.

An empathic-Thou lens leaves me realizing that these actions were both in the best interest of the student—and also provided them a disservice. I would be lacking empathy if I had not prepared my students for the realities of the testing situation they would face. I would be lacking an other-oriented perspective if I didn’t understand the stakes at risk for my students, if I failed to “teach to the test,” and if I didn’t provide ample opportunities to practice the material and manner in which they would be tested. However, I provided a disservice to my students as

well. I am more fully aware of how the tests drove my judgment, and my judgment drove my practice. Furthermore, I am significantly concerned about the way that testing judgment limited diversity—of my assignments, of my assessment of those assignments, and of my students’ development of their writerly-selves.

In terms of writing assessment, tests create a hegemonic-self. The writer writing is a producer of a writing, even in an essay test; but, it is limited text, created artificially, and its worth is over determined by an outside standard that shapes it. These tests fail to encourage the diversity. Yancey (1999b) suggested that:

Ironically positivism—which depends on external reality as its litmus test—relied as much on its (hidden) assumptions as on empirical evidence. The measures of writing based in positivism assume as their idea single right (and usually white male) writer that the myriad of writers taking this test must replicate if they are to succeed. ... put in terms of the test intersecting with the self, we have an underlying determinist construct, the single, predictable self. Tests shape our writers into this single variety.” (p. 116)

When tests too fully shape our classroom practice, this becomes the norm and then shapes the writers we are creating. We fail students who are not the majoritarian norm when we focus too fully on external standards. Tests similarly erode our own belief in the importance of teacher judgment. I suggest this is happening more often than we are aware; we are not having enough conversations that draw our awareness to the tacit roots and assumptions that are driving our practice. If we began to conscientiously focus on assessment as a (legitimate) form of empathic-Thou judgment, we would free assessment to celebrate diversity and empower students and teachers. These changes begin with an essential starting point to reimagine the role of subjectivity.

Subjectivity re-minded. Given many of our testing practices are rooted in a belief that equates objectivity with fairness, reimagining subjectivity is an important beginning point. In our day-to-day interactions, teachers are encouraged to foster teacher-student relationships; we believe an awareness of our students' context will allow us to better understand (and teach) them. A more nebulous line is drawn between 'us' and 'them.' However, when it comes to assessment, either formative or summative, teachers have been shaped to believe context should be ignored. For the sake of being fair and leveling the playing field, suddenly *subjectivity* is a dirty word.

It is my belief that a mindset that rejects subjectivity is connected to binary thinking and Cartesian separation, resulting in a pedagogical (and general) value toward questioning, doubting, and bracketing. As humans—and as educators—Descartes' ideas have shaped us to cast doubt upon the senses as authoritative sources of knowledge, instead valuing mathematical and scientific formulas to order our natural worlds (Bristow, 2010). We have been shaped to believe our rational minds should guide us, separated from our unreliable feelings.

We have been drawn out of the body of the beast—*dis-embodied*—and lured into believing objectivity is equivocal with what is fair. Our stiltedness is easily apparent in terms of the rubrics I spoke of earlier. A trait approach, evaluated by a mathematical rubric that allows us to arrive at a student score, is an actualized form of Enlightenment thinking—of Cartesian dualism. We have worked so hard to separate, label, and understand aspects of phenomena, that even a teacher's approach to a communicative piece becomes an intellectual and distanced exercise of chunking and chopping, with the ultimate goal of determining a mathematical score to represent this value.

None of this is a surprise. The field of literature studies has long been criticized for its lack of rigor resulting from a subjective approach and attempts to legitimize it were achieved

through a push toward objectivity. In the 1920's, the New Critics attempted to codify a literary approach meant to bracket the subjective experience of the reader and “privileged the need for systematic analysis” (Beach & Swiss, 2011, p. 147) of language and structures. According to Beach and Swiss, this “emphasis on a rigorous scientific approach served to legitimize the value of literature instruction as of equal worth with growing prominence of the science and social sciences” (p. 146), reinforcing our belief that legitimacy and subjectivity are binaries.

Therefore, why would ELA teachers' attitudes be any less affected by a prevailing culture that separates our world and, in doing so, values science, objectivity, hard data and rationality? Although it is not surprising that teachers think we are acting in students' best interests when we try to bracket issues of student context—adopting objective, rational positions when reading, responding to, and assessing student text—we are not. Or at least, not *always*. What we don't do enough, is explicitly talk about this, and discuss if these underlying values are the values we *want* to hold.

Hence the importance of an empathic-Thou lens. An empathic-Thou lens re-minds us of the pedagogical importance and inherent connections between teachers and students, between reading and writing, between teaching and learning—and learning from teaching. This lens encourages teachers to embrace all, including the place of love in a pedagogical context. What could be more subjective—and more powerful?

On love. Susan Edgerton (1996) stated, “love has been appropriated (made kitsch) repeatedly such that one is afraid to use the term—especially in theoretical works. I intend to reclaim it. It is about power....reformulat[ing] the curriculum question, ‘What knowledge is of most worth?’ to ‘What knowledge best enables us to care for ourselves, one another, and the non-human world’” (p. 9). Martin Buber (1923/1996) re-minded us that “love is responsibility of

an I for a Thou” (p. 66). Jardine, Graham, Friesen and Clifford (1997) also called our attention to the importance of love, suggesting that failing to listen with love, and failing to enter the conversation results in “examin[ation], as if our child were an object and as if reading and writing did not draw us together inside the body of the beast” (p. 255).

An empathic-Thou lens places value on love that leads to and depends on subjectivity—being drawn together inside the body of the beast. Subjectivity may also heal us from Nietzsche’s image of ‘inverse cripples,’ those with “attention so skating . . . that our kinships are gone, and we become like Gutenberg’s machines, soulless, uninhabited, inhospitable, full of wariness and paranoia instead of attention and love, bereft of flesh and relations, all in the name of fairness and objectivity” (Jardine, Graham, Friesen & Clifford, 1997, p. 254).

Once again re-minding myself of the value of and/both thinking, it is fair to admit there is also a place for objectivism. Perhaps it is equally important to note that objectivity and subjectivity need not be seen as bipolar concepts. Moules et al. (2015) call upon Gadamar to explore the relationship between them:

Gadamar did not see objectivity and subjectivity as opposites, as an either/or proposition, but as dialectically related aspects of human understanding. We cannot see the world but from within the horizon of our own understanding. We cannot see the world but from within the horizon of our own experiences, and yet our experience is not fully our own, separate from the world. (p. 12)

For me, this dissertation has made me more fully aware of the values and assumptions rooting the practices that I had been engaging for twenty years; it unearthed pedagogical skeletons as well. I have spent a great deal of time cringing over the past couple of years. As I

write my pedagogical reflections, I wish I could get my hands on Hermione's time traveler; I could spin the clock and have a chance for a do-over.

Transitioning Comment

This chapter suggested the positivistic paradigm has had lasting effects on writing assessment, and that the power of testing continues to affect our classroom writing assessment practices. I suggest that drawing awareness to these driving forces is a necessary step.

Although a primary purpose of this entire work has been disrupt and explore the roots that drive our decision-making and practices on a philosophical level, I think it is important to also explore how an empathic-Thou lens might inform our assessment practices—the being *and* the doing—in an ELA classroom.

Therefore, the final chapter of this section explores how an empathic-Thou lens might inform theoretical positioning and values—and our classroom practice.

Chapter 9: Re-minded Writing Assessment

Head down, arms overflowing, coffee cup precariously balanced, my brain grinds out the list: paper mostly done; next week's presentation not begun; kids are covered—Jim's dropping Olivia off at synchro and scooping Gisella away to a Tuesday daddy-daughter-date; students submitting another assignment tomorrow... ugh. Another pile of marking.

Gotta hurry! Class starting soon.

I barrel down the hall and see a student leaving a lecture hall. I recognize him from my Thursday section. Somedays, I would look down and hurry by, too 'busy' to stop and talk. Too distracted to connect. But something encourages me to smile and seek his eyes. My smile drops away.

He is crying.

As we move out of the lane of student traffic, the world falls away. We share a moment. News of his mother's terminal illness. My heart grips.

Afterward, I am seized again; ghosts this time. Woulda. Coulda. Shoulda. Moments haunt me. I am shaken. I could have easily missed this moment—preoccupied, in my head, with my agenda. How many others have I missed?

... Recently, I have reflected on this moment. My re-minded self is differently haunted. How many other times, in other ways, have I missed similar calls? I think to the piles of writing assignments that I have groaned over. How many times in person? But how many student text's might have been crying out with a similar need?

How many times have I failed to see or to respond?³³

Roadmap Reminder

This chapter begins by encouraging readers to consider classroom writing assessment as a form of *empathic-Thou judgment* and *empathic-Thou response*. To support my suggestion that our assessment practices might benefit from a conceptual shift, I engage a fictionalized exemplar that assesses a section of Buber's work under our current paradigm, with current writing assessment tools.

Although I transparently share the major goal of this dissertation—to unearth the beliefs and assumptions that are guiding our classroom practices—this section also recognizes teachers' desire for concepts to be applied. Therefore, the final section of this chapter serves to connect this study's overarching ideas to specific classroom practice and demonstrates how an empathic-

³³ Personal reflection from April 2015 with reflexive re-writing: Writing as inquiry

Thou lens might differently inform our practice in regard to (a) reading and (b) responding to student text.

As in Chapter 7, empathy is engaged as both a *tool* (used to inform specific classroom practice), as well as a continuing empathic-Thou *lens* (that reveals insights about our pedagogical beliefs and choices)

Introducing Empathic-Thou Judgment and Response

At the core, classroom writing assessment is a process where: (a) teachers judge students' texts (by a variety of standards or forms) which results in (b) teachers' response. That response might be written feedback, a numerical grade, holistic evaluation, or verbal communication. These responses might also be formative or summative, but assessment is an act where this engagement results in some form of teacher-response based on a teacher-judgment. Assessment *is* an act of judgment and response. If we return to the original definition of assessment engaged in Chapter 6, we note that assessment can also be thought of as “any act of *interpreting* and *sharing* information about students' performance, collected through any of a multitude of means or practices” (Joughin, 2009, p. 9, italics added).

What might it look like if we remember that the teachers who are reaching assessment judgments about student writing are also necessarily *interpreting* students' writing through their own lenses? What do we believe is necessary if we are to interpret that writing effectively, or ethically? An empathic-Thou lens suggests that it is fruitful and important to conceptualize assessment not merely as a process of formulating judgments and expressing responses, but as a form of *empathic-Thou judgment* and *empathic-Thou response*. I suggest this shift might have powerful consequences.

Previously, I advocated the importance of philosophically re-minding ourselves to value subjective-judgment as well as objective-judgment; that said, regardless of how those judgments are reached, assessment pushes student work in the realm where the work becomes describable, analyzable, or classifiable—the realm of the *It*. When teachers are making judgments (either subjective *or* objective) the world of the *It* is in play; all forms of judgment, even *empathic-Thou* judgments, transforms our relationship to and with student work into the realm of objects; this is inevitable. Buber stated that “the individual *Thou* must become an *It* when the event of relation has run its course” (p. 84). This is the world of the relational *Thou*, “doomed by its nature to become a thing or at least to enter into thinghood again and again” (p. 69). However, the *empathic-Thou* lens re-minds me that existence is dual and supports the *Thou* and the *It* in relationship. Buber’s pointings re-mind us that although every “*Thou* must become an *It* in our world...everything in the world can—either before or after it becomes a thing—appear to some *I* as its *Thou*” (pp. 68-69).

I believe that is why—even though it might seem antithetical—it is necessary to re-mind ourselves of the role and importance of the *Thou* amidst these *It* judgments. I worry we focus too fully on the *It*, relegating students and their writing into objects and forgetting there is a subject in the process as well. I have concerns that ‘traditional’ assessment judgments, informed by a culture of testing and driven by a bias toward objectivity, directs us toward hegemonic standards. When this happens, we can never catch a glimpse of the *Thou and the It*.

Empathic-Thou judgment allows us to see the world as it is: messy, ambiguous, complex, rich, diverse, and full of potential. Both *Thou* and *It* play a role. *Empathic-Thou* judgment re-minds to be open to the *Thou* that is behind, within, and part of the *It*.

Likely, this is a difficult concept to sell. This “stance conflicts with traditional expectations that the act of [assessment] should be objective, creating an ethical dilemma for teachers who want to be contextual, flexible, and nurturing in response to student drafts, but feel they must be ‘objective’ guardians of institutional standards” (Shiffman, as cited in Deitweiler et al., 2000, p. 213). I know I have asked this before, but I return to this question: what is the risk if we engage this change, compared to the risk of our present practice?

Therefore, I suggest, as our writing judgments are being formed and articulated, that these engagements could be differently shaped by empathic-Thou positioning, especially in the stage the student work is being read. To respond to student writing, it must be read. On the surface, the statement seems glaringly obvious; unpacking it reveals the complexities involved.

In Huot’s (2002) opinion, these complexities are rooted in an exploration that is larger than shifting practice. Although Huot does not disagree with the research regarding teacher practices, he suggested practices are rooted in a larger need to “unearth the beliefs and assumptions that guide current response practices and hold a critical eye toward them...creating a more conscious awareness of where our practices come from” (p. 110). This study echoes that assertion. But I also feel that teachers must also have something to hold on to; they must see how their re-minded being might look in terms of guiding their doing. I hope that an empathic-Thou lens can provide some guidance in both areas.

Response *is* Reading

Huot (2002), informed by the research of Louise Phelps (2000), asserted “[r]esponse is fundamentally reading” (p. 93). Phelps noted that (judgment and) response to student writing includes a reading process that should involve “engaging in thought, experiencing feelings, imagining, and voicing inner speech” (p. 94); through that process, meaning is constructed. But,

what if teachers do not engage the type of reading process that Phelps describes? What if the meaning teachers construct is not that which the student intended? How does that shape our judgments and our response?

David Bartholomae's (1980) "The Study of Error" voiced a similar concern, suggesting "we have not read [student writing] as we have been trained to read [literature], with a particular interest in the way an individual style confronts and violates convention. We have read, rather, as policemen, examiners, gate-keepers" (p. 255). Many English teachers read literature in ways that allow the work to amuse us with irreverent deviations from conventional style or form; puzzle us with deep complexity of meaning or organization; and provoke us with ideas that challenge and defy. Legitimized writer's writing follows different rules than what we ask from our student-writers writing and ways we assess our student-writers' writing. Bartholomae suggested we do not allow student-texts enough of the same freedom to amuse, puzzle, and provoke us, stating:

The teacher who is unable to make sense out of a seemingly bizarre piece of student writing is often the same teacher who can give an elaborate explanation of the 'meaning' of a story by Donald Barthelme or a poem by E.E. Cummings. If we learn to treat the language of basic writing as language and assume, as we often do when writers violate our expectations in more conventional ways, that the unconventional features in their writing are evidence of intention and that they are, therefore, meaningful, then we can chart systematic choices, individual strategies, and characteristic processes of thought. (p. 255)

I can cite examples of my own reluctance and impatience when deciphering a cryptic student paper—a process of hermeneutic ingenuity that I effortfully and happily engage when

deciphering literature or other challenging texts. This realization encouraged me to reflect on my recent engagements of Deleuze, Levinas, Gadamer—and Buber. I have spent hours holding their thoughts lightly, letting the reading wash over me, sink in, and make sense. Because I trusted they had something important to say, I have gone to tremendous effort to understand those complicated thoughts and appreciate their unique manner of expression. If I thought *I and Thou* was student work, would I have done the same? I wonder how I would have read the text in that context? What judgments I would have made? How I would have responded to it?

Buber in the Spotlight

I wonder what response a section of *I and Thou* (Buber, 1923/1996) would receive if I assessed the work through current assessment methods and approaches. Let's give it a try.

To start, let's pretend, similar to the concerns of this dissertation, I created a class-based writing assignment that was linked to a ELA 30-1 unit; let's pretend the title of the unit is "No Man is an Island" and we had been exploring a variety of texts (fiction, non-fiction, and visual) that engage social, political, and environmental concerns about a growing separatist ethos. Taking it a step further, let's pretend the students were assigned the following writing task: In relation to the concerns we have explored in class, how might individuals, on a personal level, affect important change? Support your idea(s) with reference to our current societal context, and to your previous knowledge or experience.

Anne Davies (2007), a leading researcher in the field of educational assessment, noted that "specific descriptive feedback is needed both during and after the learning. It is formative. In this kind of feedback, student work is compared to criteria, rubrics, models, exemplars, samples or descriptions of excellence" (p. 32). Directed by research in the field, I am bolstered to turn to my rubrics and criteria that will guide my reading of these texts and—by "comparing

the student work to criteria, rubric, models, exemplars, samples, and descriptors of excellence” (p. 32)— allow me to provide specific feedback to the students. To do this, I use the 30-1 Personal Response to Text Assignment rubric (see Appendix D). Although the students’ work is not a personal response to *text*, rather a personal response to a *context*, I believe I have made a sound educational judgment regarding the criteria that will guide this process.

I begin by exploring my rubric. I note that there are two main categories of the rubric that have articulated specific criteria to guide my feedback; each are cross-referenced to the ELA Program of Studies outcomes. The first category is “Ideas and Impressions.” I am careful to note that the requirement of “constructing meaning from text *and* context” is not a clear fit. Therefore, I clarify my own expectations that the students are not expected to demonstrate their understanding of the meaning or craft of a text. Rather, I plan to use the rubric to explore how the students have responded personally by relating the context—our social reality—to their own experiences, feelings, values and beliefs, as well their ability to develop that content. The rubric suggests that I should consider: (a) the student’s exploration of the topic; (b) the student’s ideas and reflection; (c) support in relation to the student’s ideas and impressions.

The second category is “Presentation.” This area is also carefully cross referenced to Program of Studies’ outcomes. To ensure I follow the direction of accepted assessment research, I carefully look at the specific criteria for this category as well. I note that I should consider the effectiveness of: (a) voice in relation to the context; (b) stylistic choices (including quality and correctness of language); (c) and the development of a unifying or aesthetic effect.

Next, I refresh myself with the standards descriptors. The standards for each category are: excellent, proficient, satisfactory, limited, and poor. Because I am providing formative feedback, these descriptors will not translate into numerical equivalents—instead, they will guide

my descriptive feedback. At a later, summative stage, excellent will translate into 5 points, proficient into 4 points, satisfactory into 3 points, and so forth, to formulate a fair, numerical representation of the student's learning.

Considering this rubric has been used by hundreds of teachers, on thousands of students' work, it reinforces my belief that it is an appropriate tool to guide my reading and response. These rubrics have been created precisely for this age group and class; they are the very ones that we are trained to use in diploma marking sessions; surely this tool is more legitimate than anything that I—a classroom teacher—could create.

I turn to the first assignment, trying to ignore the name on the top of the page, but I can't help but see that it belongs to Martin. Because I don't want any contextual factors to sway my professional judgment, I hadn't sought out the student's name; however, I reassure myself that it is acceptable that I know whose paper this belongs to (rather, who belongs to this paper, as I often think) because this is a stage of formative feedback. Therefore, it is "more" acceptable that I might be possibly influenced by "knowing" the student. If I were grading the paper summatively, I would want to remain much more objective. I begin to read:

It is said that man experiences his world. Man travels over the surface of things and experiences them. He extracts knowledge about their constitution from them; he wins an experience from them. He experiences what belongs to the things.

But the world is not presented to man by experiences alone. Those present him only with a world composed of It and He and She and It again.

I experience something.—If we add "inner" to "outer" experiences, nothing in the situation is changed. We are merely following the uneternal division that springs from the lust of the human race to whittle away the secret of death. Inner things or outer things, what are they but things and things!

I experience something.—If we add "secret" to "open" experiences, nothing in the situation is changed. How self-confident is that wisdom which perceives a closed compartment in things, reserved for the initiate and manipulated only with the key. O secrecy without a secret! O accumulation of information! It, always It!³⁴

³⁴ Buber, 1923/2000, p. 21

My eyebrows furrow. Immediately, I feel puzzled and unsettled. Even a bit irritated. There is no introductory offering; the text begins mid-thought, it seems. And those thoughts seem to be spit-out, individual, disconnected. They are statements, more than thoughts, really. I am not entirely sure what they mean. I feel like I am reading ramblings more than a thoughtful composition. Right from the start I can tell it needs some careful editing. What a mess.

Immediately I begin to write in-text comments. I am aware of my frustration to this work so I work very hard to try to keep my tone neutral:

It is said that man experiences his world. What does that mean?
Hmmm... you are missing a developed introductory paragraph. Provided you answer this question, are giving your reader direction but you might want to look at the exemplars to see how you can more fully develop these beginning thoughts. Also, do be careful about using rhetorical questions...

Man travels over the surface of things and experiences them. He extracts knowledge about their constitution from them: he wins an experience from them. He experiences what belongs to the things. Are those things the same things that he is travelling over? ... it seems a bit like defining a word with the same word. Man experiences the things the travels over, so he experiences those things. I am not sure what idea you are developing here. Also, what kind of experience? Clarifying that would help flesh out what you mean- thus helping answer the question that you set up at the start. Again, part of this might be your lack of paragraph development.

But the world is not presented to man by experiences alone. These present him only with a world composed of It and He and She and It again. You lost me here. Your overuse of pronouns is making your meaning murky. It is difficult to trace back and know which is the antecedent.)

I experience something.—If we add 'inner' to 'outer' experiences, nothing in the situation is changed. We are merely following the uneternal division that springs from the lust of the human race to whittle away the secret of death. Inner things or outer things, what are they but things and things!

I experience something.—If we add 'secret' to 'open' experiences, nothing in the situation is changed. How self-confident is that wisdom which perceives a closed compartment in things, reserved for the initiate and manipulated only with the key. 0 secrecy without a secret! 0 accumulation of information! It, always It!

Microsoft Office User

Careful about using "man." Have you thought about balancing the gender of your pronouns? You use man and—and next he.

Microsoft Office User

This is a bit vague. Can you find a stronger/clearer verb and substitute the word "things" and "them" with a strong noun? It would help your reader know what you mean.

Microsoft Office User

What kind of experience? Can you give me a clear example?

Microsoft Office User

Can you give more specific examples, or more specific support? You use "them" often. I am not sure what you mean by them.

Microsoft Office User

It would be helpful if you could tell me what those experiences are.

Microsoft Office User

Man! Again!

Microsoft Office User

I am not sure this is a real word.

Microsoft Office User

It is not clear what you are trying to support. It seems like faulty logic. Or, maybe you need to connect the dots better.

Microsoft Office User

If you changed this to active voice, and clarified the pronouns in this sentence, your meaning would become clearer. You might also want to split this into two shorter sentences.

I reach the end of the response.

What to do?

I return to Davies' (2007) direction. The best way to give specific feedback is to compare the student work to criteria, rubrics and exemplars, and comment specifically on the way they meet or deviate from those standards. I again review my guiding criteria before writing some overall comments:

Martin,

By the end of this response, I am still not sure I can clearly summarize the answer to the question that you originally asked: What does it mean for man to experience the world?

Your meaning is blurry. I think this has to do with imprecise support. You have ideas here, but they are not clearly developed and are sometimes – often, actually—ambiguous. If you were to go back and summarize three points that answer your own questions, what would those points be? I am not sure if your support is lacking or if you have not explained yourself clearly enough. You are making your reader work too hard to guess at the ideas that you are trying to express.

Your presentation is large part of what makes it difficult for your reader. That said, those same stylistic choices are “impeding communication.” Your obscure voice and pedantic tone make it hard for your reader to understand and also difficult for the reader to want to hang in there. Be kind to your reader.

Have you looked at some of the samples of personal responses? You don't have to copy them, but they might give you some idea of how to clarify and develop your ideas and write in a way that is more familiar to your reader.

My reflection suggests that, if I had been providing feedback on this piece (believing it was a student work), I would have many recommendations about improving the students' ideas and impressions. Likely, I would have suggested they were ambiguous. Possibly Buber (1923/1996) would find himself lacking according the criteria established by this rubric if he were to do a self-reflection; he implied in a reflective essay that he himself didn't always know

what his ideas meant because he “wrote what he wrote under the spell of an irresistible enthusiasm” (p. 42).

That said, let’s also pretend I also know this is a second language student and look to his original text, concerned his ideas have simply been “lost in translation.” A second opinion from an academic who can read the German variation suggested “German readers would be quite incapable of saying what any number of passages probably meant” (Kaufmann, 1970, p. 24). Certainly—if one does not know what this student means—this must negatively impact ideas and impressions. What are his ideas? It is often difficult to know.

Ideas and impressions aside, the accepted assessment lens suggests the presentation aspect has significant issues as well. This difficult work of reading is the result of piled up and redundant adjectives, solecisms, and invented terms (Kaufmann, 1970). These constipated choices “slow the reader[s] down, to force [them] to read many sentences and paragraphs again, even to read the whole book more than once” (p. 43). Arguably, the voice might be described as unsuitable; undeniably, the stylistic choices impede communication.

My formative feedback would have sent Martin back to the drafting table. But does Buber’s work need this directive feedback shaped by this judgmental lens? The fact that *I and Thou* has sold millions of copies and has been translated multiple times since its publication in 1923 suggests my judgment of and response to this work might have been misguided. More importantly, my suggested changes would have eroded the essence of his work; abolished it, perhaps—work that is commonly referred to as a landmark of twentieth-century intellectual history. Oops.

As I suggested in my last chapter, I believe that the values and theoretical underpinnings push assessment to become hegemonic forces that limit diversity and creativity. It is not just our

assessment practices and response practices, but the very values that root them that need to be explored. In part, these tacit values have sometimes turned us into the gatekeepers that Bartholomae (1980) suggested; examiners of the ways that student writing breaks from the standard. As I noted throughout, entrenched pedagogical practices—ones that look for adherence to expected ideas and conventions—can also push teachers to adopt detached positions and clearly impact the way teachers are shaped to approach, read, and construct meaning.

However, I suggested at the start of this work, that the small has a place in education. Many small acts make up the large, and teachers have tremendous ability to make changes at the classroom level. One of these small changes is our approach when engaging a student text. We can step beyond the roles of policemen, examiners, and gate-keepers and embrace an alternative approach that is dependent on reading differently. We can begin by reframing our practices where “we do not read simply for what we can agree with or challenge, as in the habit of academic reading (in its multiple guises) ... [rather] for hearing differences as harmony” (Ratcliff, 1999, p. 203). This alternative approach is a simple call for teachers to embrace context, understand the power of reading to listening, and value (as well as adopt) a process of empathic reading— “small” things we can do in our classroom practice that could have tremendous impact. However, we need to remember these changes are rooted in being re-minded about what we value and what we want to value; being re-minded about what we believe, not just about what we do. Therefore, the next section will go from theory to practice.

From Theory

‘Reading’ differently. Here, too, Buber might have something important to say. Both Kaufmann (1970) and Kramer and Gawlick (2003) have suggested that Buber’s work can be

understood as a lesson in teaching us to read. According to Kaufman (1970), “man is a voracious reader who has never learned to read well” because we fail to remember the “human being behind it, as if a person spoke directly to us” (pp. 30-40). He suggested this failing results in young people who are turned loose on amazing books worth reading who don’t know ‘how’ to read them. And, if they instinctively feel addressed, then “chances are, they are asked completely tone-deaf questions as soon as they have finished their assignment—making them feel that they read badly after all or spoiling something worthwhile for the rest of their lives” (p. 40).

I suggest that student-readers are not the only ones who are sometimes tone deaf. In the framework of assessment, our current values and underpinnings might be inadvertently reinforcing tone-deaf practices that are possibly directing our teacher-reading. I have concerns that current assessment practices reinforce teacher-readers who do not listen for the music of the work, or Ratcliff’s ability to hear differences as harmony; however, an empathic-Thou lens suggests an alternative. Heeding Buber’s pointings, Kaufmann (1970) gently warned that a text is “not primarily as an object to be put to use or an object of experience: it is the voice of Thou speaking to me, requiring a response” (p. 39). Ratcliffe’s (1999) work riffs this theme. She described how society has become separate from a consideration of otherness; she calls for a philosophy of listening that results in an undivided logos (one that speaks and listens)” (p. 203).

I believe that speaking (the world of the *It*) only in conjunction with empathic listening (the world of the *Thou*) is an appropriate re-minder for teachers—especially for teachers who are assessing student work. Assessment encourages us to read with an intention to judge. Those judgments then inform our response. However, the first step should be to read with an intention to understand.

Receptive waiting. The process of receptive waiting requests teachers to engage patience that “allows letters, words, sentences to appear, the coalescing message present[ing] an alterative world, a foreign linguistic horizon, and decidedly other, even alien, ‘Thou’ to the reader” (Kepnes, 1992, p. 72). It would be fruitful for teachers to attempt to enter the relationship to a student text with this subject-subject mode of intentionality, where the ‘other’—in this case a student text—is viewed as essential *because* of its uniqueness.

A crucial part of the encounter itself comes from the distinctiveness the other brings. “Only when I recognize some of what distinguishes *you* from all other[s]...do I begin to meet you as subject. Awareness of uniqueness is one crucial aspect of the ‘subject-subject’ meeting” (Stewart, 1985, p. 324). If this is a teacher’s positioning, we try to avoid assumptions and generalizations that eroded inimitability—we would approach the work with an intentionality that views the student work as essential, valuable, and unique in the contributions it could offer. Furthermore, this approach would re-mind us that although we engage the text, we must learn to feel “addressed by a [text], by the human being behind it, as if a person spoke directly to us” (p. 39). This positioning prohibits teachers from falling into the role of Bartholomae’s (1980) gatekeeper and policeman because it is based on empathic understanding and receptive waiting.

Understanding is a troubled term because teachers, especially teachers who are assessing work, can easily confuse listening *for* intent and listening *with* intent. Ratcliffe’s (1999) work is helpful in focusing our approach. Inverting the term, *understanding* as “standing under—consciously standing under discourses that surround us and others, while consciously acknowledging all our particular and fluid standpoints” (p. 207). This highlights the importance of acknowledging the role of context, both teacher and student context.

Engaging context. Because assessment is a form of response based on our judgment, it is essential to look at the interpretations that inform our judgment. Using the words of Toni Morrison, Ratcliffe (1999) described how context will enable us to hear “the sound that [breaks] the back of words” (p. 204) and will allow teachers to “invent, interpret, and ultimately judge differently” (p. 203). If this is our belief, instead of reading as we have formerly engaged reading, as somehow context free, we instead enter the hermeneutic circle and think of both *our* prejudices and the students’. Instead of trying to bracket out those experiences, we instead use them to construct meaning, and we should be transparent about it.

This means that we must also be transparent that assessment is not a science and that neither reliability nor objectivity should not be the dominating player in our classroom assessment practices. In a place where philosophy and philosophical hermeneutics bridge to literary criticism—the teacher’s “*I*” in *I-It* encounters view understanding a result of the content of one’s own experience. This encounter is transactional; “a transaction between the physical text and the mind of a reader... [because] literary texts do not ‘contain’ a meaning; meaning is derive only from the act of individual readings” (Kennedy & Gioia, 1995, n.p.).

We need to reshape our values to believe that this interpretive encounter is acceptable. Elbow (2012) suggested we need to stop the charade that implies assessments (as a result of teacher reading) are “fair objective evaluations—rather than verdicts deeply influenced by [our] own values and point of view” (p. 307). Elbow suggested our deeply engrained sense of fairness being equated with objectivity leads us toward justification of our assessment philosophy and practices within that framework; it is time to stop pretending that it is possible.

To Practice

As I continued to explore, re-evaluate, and recognize the values and assumptions that have been guiding my assessment decisions and practices, I began to see how my own classroom response practices could be helpfully (and differently) considered; I see ways in which I am becoming differently minded (re-minded) and informed by engaging an empathic-Thou lens. That said, I continued to be troubled by a problem that plagued me from the start. Buber inspires, but there are no specific steps or ways to actualize the pointings that he brings to our awareness. In fact, the attempt to do so brings an intentionality and applicability that takes it out of world of the *Thou*. But, even if we ignore that aspect, his work is not exactly teacher friendly.

I've already noted that Buber's text is not gender balanced; although I tried to reconcile that challenge and rationalized the continuing ideological value to this work (in Chapter 2), if *I and Thou* were placed as a 'tool' in many of my colleague's hands, I would be in for a long conversation. The lack of inclusive language would be enough to put a few of my politically inclined and socially aware colleagues off the work immediately. But there are other challenges too. I think about formulating an answer to my fellow teachers when they say: "*Great idea. But how does that look in the classroom?*" Let's pretend I answer by explaining they simply need to cultivate an openness through an act of coming together where:

activity and passivity are united in the single act in which one gives and receives the *Thou*. All particular acts and faculties are suspended, so that one appears to be doing nothing; and yet the central act of one's being is performed in saying *Thou*.... (Wood, 1969, p. 53)

I imagine the look on my colleagues' faces.

Although I value an empathic-Thou lens to encourage relationality, rupture and re-minding, I return to empathy as a classroom-based practical "tool" to actualize some of the ways

of being that Buber points to. Furthermore, because Carl Rogers' ideas were engaged in composition theory, as well as connected to Buber's ideas of dialogue [see *The Martin Buber-Carl Rogers Dialogue*, (1997)] it seems a fitting choice to engage Rogers' empathic strategies in application to writing assessment practices—specifically regarding the way we engage the reading of the text.

Empathic reading as active listening. Active listening involves *oral exchanges*, a process of effective communicative response, coined by Thomas Gordon (1980) but informed by the work of Carl Rogers. This oral framework could help teachers imagine a way to read student work differently, embracing student context and approaching reading and response as forms of active listening

Active listening is a process that requires the listener to understand, interpret, and evaluate what they hear. Some benefits of active listening are that it fosters attentiveness versus distraction; encourages the receiver to stay attuned to the sender's message instead of the receiver's response; prevents misunderstandings; and, ideally, results in individuals being more open to change (Rogers & Farson, 1987). Active listening requires differentiation between the words being said and the message being communicated. When we respond to a total message, we are cognizant that the content of the message is only one aspect; although we must work hard to make sure we have accurately understood the content, recognizing the underlying feelings or attitudes is essential as well. Therefore, it is necessary to respond to the content and to the feelings while asking ourselves what might the sender be trying to tell me? What does this mean to the sender? And, how does the sender see this situation?

In a pedagogical context, teacher empathic reading as a form of active listening introduces another requirement. Although it is important that students feel heard, it is equally

important that students are being heard to improve their writing. Phelps' (1998) appropriately noted, "[t]he entire exchange between student writer and teacher is pervaded by the assumption of learning as an overriding purpose. That purpose subsumes all writings and readings, authorship and interpretation, in a pedagogical situation" (p. 258). Although there is purposeful intention (learning or the reporting of the learning) assigned to the exchange, I don't believe this contradicts the fundamental principles of active listening. In fact, as mentioned previously, the root of an empathic Rogerian exchange is to bring about *changes* in all the participants—also aligned to the idea of rupture I noted earlier. Learning *is* change; thus, active listening is a fitting framework to explore.

I think this resonates with Buber's work as well. Although entering such direct intentionality is somewhat foreign to Buber's pointings (1923/1996), he recognized that "relation is reciprocity. My Thou acts on me as I act on it. Our students teach us, our works form us" (p. 69). The following is a series of ideas about the way empathic reading might shift our practices of engaging student text; they are also a call to shift our values that underlie the approach.

Seeking understanding. In active listening, the speakers must be allowed to finish their thoughts without interruption. This allowance can be similarly achieved when reading empathically by simply reading all the way through a paper before a teacher begins to comment. Before becoming distracted by our own reactions, ideas, and opinions, teachers must read with the intention of understanding the complete message—something that Maxine Hairston (1986) has described as sitting on your hands while reading.

Active listening also re-minds us that, just because the words from someone's lips are audible, we might not necessarily understand what the speaker means. The same is true of reading. Because reading is a complicated process and teachers' feedback to student work is

solely dependent on how this meaning is constructed through reading, teachers must do the best they can to work out the complete message.

Imagining the students' worldview. To understand the complete message, it is necessary to engage the students' context, and teachers need reassurance and persuasive evidence that this type of engagement is beneficial and necessary. Reading student work with detachment—instead of empathically—results in barriers to communication and student learning. Bator (1996) describes a more fruitful approach as one of fostering an ability to “imagine with empathy” (n.p.). Just as teachers instruct students to imagine another's views when applying Rogerian principles in the writing class, a teacher “must imagine the entire worldview that allows [student] arguments to exist, that makes them valid,” thus attending to the “context of the arguments that support ... [students'] ways of seeing” (n.p.).

Therefore, instead of reading with preconceived notions, empathic reading would allow us to approach student writing as Grant P. Wiggins (1993) encouraged, “with the tact of Socrates: tact to respect the student's ideas enough to enter them fully... thus, the tact to accept apt but anticipatable or unique responses” (p. 40). Louise Rosenblatt's work added another important voice, reinforcing that these writers are *not* adults; therefore, teachers must engage the work looking for “evidence that the youngster has ... thought about it, not a question of whether, necessarily, he has thought about it the way an adult would, or given an adult's ‘correct’ answer” (Wilson, 1981, pp. 3-12).

Being surprised. Empathic reading also encourages teachers to loosen control. Teachers work hard to create ‘good’ assignments that allow students to demonstrate their mastery of course outcomes. However, Straub and Lunsford (1995) suggested that, if teachers pay too much attention to the assignment, that focus could disable a teacher's ability to listen carefully to

the student response. Focusing too fully on the assignment criteria and objectives can result in teachers reading according to pre-conceived notions; these notions and can limit the types of responses they feel are acceptable or appropriate.

In a textual experience, expectations and “adherence to the assignment” can have similarly limiting results. This type of directed reading engagement can also result in biased responses to student writing; Phelps (1998) comments on this same research, suggesting a teacher’s “reading process will be dominated by pre-judgments about what a ‘good text’ should look like ... disabl[ing] a teacher’s ability listen carefully to the text itself and enter into a genuine conversation with the student writer” (p. 247).

Embracing change. Empathic reading also allows the teacher to be changed as significantly as the student. It fosters the possibility that Shaughnessy (1976) described, “that teachers also change in response to students—that there may in fact be important connections between the changes teachers undergo and the progress of their students” (p. 234). And, even if a teacher is not changed through the communicative exchange, empathic reading encourages teachers to adopt Elbow’s (1993) concept of liking, and might be “particularly helpful in cases where [student] writing is not just bad, but somehow offensive ... or frighteningly vacuous” (p. 203).

Looking beyond errors. Additionally, reading empathically automatically positions teachers to look beyond surface level errors. Like active listening, empathic reading encourages teachers to receive the full message—not focus so much on *how* the writer is saying it. If a teacher focuses on errors in a detached reading, and in the process reveals a failure to understand what the writer was trying to say, the student is likely to reject or resist the feedback in its entirety. If, however, the teacher conveys a genuine, engaged, and appreciative understanding of

the student's content, the student is more willing to listen to feedback about error or infelicity.

When the writers realize that the teachers do not—in fact—understand what they were trying to say, given the most earnest empathic effort, it may naturally lead writers to explore root causes. Therefore, and perhaps most importantly, empathic reading will also result in feedback that is easier for students to hear; it might become evident to the student that—even when reading as an ally—the teacher has failed to understand, enabling students to safely see where their work falters. As Elbow (1993) stated, “readers play the crucially active role in this story of how writers get better” (p. 200). Student writers need empathic-Thou teachers if students are to grow as writers.

Re-thinking feedback. Boud (2007) suggested that we should be cognizant that teachers “judge too much, and too powerfully” (p. 5). As a starting point, feedback should be thought of as a description rather than evaluation of the student work. Connors and Lunsford (1993) suggested that teachers' feedback tends to relate to the grade assigned, not the work; further, most summary comments on graded papers are simply attempts to justify the grade instead of giving clear, detailed feedback to the student writer. Research has focused on rethinking teacher feedback practices, ideas that range from being aware of the language teachers use to the range of comments types (for example, include one positive, one corrective, one question). Although helpful and important points, what is more essential is to focus on the values behind the practice.

If teachers read student writing from a distanced, rather than empathic stance, the entire concept of feedback is called into question. Without trying to imagine or consider the positions from which the students write, teachers end up giving feedback on papers the *teacher* would write. Although empathy has been called into question for issues regarding appropriating another, teacher feedback *without* empathy would be a different form of appropriation. Reading

without empathy could result in student work contemplated and shaped through directive feedback from a teacher who understands the topic from only one point of view—hers. The feedback would then push students to adopt the teacher’s position, rather than to develop the student’s ideas.

Pausing for Reflection

Teaching stands with a necessary foot in the world of the *It*, “in the sphere of goal directed verbs” (Buber, 1923/1996, p. 54); teaching demands we use our experiences and knowledge to help students learn. As I noted earlier—so does assessment. Assessment necessarily is rooted in judgment; judgment belongs to the world of the *It*. However, an empathic-Thou lens calls attention to the ways that we could also place a greater emphasis on, and awareness of, the aspect of assessment rooted in valuing, versus evaluating (Elbow, 2000).

One of the greatest challenges I have faced (and continue to face) is how to take this theoretical dissertation—that advocates for a more subjective, necessarily contextualized, fully relational, embedded understanding—and connect it to classroom practice, without it becoming a reductionist, decontextualized list of “best-practices” that teachers are encouraged to simply apply. These last two chapters have attempted to draw this work closer to classroom applications (for example, Chapter 7’s identification of ways empathy can shape the teaching of writing, and this chapter’s identification of empathic reading strategies that can shape the interpretation of a student’s text). These sections have attempted to remain wary of reducing complexity or eroding context, while recognizing the importance of meaningful application. However, I can imagine critics suggesting that these empathic engagements are not “practices.” Rather, they remain suggestions that might encourage us to question our classroom approaches and interactions—but do not guide teachers clearly enough how to apply those suggestions.

Questioned by reader feedback, and my own recognition of teachers' desire to know (specifically) how theoretical concepts might "work" in the classroom, I grapple with the challenge of providing an exemplar. I am not avoiding the question of how a concrete example might look—but I do struggle with it. First, an inner voice problematizes that task. A concrete example is difficult to articulate partially because an empathic-Thou lens encourages us to understand that our approaches and practices will "look" and "work" differently in every case. Additionally, I am reluctant to offer a to-do list that could allow or incite a teacher to circumvent the difficult exploration of one's current values and the theories at play; this dissertation asserts that type of exploration necessarily precipitates meaningful (and always contextual) shifts in practice.

Furthermore, this task has me soul searching. Is my engagement of this task a response to my own insecurity about offering a theoretical study? A "good" hermeneutic study is "not seeking an exactly replicable application of findings...[rather] when its audience views its findings as meaningful and applicable in terms of their own experiences" (Moules, 2015. pp. 175-176). Does this study *need* a concrete application or example to answer how an empathic-Thou lens might differently inform our values, beliefs, and practices surrounding ELA writing assessment?

Wonderings aside, Elbow and Belanof's (1999) work draws attention to the paradoxes of writing: "the reader is always right; the writer is always right" (p. 1). And, a trusted reader has asked. Therefore, this next section is an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of a decontextualized set of practices, while also helping my readers see the ideas of this work as (more) concretely applicable in terms of informing classroom practice. At this juncture, I would also note that I hope my own attempt at answering "What might this look like?" will inspire readers to imagine

how they might come to their own answers.

The Martin exemplar: Re-minded practice. With that goal in mind, I return to the specific Martin example to describe how an empathic-Thou lens might differently inform my values, beliefs and practices if I were making assessment decisions about that fictionalized student scenario.

First, an empathic Thou lens would encourage me to reflect on my choices and decisions surrounding the fictionalized assignment itself. I would find myself in support of some of the parameters I had articulated. The scenario recognized the importance of formative feedback; the writing assignment was structured in a way that encouraged students the opportunity receive feedback on their work without a grade attached. That decision—in turn—encouraged teacher feedback regarding the student’s writing choices, versus feedback that justified grade assignment. The realities of teaching high school English Language Arts (three or four classes of 30 or more students each) are logistical deterrents that can dissuade teachers from engaging rounds of teacher-led descriptive, formative assessment; an empathic-Thou lens might begin by reinforcing the importance of this teaching practice.

However, as I noted earlier, formative assessment is usually [see my later comments inspired by Peter Elbow’s (2000) work] based on judgments that adjudicate student work with the intention of forwarding the writing and making it “better.” In the Martin example, there were no grades attached to formative judgments, but there was an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, an empathic-Thou lens would also encourage me to ask myself if—when providing the feedback to forward Martin’s work—I had entered the assignment with a narrow notion about how this written response should look, or if I had given myself the opportunity to be surprised, and possibly changed. Had I been limited by what I expected and

believed to be the norm—acceptable, conventional, or even predictable? How much of my evaluative and corrective responses to Martin’s work were reactions to the way the student text deviated from those expectations? An empathic-Thou lens might also encourage me to question the ways that this assignment might have been limited by the prevailing testing culture—and limited by the exemplars that have been published.

Next, I consider my fictionalized decision to use a diploma exam rubric to (formatively) assess this piece. In my own experience, I consider the many times that rubrics have not seemed to work—times that I tried to make the text fit the tool—especially when I have encountered an interesting and surprising piece of writing, like Martin’s. I do not believe this is uncommon; my experience also suggests that the greatest discrepancies between markers often result from these interesting pieces. In my classroom practice I have often asked a colleague to weigh in on a student paper that I was having trouble grading, only to find that we were at opposite ends of the rubric; this has happened when marking diplomas as well. My own Alberta Education marking report cards revealed times where the discrepancy between my score and another marker’s score has been as great as a five and a one. Some pieces also garner great debate at our reliability review sessions. Is it a brilliant and creative take on the task—or vacuous and confusing? What does the rubric tell us about the writing? An empathic-Thou lens might embolden me to question whether the problem is in the rubric itself. In the Martin scenario, I might ask if the rubric was “good” just because it was legitimate. If I were assessing this work—with this different awareness, and differently minded—I might, for example, change my practice by rejecting rubrics in their entirety.

This dissertation has been informed by the work of composition theorists such as Patricia Lynn, Brian Huot, and Peter Elbow. All three of these writing teachers have questioned the

limitations and role of rubrics in the post-secondary setting. However, in the introduction to Maya Wilson's (2006) *Rethinking Rubrics*, Alfie Kohn noted it is difficult to find sources that take on the critique of rubrics in the K to 12 setting and "without validation, our misgivings fade into resignation" (p. xxiv). Therefore, an empathic-Thou lens might encourage us to credit our own misgivings and gut reactions, find validation from texts that question accepted best practices, and explore new practices.

In the fictionalized scenario, I followed the direction from credible assessment literature (Anne Davies, for example) and the research of Alberta Education. Yet, assessment literature also "contends that improving the design of rubrics, or even inventing our own, will not suffice because there are problems inherent to the very idea of rubrics" (Kohn, 2006, p. xv). Not only are they antithetical to good teaching because "assessment strategies cannot be simultaneously devoted to both 'helping all students improve and sorting them into winners and losers'" but they are reductive because "quality is more than the sum of its rubricized parts... [rather] 'we need to look to the piece of writing itself to suggest its own evaluative criteria'—a truly radical and provocative suggestion" (Kohn, 2006, p. xv). An empathic-Thou lens might inspire me to make this type of radical shift to my usual practices.

But—radical shifts are scary. Maybe this lens would encourage me to embrace smaller changes in my practice. Maybe, instead of throwing the rubric out entirely, I might be inspired to experiment with design. Perhaps I might begin by questioning our "legitimized" five levels of achievement. Perhaps I follow Elbow's (2000) advice and rationale, and I embrace three levels of achievement—strong, satisfactory, and weak. Radical, given what ELA teachers have been persuaded to believe is a "good" rubric, but not as radical as abandoning them completely.

As importantly, an empathic-Thou lens might also encourage me to return to the Martin

assignment and consider if I could (perhaps briefly) have separated the two parts of assessment--judgment and response—in a way that allows empathic-response to stand judgment free. I have struggled with this idea for years—a true skeptic. Yet, Elbow (2000) has insisted it is possible and helpful. He used his own teaching experiences to:

insist that liking or loving can operate outside of judging and often do.... Sometimes people don't take risks or try out their own values or start to use their own internal motivation until critical thinking is turned off and even the nonsense and the garbage are welcomed. In such a setting, people sometimes think themselves into their best thinking or imagine themselves into being more of who they could be. (p. 404)

As with the rubric example, an empathic-Thou lens does not necessarily lead to an invention of “new practices.” It might, however, motivate me to seek out and explore existing practices that are aligned with different values and beliefs; an empathic-Thou lens might shape me to become more open to them. I have not always been open to Elbow's (2000) assertion. Previously, I would have doubted that I should be liking and welcoming “nonsense” and “garbage.” However, an empathic lens might encourage me to take pause and ask—as Elbow did—if specific classroom practices that take “time-outs from the evaluative mentality [could] help my teaching... [and] foster an atmosphere of support and appreciation that helps students flourish, think well, and stretch themselves” (p. 404).

But how would I “do” that? How would that look? Elbow (2000) suggested that this classroom practice is achieved by asking the same types of questions of student texts that readers ask of legitimized or “important texts:”

What does the text say? What does it imply or entail? What are its consequences? What does the writer assume? What is the writer's point of view or stance? Who does the text

Speak to? How does the text ask me to see the world? What would I do if I believed it?

(italics original, p. 405).

I think to my engagement of Buber's work; I can see that I asked many of those questions. I think to my engagement of Martin's work; my questions were very different. I did not apply the same questions to Buber's important text as to Martin's student work. As Elbow pointed out, nothing was stopping me; they are "simple, obvious, important, questions that have no inherent connection to quality or to value" (p. 405). An empathic-Thou lens might encourage me to shift my classroom practice to "answer these kinds of questions about our student's writing without a habitual edge of evaluation" (p. 405).

This shift could also influence how—as a teacher—I was imagining (or failing to imagine) Martin's worldview. The idea Martin articulated in the textual excerpt suggested that when humans experience things, they don't matter. Martin suggested that neither inner, nor outer, nor open, nor secret experiences are important because those experiences are meaningless things—an accumulation of meaningless knowledge. When I read that same passage of Buber's work, I carry with me the knowledge of his life experiences and complexity of his thought; I am deeply challenged to think through the ways that statement sits uncomfortably with me. As Martin though, it was easy to dismiss those ideas as immature (ridiculous even), to believe there was a paucity of thoughtfulness that went into a statement. It left me with a desire to help Martin fill in the gaps with my own ideas—perhaps directing him toward the entire field of phenomenology. I did not do so with Buber.

Nor did Martin's work encourage me to embrace change in the way that Buber's did. Again, I don't mean to suggest that teachers do not have things to teach their students. However, so too do students have things to teach us. I suggest that there is something about the work of

formulating and articulating judgments that distances us from the ability for a work to impact us; in my own experience, I have held the work at bay—at an arm’s length distance—to be safe from the sway of it so I can remain more objective, clear headed, rationale, and able to articulate and support the reasons I have given it the judgments I have. This leaves little room for me to be changed. Buber’s work changed me (I wrote an entire dissertation because of it), but as a teacher assessing Martin’s work, I didn’t allow myself to be impacted by it in the same way.

Returning to the Martin scenario, in my fictionalized contextualization, I did not stipulate where (and how) the writing assignment fit in the larger course context; however, an empathic-Thou lens might also reinforce an examination of my (general and specific) choices about the design and choice of writing tasks in my classroom. This lens might initiate me to explore if the tasks themselves were requiring and encouraging students to write in variety of forms and ways. Because an empathic-Thou lens might provide me a new awareness of the pressures of the testing culture and the limited types of writing those tests demand, I might question how many of—and to what extent—my assignments—in question structure, form of response, and expected parameters, were being modelled after and influenced by the diploma exam.

The assignment presented in the fictionalized scenario was clearly influenced by the exam; I would ask myself how many other writing tasks might be as well—and if there were a balance. Again, the empathic-Thou lens might not invent new classroom practices; sometimes the lens might bolster our resistance to habituated ones, and to redirect ELA teachers toward existing guidelines and composition cautions that would positively shape our practice. For example, if I return to the NCTE-WPA white pages and CCCC guidelines (noted throughout and explored in Chapter 7) there is a list of practices and considerations that could be directly applied to my assignment creation and assessment of classroom writing.

This re-minded approach might also encourage me to question my decision to grade at all. But those are brave steps. They are also steps that might not be supported by a teacher's administration or division. This encourages me to return full circle in which I considered the big—and the small. I reflect on what I can do—in my small but important realm of control—pen in hand.

Recognizing the importance of the small, I return to the specific act of response and explore my fictionalized feedback practices. First, I look at my approach and tone. If I am honest, if this had been a student's text, I probably would not have been so patient. Nor would I have given as much feedback to such a short piece. Likely, the fictionalized exemplar feedback has already been swayed by my empathic-Thou lens, or perhaps simply because I knew this sample of feedback would be publically available, under scrutiny, and possibly a reflection of me as a teacher. Although my tone seems somewhat conversational and patient, I note some things that I would also change.

During my assessment process of Martin's work, as soon as I started reading, I began by making in-text comments. Believing that I was in dialogue with the text, I immediately began questioning, wondering, hinting and suggesting. Although I was fully engaging the text—some might even say in dialogue—I did not seek understanding before I began to deconstruct individual parts. Akin to someone who is preoccupied with formulating their responses while someone is talking, the simplicity of the suggestion to (first) read all the way through should not be minimized. This seems a simple, practical, suggestion for a teacher—but one that I know I fail to do. In my own experience, I have been a better listener as Buber's student-reader than I was as Martin's teacher-reader. In part, this requires extra time for teachers to engage a text multiple times. This is a change in practice, but it is also a philosophical shift that asks us to suspend, not

abandon, our teacher-tendency to make sense of something through our own experience and to facilitate another to change.

Even by the end of this attempt to situate this fictionalized example in practice, I am aware that it still does not paint a precise to-do list; I return to my assertion that much of this work is an exploration of our assumptions which might open a multitude of possibilities and encouragement to seek out, experiment with, engage a wider variety of practices.

As Teich (1994) has vitally observed, it is important for “instructors and students alike to examine their assumptions, opinions, and values in the act of entering emotionally and intellectually into other people’s world’s” (p. 153). An empathic-Thou lens re-minds me that we are not just readers. We are teachers. Teaching requires standards—but also patience and positioning on the side of our students. I am inspired to wonder the many other ways that an empathic-Thou lens might encourage a deeper openness to practices that allow student writers to be safe enough to find their own voices; brave enough to explore their own ideas; and open enough to feedback that would strengthen both content and form. I believe this stance might result in the kind of rupture and re-minding that I have spoken about being important—an openness that might differently inform the values, belief, and classroom practices surrounding writing assessment.

Transitioning Comment

This final chapter of Part 3 worked to acknowledge and address applicability in practice. As I have stated throughout this study, my main goal has been to disrupt and reveal theoretical underpinnings that might be driving our practice. However, I recognize the importance of demonstrating that overarching ideas can touch down in classroom application. This chapter brings “Part 3: An Empathic-Thou Lens on Writing Assessment” to a close.

The final section: Looking Forward Looking Back is a closing reflection that articulates my unfolding understandings and continuing mysteries.

PART FOUR: LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

Chapter 10: Unfolding Understandings, Continuing Mysteries

The other day, I got a bucket of water and a cloth, and called to my youngest daughter. Admittedly, it was a rather pathetic attempt to appease some “mommy-guilt.” Struggling to find the tenuous balance between my need to get stuff done, while still spending quality time with the kids, sometimes leads me to combine those binaries and sell it as fun.

I also had a “goal” in mind for Gisella; I wanted my tiny whirlwind to learn while helping Mommy – something simple, like how to clean the table. But then she discovered that as she dunked her little hand into the bucket, soapy water spilled over the edge. It fascinated her, and she tried it again and again, experimenting with this concept. Her Eureka-moment trumped the intended chore. Instead of learning to clean, she learned about displacement – pretty great for a three-year-old and certainly as valuable as table-wiping.

Then it struck me: if this had taken place in school, Gisella would have failed miserably! She didn’t “learn the lesson.” In fact, instead of cleaning up, she made a mess! Summatively, it would have been reported as a “not yet” on a report card. Formatively, she would have been redirected to focus on the “I can statement” of the lesson. She learned something, but not what the target set out.

And so I find that my own children have awakened a burgeoning curiosity that leads me to question teaching practices I have been enthusiastically endorsing – such as outcomes-based curricula and their corresponding assessment models.

The crusade for solid unit planning and assessment reform is a moving tide at the core of professional learning that aligns teacher practice to our current curricula. I have bought into these principles! I lived and breathed them; I encouraged others to do the same. I have urged teachers to ask themselves essential questions about the purpose of their instructional and assessment choices, and to align their planning and assessment to curricular outcomes that begin with the end in mind.

Now – I reconsider.

I try to imagine what school will teach my other daughter, six-year-old Olivia. Olivia’s mind dances. Parenting such wonderful trouble can be frustrating, but I also see the gift her insatiable inquisitiveness holds. There are times when I am not sure how to rein her in – the energy of a hurricane is hard to steer. But I do know that when she is interested, she is captivated. She is already a smart little girl, and a square little peg.

Unfortunately, I have begun to see schools as round holes that all children must squeeze through. I worry that schools do not allow learning to occur naturally, or borne of student need or interest. Nor do they allow for assessment of that learning to generate from the experience, or what students may have learned from their opportunities. Schools attempt to organize teaching and learning in ways we can explain, defend, describe, and evaluate. But what about the other things children may take away from a learning experience?

I don’t know how this plays out in the classroom. I can see value in enabling our students to dunk their soapy hands in their learning. The imaginative possibilities encompassed by a flexible curricula appeal to me; I believe these very things will teach students to think critically and adequately prepare them for a changing world.

But there is practicality to consider. Nobody wants a free-for-all! Outcomes-based curricula and assessment provide helpful structure, equity between students, and general organization. But are specific outcomes the best way to encourage authentic learning? Certainly they create destinations we are driving toward; but they also, by definition, limit the journey. In

the process, do we limit our children?

Do we create and implement curriculum outcomes because we truly believe they are best for our students – or because we haven't imagined how to do it differently? Are we ready to transform?

I have few workable answers to the practical challenges this educational transformation would present. However, I do think we are tumbling in a world that is a shifting kaleidoscope, unable to predict what picture will appear tomorrow. I am not confident the structure of schools and our current practices encourage the flexibility, creativity, and healthy curiosity our children will need as they navigate the ever-changing landscape of the future.

There is one thing I am sure of: that the weighty responsibility of preparing children for a world of possibilities, and the challenges that come with change, face educators and parents alike.³⁵

Looking Back

Throughout the process of my PhD work and engaging this dissertation, I have asserted the importance of looking back as an essential step in looking forward. The process has actualized in terms of historical explorations of the ideas that have been engaged, as well as my own experiences. Thinking back, I am surprised to realize that some of the driving questions behind this study were bubbling up long ago. One doesn't always realize what they have been thinking about until they are re-minded. Five-plus years, classes that stretched me, a mountain of reading, a couple of worn-out laptops, and a treasury of tuition payments down the road, I realize I still don't have all the answers to the questions I posed.

What I believe now, that was not part of my previous understanding, involves the need to change something deeper than a simple change to what we are we doing. I now believe in the importance of drawing awareness to our way of being in the world and in the classroom. Tacit awareness is slippery and lurks undisturbed. Concentrated effort and specific intention is required to mine the depths.

Importantly, I now believe in the role an empathic-Thou lens can play in encouraging and

³⁵ Personal article: Excerpt from "Square Little Pegs," published in *Education Canada* (Day, 2013)

allowing these different and deeper understandings. I now believe the deeper issues I have grappled with have much to do with our orientation towards our students and their learning. If we treat our students (and their texts) less like objects and more like subjects, encouraging and allowing *I-Thou* encounters instead of living so firmly in the world of the *It*, we will begin a necessary journey. Therefore, I do not believe that understanding is necessarily predicated on finding answers to all the questions I have wondered about; rather, I believe we all can become better ELA teachers by employing a lens that encourages us to see ourselves, our culture, our institutions, and our practices in different ways. This process calls attention to who we are. Perhaps more importantly, this process calls attention to who we want to be.

Being Re-Minded

My study is founded on the belief that relationship is ontologically fundamental. Although we have been conditioned to believe—and to live—otherwise, it is necessary to once again become other-wise; empathy can re-mind us of this different way of being. Throughout this process, I have played with the word *re-minded*. The task and ability of empathy to re-mind us is embedded in the very title of this thesis.

I strongly believe in the importance of being re-minded. If we are re-minded, we might be able to darn the Cartesian split and return to a way of being in which we are whole: head and heart, mind and body, self and other. Going forward we can see ourselves, our roles as teachers, and our decisions and practices within those roles, in a different way. This study has been a personal journey that has combined academic research and my own personal experiences to explore who I have been, who I am, and who I would like to be—and how that way of being shaped and shapes what I do.

Although I am hopeful this work has value to others, this work has been a reflective engagement of my own experiences and beliefs. For me, this reflective journey was necessary. I believe it is important for all educators. Educators should practice empathy and, to do so, teachers must be strongly self-aware. Without self-awareness, we have no ability to define the boundaries between self and other; our experiences, habits, and judgments can subconsciously condition the ways we relate to others.

Usually I am not about boundaries! Even in these late stages of my work, my writing reveals surprises. Another lesson. And/both.

We can not—nor should—leave pieces of us behind or apart from what we bring to relationships. But we must have a primary objective of knowing ourselves and what we bring to our relationships, both with students and the texts we are assessing. We must ensure that our foundational goal as teachers of writing is not to project our own attitudes and experiences on others. Reflection is key to self-awareness and allows us to engage an empathic-Thou attitude requiring an understanding of oneself and an understanding of the other. Edith Stein noted that “only he who experiences himself as a person, as a meaningful whole, can understand other people” (p. 116). According to Buber, another essential piece of experiencing oneself as a person is when one is in relation with an other, where one can become an *I* to a *Thou*.

Beginning with that belief, the goal of this work has been to bring academic research and personal experiences into connected conversations to develop an empathic-Thou lens, and to theorize how this re-conceptualization might relate to education. Central to this study has been a process of exploring the values and assumptions that might be rooting and directing our educational decisions (and actions) without us being fully aware.

In many ways, this process has been like building a jigsaw puzzle. Anyone who knows me would smirk at my choice of metaphor. I strongly dislike jigsaw puzzles. But, like beginning a jigsaw, I needed to find some border pieces. To start, my work needed a frame, and Martin Buber's *I-Thou* pointings provided that framework. Foundational to Buber's work is the idea of the importance of treating others as subjects. The danger, when we allow ourselves to see others simply as objects, is that anything living or otherwise can be used, experienced, or desired. However, *Thou* encounters re-mind us of the importance of relating to others as inherently valuable subjects.

It is important to again note that Buber stated he did not believe in empathy; but the understanding of empathy has changed over time. It's become even more complicated and conflated than in Buber's time. However, Coplan's (2011) understanding of empathy seems very much aligned with Buber's concept of inclusion, the attempt to see the other, experience the other side, and imagine the real while keeping a strong sense of self. Buber was concerned with both the *I* and the *Thou*; self and other. So too is empathy, the way I have engaged it. Buber's work spoke to me and the role of empathy as integral to empathic-Thou encounters.

From there I needed to have some solid corners, to build some structure and support to the project. I realized that better understanding each of the core concepts—empathy, writing, and assessment—was necessary foundational work. I explored and questioned the history, theoretical underpinnings, and coinciding values that tacitly root each. Empathy was explored first, and then developed as a lens for inquiry. Then, the history and values inherent in the concepts of writing and assessment, both present in English Language Arts classrooms, were explored through an empathic-Thou lens, informed by Buber's dialogical philosophy offered in *I and Thou*.

Each section that fit directed me toward next pieces that I needed to find. The process took on a life of its own. Through the reading and the writing, the project directed me as I directed it. The puzzle was transactional. I was creating it and building it, and my own experiences worked their way into the formation of the picture. This process has resulted in my own different consideration about the ways these three powerful forces have presented themselves and impacted both education and English Language Arts education. Building and discovering resulted in my own understanding of how these forces have shaped me, my decisions, and my pedagogical practice. Specifically, this process has also brought me to posit how an empathic-Thou lens might encourage ELA educators' openness to small changes that might differently inform our decisions and practices surrounding English Language Arts writing assessment.

This dissertation was a discovery and an articulation of my own process of being re-minded and the learning that has resulted from that exploration; I hope it will inspire readers to engage their own exploration. Finally, although my dissertation is reaching the end and I have been changed—re-minded as well as trans-formed—I acknowledge there remain missing pieces and questions unanswered.

Understandings and Mysteries

I am left with unfolding understandings and continuing mysteries—many of which are linked.

An empathic-Thou lens re-minds me to discover the hidden parts of my own iceberg. Throughout this study, I have suggested that there is a deep foundation of values, underpinnings, and pre-suppositions that lie beneath the still waters of awareness. Thou-empathy requires self-understanding. This maturity can only become complete in relationship with others. This

dissertation (for myself, in the *process* of writing and—hopefully—for others, as they read the *product* of the writing) is an attempt to explore these understandings. I see the writing and reading of this dissertation as a dialogue, the space of a Buberian between. It is in these spaces that dialogue, in the Buberian-sense, can bring power to highlight beliefs, values, and encourage understanding. This work has been part of my own process. I hope it will speak to – write to – my readers.

Throughout, I have been re-minded of the power of the writer writing. Although society and schools have a graphocentric bias that results in valuing of the product of the writing, before it becomes an object, the process of writing has the possibility to create an important dialogue within the writer—or perhaps in a space of between the writer and the page. The process of writing as an act of research, exploration, and understanding has pushed me into my own thoughts and experiences. This silent communion has been an experience of and/both regarding connection and isolation. I have been alone, and at times lonely. Until the writing is product, my thoughts can neither be testified nor shared with the world; but, the act of writing opened a space of *between* and of *dialogue* that encouraged me to recognize and understand valuable connections. I have connected past and present experiences and it has pushed me to imagine about the future. I have connected what I think and what I feel. I have connected theory with practice. Praxis.

This act of writing, in an embodied way, affirms what research tells me about the importance of writing in the classroom. As I stated throughout this study, teachers can be insidiously tugged in ways that undermine their own better judgment. The way we societally value and educationally assess writing (as object) does not just tug, rather it drags us toward classroom practices that undermine the full potential of writing. An empathic-Thou lens

encourages me to look at writing in its entirety. Instead of seeing value of the object of writing, this experience has reawakened value in the act of writing.

I need to nurture this re-minder and gently hold this remembrance. As this final reflection draws to a close, this butterfly becomes a chrysalis. It will be easy to forget wings that have powerfully fluttered.

An empathic-Thou lens re-minds me of the importance of valuing disruptive voices that create rupture and allow for genuine change to occur. An empathic-Thou lens encourages disruptive voices to be engaged with more tolerance and to look beyond a majoritarian response. Tolerance opens the door to discover value, worth, and depth through understanding. Tolerance has the potential to shift to acceptance and appreciation. An empathic-Thou lens allows me to conceptualize these disruptions differently—opening the door to the richness of diversity.

Disruptive voices also need a place in student writing. In relation to the assessment of student writing, this lens encourages me to consider student writing that deviates from the norm (either through content *or* form) as a form of a disruptive voice. Like other disruptive voices that have historically been marginalized and silenced in the past, an empathic-Thou lens allows me to understand the importance of allowing those voices to be heard. This process also brings into question when I should engage a standard, and when to embrace diversity.

An empathic-Thou lens re-minds me that knowing is relational. I have been encouraged to rethink my position regarding objectivity *and* subjectivity. In a process of fusing binaries and rejecting bifurcation, I value the place of both subjectivity and objectivity. Importantly, I also come to value the place of inter-subjectivity. This relational foundation has a place in assessment. It re-minds me of the philosophical base of formative assessment and the power it holds.

More than a process of shaping student learning to successfully achieve academic outcomes or external standards, assessment can turn learning into a dialogical conversation. It moves the teacher from the front of the room to the side. It encourages students to be seen. An empathic-Thou lens encourages me to understand that a place exists for the planned *and* the lived in assessment. It acknowledges the relational power that affects both student and teacher to be shaped and altered through the exchange. This power could change both the student and the teacher.

An empathic-Thou lens encourages me to challenge power structures. It encourages me to question constructs that are antithetical to student learning and question how they are driving our decision-making. It re-minds me that students' immediate experiences and needs are important as issues of validity and reliability. It affirms what I already know about good writing and good assessment. It moves my judgment and trust in that judgment back into the classroom, back into relationships. It moves my judgment and trust in that judgment from my head to my heart. To my gut. Empathy bolsters me toward acts of resistance.

An empathic-Thou lens fortifies me to stand against being bullied, coerced, or frightened into unwise choices. Sometimes it simply re-minds me to stand against myself and my own fears and concerns. It re-minds me to stand firm against the tide of values and forces that tow me, in ways I might not have previously been aware of, because I choose to be anchored by new values.

This re-minded lens allows me to reconceptualize what is important. An empathic-Thou lens allows me to see who I want to be, what I want to do—and be reassured that I should be doing it. It empowers me and erodes the authoritative sway of influences that are not in students' best interests, nor in the interest of good practice when it comes to writing.

I also find myself faced with continuing mysteries. There are places where I have

incomplete answers. Schools are normed environments. The curriculum itself requires us to teach specific outcomes, specific competencies, and specific standards that are to be achieved by students. I can't throw standards out the window, hegemonic or not, just because I see the value of some students 'way with words' that differ from the legitimate currency of the school system and ELA curriculum. My study explores assessment, which is rooted in judgment. Judgments must be made. These judgments are unavoidable and are part of the job that I agreed to as a teacher. What to do?

How do we have standards that don't also level diversity; that encourage and value each student's unique ability, voice, and talents? How do we offer such broad multiplicities that allow students to demonstrate their learning in the ways that are best for them? How do we create authentic learning engagements and corresponding assessments that leave the road of possibilities open, instead of limiting the destination? An empathic-Thou lens allows us to see the importance of these questions because we are more other-wise about our students; but, how can they be actualized? Where do teachers find the time? The support? I still have many questions.

I also believe there is power simply in the asking of the questions. When we can see our students—and their texts—as subjects rather than objects, it forces us to ask if we are acting in the best interest of those subjects. An empathic-Thou lens encourages us to ask not only what we are doing, but why we are making the choices and the decisions that we are making—both in terms of our specific practices assessing student writing and education in general. An empathic-Thou lens encourages us to break free of our habituated ontology but this will take effort. It will take relationality, rupture, and re-minding. It is also a journey.

Pausing for Reflection

Just as Pinar (1975) defined and imagined *currere* as a pilgrimage, my steps here have been a pilgrimage, of sorts. Traditionally, a pilgrimage is a journey one undertakes to find significance. Pilgrimages engage the person and the community. On a pilgrimage, an individual embarks on a journey that challenges one's mind, body, and spirit—one's relational being engaging in a common curriculum that weaves separate I's independent journeying into relationship along the way. At the pilgrims' destination, these relationships shift yet again; beings—in relationship with each other—are joined to a greater collective energy, beyond the sum of the individual parts. Finally, when the pilgrimage ends, each pilgrim once again exits individually, each shaped and changed by one's individual/collective experience.

Furthermore, pilgrimages engage past, present, and future. A pilgrim's experience is deeply rooted to the past, as one follows a tradition rooted in history; but, a tradition that affects the moment as the pilgrim commits to a journey that will shape the future. Such journeys engage both the imminent and the transcendent. One is moved, impacted, filled, with spirit as the journey takes place—feeling within and between travelers. However, just as spirit and connections are rooted and grounded, one is simultaneously offered a connection to something out-there, bigger-than, and beyond. Pilgrimages erase dualisms between relationships, time, and spirit.

The process of engaging this study has been a pilgrimage for me as a teacher, researcher, and human being. I am left inspired to hope that engaging an empathic-Thou lens could carry others on a pilgrimage as well.

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