

**University of Alberta**

**Resistance and Revision: Autobiographical Writing in a Rural  
Ninth Grade English Language Arts Classroom**

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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**Samuel and Sara-Lauren  
your entrance into my life sustains me.**

**May our lives together cultivate a passion for learning.**

## **Abstract**

This qualitative study draws on the traditions of narrative inquiry and arts-based research to explore the intricate puzzle of the experience of writing in a grade nine English Language Arts classroom, with a particular group of participants engaged in a creative autobiographical writing project. This case study of a small rural classroom, where 10 of 12 students participated as writers in the research, explores both the teacher's and the students' experiences. As a participant-researcher, I designed a three-cycle writing project spanning nine weeks, where all participants engaged in conversations about writing. One specific feature of the classroom setting was that both the teacher and the researcher were themselves active writers and deliberately and systematically offered stories of their own writing practice as part of the teaching about writing process, while undertaking the same writing tasks as the students.

The data collected and analyzed in this dissertation includes students' group conversations in class time, participants' drafts and final writing, entry and exit drawings of how students saw themselves as writers, and individual reflective private conversations. From this data, I created portraits of the participants as writers and of the instructional moments.

The drawings which were shaped by a participant's historical relationship with writing, their broader personal, social and educational context, and the study provided insight into the individual's relationship to

and with writing, providing access to a participant's knowledge and experience at times unavailable through more traditional forms of data. Two main themes that emerged were resistance to writing and students' complex relationship with revision. Their resistance manifested itself in a variety of forms, including one instance of plagiarism and a total absence of writing with another. An exploration of revision practices revealed a tangled process that often failed to improve the quality of students' writing, where revision became, for example, a matter of excision with the delete key or serial first drafting. This study complicates the common school use of autobiographical writing prompts, by documenting the many forms of participant resistance and task subversion. Further, the interpretation of 'autobiographical' as necessarily entailing only the 'true' proved an area of tension.

## **Acknowledgments**

The three simple roses of the writer, the teacher and the researcher, now more fully integrated through participation in this research project, are thankful for what “we” learned.

As the researcher my words wait for companions; I am grateful to those words that have shaped my thinking, my actions and my experiences through courses, readings, and events. The ordered generations before me all contribute to this story.

As the writer, the invisible presences in my life continue to shape and reshape my story. My parents (both deceased) and family all participate in my autobiography. They come with me to research, to class and to writing. Those living provide new stories. Those deceased never object to revisionist history.

As the teacher and the researcher I owe a debt of gratitude to Ms Harris and her class for giving me the ultimate gift—the gift of learning. Reluctant at times, the students taught me the importance of paying attention to the back-story of writing and of lives. They narrated an important story of resistance, which I now need to capitalize on to make a difference.

My writing started off rough and through conversations with many became polished. I thank: David Pimm for his handprints which produced a far more sophisticated understanding of revision and resistance; Margaret Iveson for participating in my conversation and my graduate story from beginning to end; and Jill McClay for her challenging and thought-provoking pushes that I both embraced and resisted. Their thoughts and suggestions provided insight into the form and structure of this work.

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## **Dedication**

Ordered lines of generations  
capped with stucco and stone.  
Red roses mark the distant past  
white the more recent passed.

Gray shades of life, rough and polished,  
inscriptions trapped in stone.  
Harsh letters  
    carve time,  
as words wait for companions.

Dates in memory, images of meaning  
    holding hands,  
    rings woven together  
    with three simple roses.

Surrounded by layers of green  
    dying wreath  
    artificial carpet  
    resting on living dying green.  
White roses hold a place for us.

Bouquet of balloons wiggle and dance,  
like little girls in new dresses  
now, clutched in reluctant hands  
    pink, blue, orange,  
    yellow, purple, green.  
Let them go.

Endings and Beginnings.

Angelic legacies sitting on stone  
mark  
invisible presence.

*by Susan Bowsfield*

# Chapter One

## Three Simple Roses

We are not smudges on the mirror. Our life histories are not liabilities to be exorcised but are the very precondition for knowing. It is our individual and collective stories in which present projects are situated, and it is awareness of these stories which is the lamp illuminating the dark spots, the rough edges. (Pinar, 1988, p. 148)

I first became a writer in 2003. Or, rather, I first came to see myself as a writer while a graduate student and, even then, I did not actually consider myself a writer until I had completed my Master's thesis in 2005. The identity of writer for me was late to bloom, especially considering that for fifteen years prior I had been a teacher of writing, although I now believe I assigned writing for much of that time rather than taught it. As an Alberta English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, I am responsible for teaching *all* of the language arts. I am a *reader*; I am a *speaker*; I am a *listener*; I am a *viewer* and, as such, I act from a position of insider knowledge whenever I teach as someone who can and who knows she can. However, before 2005, I did not consider myself to be a *writer*, nor did I consciously teach writing from the intimate perspective of knowing writing as an insider.

It was this lack of a writer's identity that now strikes me as odd, given that every day, as a teacher, I was required to write in some form or another. I wrote assignments, units, lesson plans, reference letters, newsletters, etc., but still I was not, to my mind, a writer. For me, the only people who qualified as 'writers' were professionals in some way. How, then, did I come to perceive myself as a writer? Which definition was I using then and which one am I using now? How do our operational

definitions of who a writer is and what a writer does influence our experiences both of writing and of learning to write?

I specifically chose to preface this dissertation with a poem of mine, in part because poetry is not typically considered academic writing. Consequently, it likely needs some situating in an academic context such as this. The particular poem is both creative (in the sense of attending to the aesthetic) and autobiographical (in that it speaks of a moment of reflection on my experience capable of shaping new ideas as seen in this dissertation). I present it where it is in this academic setting for both academic and personal (dedicatory) purposes.

In the poem, set in the tiny cemetery where we buried my mother, the ‘angelic legacies’ are my five young nieces who, after the interment, sat on the gravestone as a natural resting place, providing me with an opportunity to see differently. By sitting where no adult ever would, they changed my perspective of the place, the solemnity of the ceremony, and eventually, to some extent, my sense of the place of autobiographical writing within academic writing. As a *writer* occupying their place and their point of view, I saw the world could be different – sitting somewhere else, looking out to look in.

I also came to see writing differently from within an academic setting. The opportunity to write creative prose and poetry in two doctoral-level graduate courses caused me to consider my own writing self in relation to those of my school students. The first was a writing course offered in English education by my supervisor, Margaret Iveson, which focused on the teaching and researching of writing. The class members were asked to bring a piece of writing to workshop each week on any subject we chose. At times, we were given open prompts, such as to locate a word in the dictionary and work it into or through our writing (my word was ‘invisible’ within the poem *Dedication*, written two months after my mother’s death), a suggested genre or no prescription at all. This writing

encouraged both risk-taking and an exploration of genres that, frankly, I had previously avoided.

The second course was Jean Clandinin's seminar on narrative inquiry. This course required weekly writing of what she called "work-in-progress." The writing could be on any subject we wanted to work with and I chose to write on the use of creative writing in academic settings. I wrote poems, stories, anecdotes and an academic final paper which incorporated these creative texts, using them to discuss the place of creative writing within academic settings, its potential for generating greater self-awareness of writing process and the nature of voice.

Together, these two courses provoked questions in me about pedagogical choices in the classroom that enable and constrain student writing. They provided contrapuntal moments that ruptured my sense of writing in the classroom. The opportunity to write creatively in an academic setting about significant and deeply personal experiences created powerful motivation and important awareness of process for me. I began to wonder, "Did I ever occasion similar possibilities for students in my secondary classroom?"

Further, these two courses served to revise my personal definition of a writer, a shift which subsequently allowed me to change my self-classification from "not a writer" to "writer". Previously, I had seen a writer as some sort of paid professional: a journalist or a published novelist, poet, author, editor, etc. I had had a conversation with a classmate in a graduate course, which brought this entrenched belief to the surface. We were talking about writing in general, when she elected to relate a story about her own writing experiences. While parenting young children and not teaching, she had written a novel and (unsuccessfully) submitted it for publication. She expressed a clear sense of being a writer and enjoying writing. I asked if she had ever offered this story and or the novel itself to her students. She explained that she had, but always prefaced the claim of being a writer or writing a novel with the (for her)

important detail, of “unpublished”. But “unpublished writer” was clearly not an oxymoron for her – and dissertations are frequently cited with the same “unpublished” tag.

For me, significance resides in this paradox: I am a writer, but others do not see me as a writer; or I do not see myself as a writer when others would. Underneath lies the key question of who gets to decide who is or is not a writer? When I began writing extensively in graduate courses and gained a greater confidence in the quality of my writing, I started to see processes that helped me be productive as well as strategies that I used when resisting writing and places where my writing worked and where it failed. In addition, I noticed that the time I needed to read and/or generate possibilities was necessary and eventually rewarding.

Graduate school required the use of a variety of academic forms: book reviews, papers, research papers, presentations, proposals, and so on. It also required journal entries on readings, which led to a clearer understanding that writing itself could function as a means of learning. Writing became a place to return to, in order to understand my thinking at a particular place and time. I also started to experiment with the creative genre of poetry. As my comfort with poetry grew, I branched out into creative prose forms such as anecdote, memoir and story, although my preferred genre remains poetry. Coming to understand better *how* I wrote, *when* writing worked for me and the significance of learning *through* writing all contributed to this shift in framing myself as a writer.

For me, the definition of “writer” is now very broad, involving experiences in writing in various forms, for various reasons, both academic and personal; the writing may be published or unpublished, private or public, but it always invokes a space to learn about oneself, about others and the world around us. As I want my students to see themselves as writers (and act accordingly), I needed to find ways to invite myself, other teachers and the students themselves to see writing as an experience central to learning and as one invoking a space of self-

exploration. For me, understanding my personal writing process better proved a significant part of this journey. The research I have undertaken for this dissertation seeks to create space for this reflective growth of self-understanding about writing *within a classroom setting*.

In my Master's thesis, entitled "Conversations: Implementing English Language Arts Curriculum in a Rural Senior High Setting" (Bowsfield, 2005), I explored a lack of discussion among teachers regarding the various relationships among writing, teaching and the teaching of writing in the secondary English Language Arts classroom. The professional conversation group that was the focus of my Masters' study, in which I acted as a participant-observer, met to explore the issues of implementing a new ELA program of studies for Alberta. However, this group rarely talked in any detail about the role of writing in classrooms. Very little of our personal writing, individual philosophies of writing, teaching of writing or writing assignments were even mentioned, let alone examined or challenged. I knew these teachers: they were all well respected in their various high schools and diligent both in providing writing opportunities and in their construction of writing assignments. For some reason, though, it seemed we were unable to articulate, unwilling to share or were perhaps even unconscious of the relationships among student writers, ourselves as writers, the act of writing, the instruction of writing and our classroom context. This absence from the conversation led me to wonder about the role of writing in ELA classrooms.

This research study explores the interconnections and the intertwining, as well as the interstices, of life in a secondary ELA classroom when creative, autobiographical writing is composed by students, by the teacher and by the researcher. The opening quotation from William Pinar proposes that the precondition for knowing is contained in our individual life histories. I selected creative, autobiographical projects as a touchstone for the writing, because they are situated in writing lives whose authors pause to reflect.

The conversations that comprise much of the data drawn on for this dissertation form layers of relationship: the teacher's and the researcher's writing, our relationship to writing process and the planning of writing as it lived beside and with students' writing in addition to the students' own public and individual conversations about writing. While focused on writing, the conversations twisted and turned improvisationally in the classroom setting. Specific writing processes, strategies, frustrations, triumphs and failures were all elements that created space for self-reflection. Individually and collectively, we wrote to learn more about ourselves as writers.

I am deeply embedded within this research study, not least as it also reflects a significant step on my journey from non-writer to writer. I asked the teacher and the student participants to reveal themselves through their writing and their conversations about writing. In solidarity, then, I offer throughout this dissertation part of my writing self alongside the stories I have constructed of them and theirs.

One layer of this account concerns the plurality of my own voice. One voice is that of Susan, an experienced secondary-school teacher of ELA. A second reflects Susan Bowsfield, a writer/non-writer, while the third is "I", the researcher and author of this dissertation. At times, extricating a unitary voice proved challenging and confusing. Whenever I (as the researcher) entered the classroom, I brought with me both the writer/non-writer and the teacher. In my narrative of Avery in Chapter 8, tensions between my teacher and researcher self come very much to the fore. It is not that these are distinct roles or identities that I move in and out of (Ainley, 1999). Rather, I am all three at the same time, but with varying emphases at given moments: a messy compilation of teacher, writer/non-writer and researcher situated in historical, personal and social experience. These are the three simple roses that entwine as they rise in the light.

## The Research Project

I acted as a participant-researcher in a grade nine, secondary English language arts classroom, for which the class teacher (whom I call Ms Natasha Harris) and I had constructed a themed, creative, autobiographical writing project for her class. Ten students from this class agreed to participate in the research and were initially clustered into two conversation groups. All the participants, including Ms Harris and myself, generated original writing from our personal experience, which was then shared and discussed. The conversations surrounding this writing experience grew out of the processes individuals employed, the stories they told about and of their writing, as well as the writing itself. Both an initial and concluding task for the research project had participants visually represent their writing experiences within it.

The project worked through three consecutive cycles of initiating writing, revising writing and exploring the experience of writing in discussion, with significant time devoted to talking about these experiences. It was the intricate puzzle of the experience of writing in a particular classroom, with a particular group of participants engaged in a creative autobiographical writing project that I explored for my research.

The following research questions formed a starting place, among other things to generate further questions:

1. How does a teacher's/researcher's writing self and understanding of individual writing processes shape and interact with students in a secondary ELA classroom context?
2. How does creative, autobiographical writing contribute to students' awareness of personal writing processes and understanding of the writing self?
3. How do the individual writing selves that exist in the classroom interact, interconnect and relate to one another?

4. How does the experience of an arts-based research task contribute to an understanding of writing experiences?

As T. S. Eliot (1974) observed in the opening line of his poem *East Coker*, “In my beginning is my end.” I will return to these questions in my final chapter and comment there on how they played out through and in deep connection with my specific setting and participants’ experiences.

This chapter has introduced some aspects of my “individual story,” fleshing out my sense of the opening Pinar quotation. In Chapter 2, I turn to those related ‘collective stories’ that the relevant ELA research literature documents. But before doing so, I close this chapter with a traditional Armenian ending for a story (Tahta, 2006, p. 240), which (naturally) I have somewhat modified for my own purposes.

Three apples fell from heaven:

one for the reader,  
one for the teller of the tale,  
and one for the writers of the world.

# Chapter Two

## Ordered Lines of Generations

The teaching of writing demands the control of two crafts, teaching and writing. They can neither be avoided, nor separated. The writer who knows the craft of writing can't walk into a room and work with students unless there is some understanding of the craft of teaching. Neither can teachers who have not wrestled with the writing, effectively teach the writer's craft. (Graves, 1983, pp. 5-6)

I needed both the craft of teaching and the craft of writing to construct this literature review. While each section lends itself more heavily to either teaching or writing, both are present in each section. While the 'generations' of theorists co-exist in reality, here they have been ordered into a story suited to my research.

Students' experience with writing is littered with multiple teachers and classrooms and many, many other students writing alongside them. As they travel from one grade to the next, each previous experience contributes to shaping the new one. Generations of writing process researchers, since the early 1970s, have contributed to establishing *process* as the dominant theory for teaching writing in both elementary and secondary classrooms. In particular, students are introduced to some form of writing process theory over the course of several years in school as plural strategies are introduced, taught and reinforced.

For my research, I was not interested in researching the writing process itself, but rather in examining, in context, students' experiences using the writing process and how they come to understand, construct and use processes in their writing, alongside their teacher. Further, I sought to explore how and to what extent the teacher can make her processes and writing stories available to students. The teacher guides, directs and, at

times, controls the use of processes by making curricular decisions, defining instructional strategies, assigning writing assignments and assessing writing and skill.

Writing process, as it is understood and enacted in many secondary classrooms post-2000, was outlined by Doran, Rosen and Wilson (2003) in their text *Within and Beyond the Writing Process in the Secondary Classroom*. The process itself, as described there, has four general stages: pre-writing, writing, revising and post-writing. Within each stage, there are multiple elements: for example, they claimed thinking, talking, idea collection, planning, researching, reading, using lists and other materials may all play a role within pre-writing. Post-writing includes editing, proofreading, sharing and responding, reflecting, publishing, evaluating and grading. The middle stages – writing and revising – involve drafting and revising, feedback from peers, conferences with a teacher towards revision suggestions and more talk and revisions. The text emphasizes that the writing process is not linear, but rather recursive, allowing writers to move back and forth as they develop, shape and reshape thinking and writing. How did this guiding schematic about ‘the nature of writing’ in secondary schools come to be?

A brief historical overview of the development of writing process theory follows this introduction, focusing on early research as the first generation which was critical in establishing the field. The next subsection examines the developing nature of process writing theory, whose authors I refer to as an ‘evolving’ generation expanding and broadening its research scope, complicating the field and exploring a range of issues, including: the social implications of writing, revision practice, the nature of resistance, stages of interest and motivation, intertextuality and plagiarism.

Qualitative research grows more significant with this later generation, in order to address these complexities of writing research. Finally, ‘post-process’ writing theory further complicates pedagogical

choices by deconstructing a universal and univocal theory of process writing, in order to position writing and writing instruction as a more open, social and individualized process. The studies in this section of the literature review frequently address, through the exploration of student writing, both the craft of writing and, by extension and implication, the craft of teaching.

I then survey relevant literature on autobiographical writing in particular, as well as its impact on teachers as writers. The studies primarily focus on how teachers use autobiographical writing as a tool to develop themselves as writers and then further understand their own processes in order to *teach* writing in more effective ways. This form of writing is the context and constraint I placed on all of my participants.

I conclude by attending to the craft of teaching explicitly, where I focus first on the role of conversation in the classroom and then move on to the importance of teachers being writers. Conversations where students are authentic participants and storytellers capable of positioning their conversations within the entire landscape of learning to write are vital to self-awareness. While this section may appear short, it should not be perceived as insignificant for at least two reasons. In many ways, ‘teacher as writer,’ someone aware of her processes and able to offer her stories into the classroom dialogue as starting points for students to explore their own and others’ processes, is at the heart of my argument. Secondly, many of the studies, certainly all of the early process theorists, directly call for teachers of writing to be writers themselves.

## **The Craft of Writing**

The shift in writing theory from a product to a more process focus commenced in the 1950s and Hairston (1982/1994) claimed process writing had established a strong foothold by the early 1980s. Writing

process theory developed in reaction to what she identified as “the Current-Traditional Paradigm and Its Proponents” (p. 115), which focused essentially on the product of writing to the exclusion of attention to the process. Several other features of the paradigm included: a narrow definition of discourse to be solely description, narration, exposition and argument; a significant emphasis on usage, style and correctness; a frame that presumed writers knew what they wanted to say; the linear nature of composing; and that teaching writing was mostly concerned with teaching editing. Hairston pointed out that the traditional paradigm was not research based, but rather evolved out of a classical rhetorical model, one that perceived writing to be both linear and orderly. She was critical of the perception within the academy that no special qualifications were needed to teach writing, which is a perception I still encounter in secondary schools. The process theorists who commence this story here had to resist formidable and entrenched perceptions in the academy.

### **Writing Process: The First Generation**

The shift in focus from the written product itself to the composing processes that generated it spurred the field of composition studies and drew on the works of many seminal theorists, including Donald Murray, Janet Emig, James Britton, Peter Elbow and Donald Graves. These authors began to look into composing itself as they moved beyond examining the produced text.

Murray’s (1968) trade book presented a groundbreaking idea for teaching English at the secondary level. His textbook was not directly a product of research, but rather derived from extensive encounters with professional writers and his personal professional experience as a writer and teacher of writing at the university level. Murray’s work contained a significant shift from the text to the writer, where the participants of learning to write, the writer and the teacher all became the focus of attention. His approach to the teaching of writing advocated a supportive

and positive classroom climate where the teacher's role shifted to one of facilitator, coach, writer and advisor.

The composition teacher must be flexible in his [*sic*] approaches to the teaching of writing. He is teaching individual students, and he needs different material to work with different students. The writing teacher must have a documented understanding of the writing process and he should have an inventory of materials he can use to solve new teaching problems. (p. 173)

In this account, the student became responsible for the selection of topics, planning, writing and revising in relation to defining the audience and purpose.

Emig (1971), with the first case study of the individual's process, opened the door to studying and better understanding secondary school students' writing processes. Her attention shift away from product and onto the student in her research design spawned a movement. She set out to describe the writing process of grade twelve students and concluded that: students translated abstract ideas and directives into concrete writing processes, complied with but resented teacher-imposed processes including planning and outlining, and reformulation was only voluntary in self-sponsored writing.

With respect to the teaching of writing, she claimed that teachers of composition do not tend to write and therefore underconceptualize and oversimplify writing; thus 'planning' becomes outlining and 'reformulation' becomes error correction, with no focus on 'revision.' In trying to broaden students' access to writing experiences, she suggested that teachers needed to write both in the *reflexive* mode, where the focus is "on the writer's thoughts and feelings concerning his experiences" (p. 4), and in the *extensive* mode, where "the writer [is] conveying a message or a communication to another" (p. 4).

Britton *et al.*'s (1975) study developed a categorization system for student writing by means of scrutinizing 2000 papers in the United Kingdom of 11-18-year-olds. The researchers classified examples of

writing as *expressive*, *transactional* or *poetic* and recognized that a continuum from informal to formal and structured, coupled with private and personal to public and distant audiences, reflected the many purposes for writing. *Expressive* writing tends to be informal and unpolished and could be considered thinking on paper. This important form of writing, seen as foundational for the more distant and public transactional writing, diminished in school settings as student reached higher grades.

*Transactional* writing, the predominant mode in schools, is writing of a practical nature to provide information, whereas *poetic* writing has an aesthetic objective, one more formal in nature where form becomes integral to the message. Their study echoed Emig in documenting that very little expressive writing for understanding was undertaken in school settings and that transactional writing overshadowed all other purposes.

Elbow (1973), like Murray, challenged the traditional product paradigm and generated a method for teaching writing grounded in his personal experience. He advocated and elaborated on the idea of *free writing*, in other words, commencing writing without a clear and refined picture of the outcome, thus using the actual process of writing and revising to clarify thinking. A ‘teacherless’ writing class was one of his proposals, where the teacher adopted the role of learner to become a writer within the class, one who submitted personal, even tentative, writing for reactions and responses from students. Elbow introduced the metaphors of ‘growing’ and ‘cooking’ writing: growing is the larger process that meaning evolves from, which then moves into cooking, which is “the interaction of contrasting or conflicting material” (p. 49) through a process of transformation. Through the title of his composition textbook as well as its contents, he proposed and championed the idea of *Writing Without Teachers*.

Following Emig’s (1971) methodology, Graves’ (1975/1984) naturalistic case-study work, in both formal and informal settings with middle elementary students dating from the mid-1970s, revealed that

“many variables contribute in unique ways at any given point in the process of writing. Although the contributions of these variables were specific to each child, the identification of them appeared to be transferable to the study of the writing of other children” (1984, p. 36). In particular, he charted four influential variables on aspects of writing process: family and home, teacher, child development and peers.

I note Graves’ influences on my study as follows: family and home are a factor as they become the subject matter; peers are significant conversation and revision partners, as well as one primary audience; and two teachers consciously and publicly discuss their own writing processes. Further, Graves noted that differences between students’ writing processes were unique and variable, particularly across informal and formal writing situations where students were able to exert more or less control over their writing.

The previous theorists arrive at similar conclusions about the need to focus on the process rather than the product. Murray (1968) and Elbow (1973) published composition textbooks that challenged the traditional mode of teaching writing. Emig (1971), Graves (1975/1984), and Britton *et al.* (1975) undertook research. Roughly parallel in time, these texts contributed to the shift in thinking about writing and understanding the role of writing process in the production of texts.

This new process approach to writing was then solidified through the United States Bay Area Writing Project, which commenced in 1975 and evolved into the US National Writing Project, federally funded with nationwide sites: it continues to this day. The project was predicated on developing teachers as writers, professional development with the latest research and collaborative settings and networks to support continued development (Nagin, 2003).

Perl (1979/1994) investigated “the composing processes of unskilled college writers,” who, in short bursts, planned writing, executed it, and then edited it. Unfortunately, unskilled participants’ early attempts

at error detection and correction interrupted and limited thinking and composing, resulting in writing that was not substantially improved by their explicit use of process. This process was not linear; instead, a pattern of sentence creation interrupted by error detection and modification recursively broke the flow of writing, often causing students to lose track of the ideas they were attempting to generate. For the unskilled college writer, the editing process also focused predominantly on errors and lacked “a conception of editing that includes flexibility, suspended judgment, the weighing of possibilities, and the reworking of ideas” (p. 58). Perl attributed this to teacher emphasis during class time devoted to rules and conventions, and error detection in assessment, which contributed to students’ misperceptions “of writing as a ‘cosmetic’ process where concern for correct form supercedes development of ideas” (p. 58). I still see this as an issue in secondary classrooms, thirty years after Perl identified this difficulty.

Flower and Hayes (1980/1994) asserted that the metaphorical mythology of discovery in writing fails to alert the writer to the need for building and creating new ideas from raw experience. They elected “to study writing as a problem-solving, cognitive process” (p. 64), one where the novice or experienced writer constructs a specific rhetorical problem through the act of composing. Rhetorical problems typically consist of two major areas: the situation which is often given as the writer’s audience and assignment coupled with goals the writer determines, which may include *persona*, meaning, text production and a desire to affect the reader. They concluded that weaker writers focus on features and conventions at the expense of idea development, whereas experienced writers “build a unique representation not only of their audience and assignment, but also of their goals involving audience, their own *persona*, and the text” (p. 71). Of importance was the idea that stronger writers revisit and revise the particular rhetorical problem, “developing their image of the reader, the situation, and their own goals with increasing detail and specificity” (p.

73) throughout the entire process. They believed that it was possible to teach writers how to explore specific rhetorical problems. However, I feel that to teach students *how* to address their rhetorical problems actively would require ELA teachers to define and articulate their own rhetorical writing problems; in other words, to be experienced writers with sophisticated conceptions of the writing process.

Sommers' (1980/1994) study of the revision strategies of freshman composition student and experienced writers led her to be critical of linear models of revision. Revision was perceived as a "separate stage at the end of the process – a stage that comes after the completion of a first or second draft" (p. 75); therefore, distinct from writing. Student writers tended to perceive the process of revision solely as rewording and the fear of repetition existed at the word level, but not at the conceptual level; therefore, revision processes are perceived as "lexical changes but not semantic changes" (p. 79). Students' level of inspiration or ease or difficulty with writing also contributed to whether or not a student felt revision was necessary. A linear model of composing taught to students contributed to their application of revision processes in narrow and predictable ways, with little ability to shift the focus and direction of their writing. Sommers wrote, "At best, the students see their writing altogether passively through the eyes of former teachers or their surrogates, the textbooks, and are bound to the rules they have been taught" (p. 80), a deeply familiar experience to me today.

Sommers noted that experienced writers established two objectives for revision: *first* to refine the form and shape of their argument and *then* to attend to audience and readership. The experienced writer sees writing as a recursive and messy process, where a first draft explores and creates meaning, a second draft grapples with form, structure and argument, and subsequent drafts primarily delve into style, convention and precision. The writer readily acknowledges that all levels or cycles of revision exist in each draft; however, the emphasis shifts, allowing for the balance and

management of competing demands. The experienced writer moves back and forth between ideas and structure.

Critical of the pedagogy of her time, Sommers suggested that students had not learned to accept the ambiguity and tentative nature of a first draft; nor had they learned how to revise on a comprehensive scale; finally, neither had they learned that revision was the act of re-seeing their writing. Perhaps teachers of composition who are not themselves writers hold conceptions of revision closer to those of the students in Sommers' study, rather than to the conceptions of experienced writers. If so, they may only be capable of drawing on a linear model of revision, when instructing students about process.

Rose's (1980/1994) analysis of 'writers' block' revealed that students' rigid application of writing rules and/or planning strategies impaired writing process rather than improved it, while students who were rarely or not blocked employed more flexible and serviceable strategies allowing for more ambiguity. Rose addressed the differences between algorithms, where precise and specific rules were used to achieve certain results, and the more general heuristics, which operated as guidelines, providing flexible solutions to problems. Although the rules that 'blockers' follow can reflect good practice, their application as algorithmic dicta through instruction, textbook or a writer's need for absolutes contributes to a writer's inability to move productively through solving his or her writing problem.

Rose's observations regarding planning noted that those who block tended to need certainty and therefore translated their plans into static, rigid blueprints that, as the composing process continues, failed to meet their needs. 'Non-blockers' embraced ambiguity and uncertainty, which allowed for a loose, open plan to be revised during exploration and thinking. Rose recommended that teachers interview students in order to understand their historical experiences with writing and to locate rigid rules, inflexible plans and/or those ideas about writing that are in

conceptual conflict. My access point to students' previous experiences with writing included open and public classroom conversations as well as private ones, in an effort to further understand their relationship with writing.

The research I have highlighted here from the late 70s early 80s all strove to design experimental studies, which would control variables and be generalizable. A criticism of research from this time period could be levelled at the distant and voiceless researcher who established decontextualized writing scenarios, although perhaps a necessary beginning as these theorists began to describe and articulate what writers do with the methodologies of the time. The previous studies became the foundation for and contributed to the form of process theory as it is still enacted in the writing classroom: many of the issues and concerns identified in the individual studies are currently present in both my personal teaching and research experience. The original studies from 1965 to the early 1980s constitute what I have referred to as the first generation. Their authors drew attention to issues such as an oversimplified conception of revision, the perception that the writing process could predominately be divided into three stages – prewriting, composing and revision, an inexperienced or limited understanding of the interplay of purpose, audience and form, and writer's block. None of these have evaporated in the intervening twenty-five years.

### **Writing Process: Evolving Generations**

As the generations of writing process researchers developed, the field has moved through much iteration. This section is not strictly chronological: I start here with some synthesis pieces. Peterson, McClay and Main (in press), in their Canadian national survey of teacher's instructional writing practices, suggested that, "Perhaps because of the complexity of the enterprise, teachers' practices in writing instruction are under-researched" (p. 1). On a related note, Pritchard and Honeycutt's

(2006) commissioned review of the effectiveness of process writing claimed that empirical research related to writing, with an empirical methodology and empirically answerable questions, was difficult to locate. They also concluded that significantly more research has been done with college students and adults than with secondary-school students; therefore, it becomes difficult for me to draw on relevant age-appropriate research for my study. I further observe in relation to the particularities of my study that rural students are researched less than urban students and that elementary-age students' literacy practices appeared more frequently in the literature than secondary students' writing experiences.

From the early 1980s to 2005 composition research has broadened, as did the subjects available for study. Empirical studies undertaken during this time frame were either very narrow in focus, in order to control as many variables as possible (e.g. Strong, 1986; Hillock, 1982) or very broad overviews, such as Applebee's (1984) American survey of writing across subjects or Langer's (2000, 2001) work on the professional lives of teachers and teachers who 'beat the odds' in helping students to higher achievement. At much the same time, qualitative research was gaining a greater influence, with some researchers moving to address the complex nature of writing through varied methodologies (e.g. Sperling 1995; Dyson, 1987; Schultz, 1999). Further complicating composition research was the burgeoning idea of post-process writing theory (e.g. Kent, 1999; Vandenberg, Hum & Clary-Lemon, 2006), which I discuss in the next section.

Hillocks' (2006, 2008) commissioned literature review chapters categorized common research themes as teaching writing and teacher education, writing process and instruction, response feedback, and assessment. Hillocks (2006) concluded that, "teachers are either unaware of the research evidence for task-specific knowledge, or they do not put it into practice" (p. 74). While he concedes that exemplary teachers exist (Langer, 2001; Sperling & Woodlief, 1997), Hillocks claimed, "most

teachers appear to know little about the teaching of writing beyond the most general knowledge” (p. 74). With only general knowledge, they may not know what might be helpful and useful for writing instruction.

Pritchard and Honeycutt’s (2006) revealed that, generally, “those studies that view the process model as encompassing more teacher direction in the process show positive effects on the quality of students’ writing, on their view of themselves as writers, and on their understanding of the writing process” (p. 276). Direct-instruction strategies may include activating schema and background knowledge, teaching self-regulation strategies, modelling genre constraints, guiding students in (re-)vision and editing, providing feedback from peers and teacher, and developing audience awareness and its effect on style, purpose and tone.

Smagorinsky and Smith (1992) suggested that there are three broad positions regarding knowledge of writing. The first focuses on general knowledge procedures only, where it is believed a set of universal and general strategies can be applied to writing situations. The second position involves writers additionally having task-specific strategies for particular purposes, genres and content. The third position is that of advanced writing, which requires both task-specific knowledge and broader procedures, along with a working knowledge of discursive communities in which a writer wishes to participate.

It is important to note that these authors view the three positions as forming a “curricular path” (Smagorinsky and Smith, 1992, p. 229) rather than solely a developmental one, because they require increasingly specialized student knowledge, which cannot be acquired without instruction. While not exclusive to one population or another, they suggest that the first position is suitable for elementary students who are learning to grapple with and automate general procedures such as prewriting, writing and revising that grows and explores non-linear strategies. The second position of additional task-specific knowledge becomes significant at the secondary and college levels, where students become more capable

and successful with increasingly complex writing tasks. In this position, I believe a teacher's role includes helping students to reopen their automated general procedures, so they may be refined and explored in relation to new and more complex writing encounters. This practice may also have the effect of keeping strategies fluid and subject to revision. The third position situates writing within discursive communities, likely beyond that of the classroom. In order to assist students, teachers require a strong relationship with writing and a conscious knowledge of the general procedures and task specific knowledge as well as at least a nodding acquaintance with discursive communities.

### *Critical voices*

The following literature highlights several ideas arising in this study. It is a collection of studies that informed my thinking around the themes I was seeing start to emerge from the data. Lensmire (1994) critically revisioned writer's workshop as a contested site of risk and exposure for students, whose peers may reject or affirm both the writing and/or the author. He challenged the romantic view of children and writing, where children's texts are abstracted from all social contexts and concerns, and advocated the critical interrogation of students' texts without damaging the writer, in order to examine inherent values, norms and social relations. He noted that students who desire to protect themselves from exposure are drawn toward fictional narratives that allow for distance, a sense of control and less responsibility for the writing. In my study, the stipulation of autobiographical writing stripped students of this option from the outset, though students still found ways to protect themselves.

Lensmire (1997) extended his observations into a theory of *Powerful Writing, Responsible Teaching*, with Bakhtin's work at the heart of his argument. Lensmire invoked the metaphor 'workshop as carnival,' where the official social order can be challenged, questioned and resisted through talk, action and dialogue. Within this view of a classroom, the

teacher adopts a polyphonic approach and enters into dialogic relations with students in deliberation of texts. However, Lensmire had questions and concerns about students' abilities to learn from each other.

I would like to suggest that it is not incapacity to learn from each other but, rather, inexperience. In time, with practice, skill would develop. Lensmire called for voice to be seen as in-process and "conceived of as a project involving appropriation, social struggle, and becoming" (p. 76). Stories participate in the construction of culture and should not remain unexamined. He also cautioned that 'sharing time' in traditional workshop settings perhaps does not construct the teacher's and students' responsibilities in relation to one another as clearly as it could, a concern I return to in my final chapter. Further, I was mindful of Lensmire's (1994) criticisms when selecting autobiographical writing for student participants, because the constraint positioned them at the center of their telling and thus provided less space for using their writing to direct or control status within the classroom.

McClay (2004) researched 10- to 15-year-old self-defined 'avid' writers who chose to write beyond school settings for pleasure. The writing they generate in effect become gifts both for themselves and for others. She observed that the artifacts students create are stable and grounded in a particular time and place. The artifacts have the ability to preserve the shifting identity of the adolescent where "They both mediate and record moments of self" (p. 93). Her participants also expressed frustration with school writing and the processes frequently required as evidence of process, such as the doctored planning sheets generated *after* writing. Schools' deadlines, strict criteria and prescribed assignments were often counter-intuitive and counterproductive to their writing processes. McClay observed that writing entangled with identity ironically resisted revision, "either because the writing is irrelevant to them or pointedly too relevant" (p. 98). With autobiographical writing at the heart of my study, student identity was intertwined, but not the primary focus.

### *Meta-language of writing*

Students' engagement with revision practices, or lack thereof, became a central focus for me in my study. I have incorporated the following two studies specifically because they both call for teachers to use a more evolved meta-language with students in an effort to provide them with explicit composing and revising vocabulary. Although each study defines its own specialized vocabulary, together they provided significant conceptual tools for taking up this issue with students.

Focusing on revision with students ranging in age from 13 to 15, Myhill and Jones (2007) observed "students are indeed engaging in multiple types of revision activities during writing and are able to talk about these activities often with considerable purpose and precision" (p. 339). For their work, they adopted Allal, Chanquoy and Largy's (2004) three types of revision according to *when* in the process it occurs: "pretext revision which includes evaluation, revision, and refinement of ideas and purpose at the planning stage; online revision, which occurs during writing; and deferred revision which happens once writing is complete" (Myhill & Jones, 2007, p. 323).

Myhill and Jones concluded that student writers are beyond error detection and are seeking ways to make more substantive changes that contribute to sense making. They observed that many students have a clear understanding of revision as a deferred macro-strategy to be undertaken at the end of a draft, but need to develop and extend their understanding of and strategies for pretext and online revision. They noted that all too often writing processes are rigidly and sequentially formulated into planning, drafting, and revision and editing. One clear implication from the study is the need for pedagogical attention and explicit teaching of meta-cognitive awareness and meta-linguistic knowledge, which students are then able to employ to solve writing concerns.

Their observations have two implications for my study. The conversations teachers hold with students, or the stories of writing they

tell, must contain examples of strategies, genres, issues and structures explicitly drawn out for discussion, and therefore can be used to build a meta-language around writing. The other implication for this study is to address and perhaps undo the perception of the revision process as located somehow post-writing, and thus engage students in building awareness of other revision activities.

Dix (2006b), adapting Faigley and Witte's (1981) taxonomy of revision, explored the revision practices of eight-to-ten year-olds. Dix's taxonomy involved two categories: *surface changes*, which focused on accuracy, either formal or meaning-preserving, and *text-base changes* (at either the micro-structural or macro-structural level), which affect meaning at whole-text or concept levels. Dix noted that students were capable and active users of all categories of revision strategies; however, they made fewer changes at the macro-structural level, which is a very complex revision strategy requiring the writer to hold the entire piece of text in her or his head.

Further, writers were able to explain and justify their revision actions. While the students of the study were all provided with demonstrations of how to revise and question a text for clarity, the researcher noted that, "teachers needed to be more explicit with language use as the writers did not have the precise terms to explain exactly what they were doing. They were still building a metalanguage for writing" (p. 10). Dix also noted that not all micro- or macro-strategies for revision are evident in a text and therefore a teacher may need to engage students in meta-cognitive conversations to elicit a clearer understanding of the student's actual processes.

In a second article deriving from the same study, Dix (2006a) explored how three specific students engaged with the revision strategies discussed in the previous article. The writers continually reworked their texts and could articulate their purpose and intentions, but did so in very different ways. For example, one student worked from a framework and

added ideas, while a second student focused revision at the whole text level and the third student focused on pretext revision in the form of decisions and made little change during writing apart from accuracy. While two of the students shared the same teacher, they still employed and approached composing and revision strategies differently.

### *Resistance*

Elbow (2000) explored the paradox of compliance and resistance as competing needs that reinforce each other. He suggested that both are inherent and necessary for learning. “Resistance gives us our own thinking and the ownership over ourselves that permit us to do the giving in we need to for learning; compliance fuels resistance and gives us the skills we need for better resistance.” (p. 22) He believed that low-stakes writing helped with developing both resistance and compliance. To that end, there was no assessment of student writing in this study and the majority of response was from peers, not a teacher. Bright (2003) discussed the productive relationship of compliance and resistance with respect to classroom assignments. While compliance is often necessary in school settings, it is important for students to be able to preserve elements of freedom and autonomy that arise through resistance.

At times, students’ resistance and compliance is related to their interest and motivation. Lipstein and Renninger (2007) classified students’ interest in writing into four phases as follows: “only a triggered situational interest (phase 1), a maintained situational interest (phase 2), an emerging individual interest (phase 3), and a well-developed individual interest (phase 4)” (p. 79). They noted that students, who received teacher support directed appropriately at a student-interest level, were better able to establish and meet goals, maintain attention and use their meta-cognitive knowledge. Students felt supported in their writing development when wants and needs were met. For example, phase-one writers want writing to be easier and need concrete strategies. As their skill with specific strategies grows, writing seems to be more manageable. As confidence

grows, skill grows and interest tends to improve, which can set in motion a cycle of engagement weakening resistance to writing.

Muldoon (2009) examined how the twin narrative of “resistant student” and “enlightened teacher” impacted instruction and student engagement with revision (p. 67). She challenged both the notion that the effective writer’s relationship with revision is a natural and productive one and that student resistance to revision arises from lack of effort, interest or immaturity. Even though referring to post-secondary students, she challenged the idea that resistance is predominantly the act of the student who has not yet come to understand the joyful and rich benefits of revision.

In her doctoral research examining academics’ own resistance to revision, she discovered that, “instead of assimilating feedback and exhibiting reconsideration of their positions, the authors I studied exhibited a clear resistance and rejection of the views of others; in short, they were defensive” (p. 68). She called for instructional practices that are mindful that perhaps revision is not as natural as we make it out to be, thus allowing room for more dialogical discussions between teachers and student where resistance is exploited productively, rather than silenced. For her, critical revision was fostered through her “talk back” essay (p. 69), where students outlined and defended rhetorical and authorial decision and choices in relation to teacher feedback and their final draft. She believed a dialogical approach invites student ownership and discourages plagiarism, while fostering self-reflective, meta-cognitive relationship with writing.

Plagiarism was an unexpected issue in my research, unexpected due to the low stakes of the writing requested. Chandrasoma, Thompson and Pennycook (2004) argued for a more complex and contextually contingent response to issues of plagiarism, in fact, an abandonment of this idea in “favour of an understanding of transgressive and nontransgressive intertextuality” (p. 171). This perceptual shift would

highlight issues of writing overshadowed by the connotation of plagiarism, such as authority, identity, discourses, disciplines, common knowledge, and the dynamic interplay between them all.

They refer to Howard's (1999) developmental term 'patchwriting,' where students begin with a source text and then they adapt it through synonyms, grammatical change, deletions and additions. They consider this type of writing a non-transgressive act where the student is learning to grapple with the discourse of disciplines. They also draw on Clark and Ivanic's (1997) notion of a socially constructed selfhood, including: the *autobiographical self* or the author's history; the *discoursal self* which refers to how a writer is represented through the forms and linguistics they use; the *self as author that* references the degree of authorial presence and level of authority in a writer's text. The interrelations among these selves are dynamic and, at times, conflicted. Chandrasoma *et al.* believed it was important to consider the following when trying to determine and "understand moments of transgressive intertextuality: intentionality, development, identity, resistance, student epistemologies, common knowledge, mediated discourse, interdisciplinarity, variability and task type" (p. 180).

One of the central challenges of reporting qualitative research is positioning a new study within the frame of other qualitative studies, studies which, by their very nature, are particular and highly focused. While relevant to developing a broad background of knowledge, deepening my understanding of teaching writing, and potentially transformative in thinking and practice, their particularities are not closely connected to this study. Sperling and Dipardo (2008) noted that while the multiplicity of tools, lenses, approaches and perspectives in the field of English education may be challenging to grapple with, its strength lies in the broad scope of theoretical and empirical issues and questions that become available when multiple ways of seeing, hearing and generating questions become available. They identify a gap in the literature where

researchers are not researching through teaching at the secondary level. Referring to Carol Lee, a rare researcher/teacher voice, they noted that, “Working with real adolescents in real schools demands a commitment of time and energy that can undermine scholarly productivity – or, alternatively, as in the work of the researcher–teacher we briefly sketch here, function at once as matrix and catalyst” (p. 92).

### **Complicating Writing Process: A Post-process Theory of Writing**

While working on the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) standards documents, Russell (1999) argued passionately for change to ‘writing process’ from the singular to the plural, but to no avail. As a post-process theorist, he argued to go beyond ‘process’ means to recognize that there are many writing processes at play within activity systems, using:

the term *activity system* to mean collectives (often organizations) of people who, over an indefinite period of time, share common purposes (objects and motives) and certain tools used in certain ways—among these tools-in-use certain kinds of writing done in certain ways or processes. (p. 81)

He believed that, in order to understand student writing, it must be traced through its social or activity network, suggesting that, with regard to writing processes, it is necessary for teachers to broaden their understanding and range of processes, as well as broaden the ways in which writing occurs in the classroom.

Described in both concrete and, at times, reified ways, writing processes are far more complex than the standard, tacitly linear, “pre-write, write, revise, and publish” poster of the upper elementary classroom. The writing process approach to teaching writing is not unified. Writing process is elusive and individualized rather than universal, post-process theorists conclude. Their most severe, and perhaps only unified, criticism of process theory is that there is no codifiable universal theory of

composition that can be taught to writers. Kent's (1999) introduction to post-process theory identified the common belief among such theorists "that writing is a practice that cannot be captured by a generalized process or a Big Theory" (p. 1). The only other assumptions post-process theorists seem to hold in common are: "1) writing is public 2) writing is interpretive and 3) writing is situated" (p. 1).

Russell (1999) called for the teaching of writing processes to look like this:

(re)classify them, commodify them, and involve students with (teach) them in a curriculum that is sequenced to lead students from the germ cell of insight into writing processes—the PREWRITE/WRITE/REVISE/EDIT my daughter Madeline was taught—to a progressively wider understanding of writing processes as they are played out in a range of activity systems in our culture(s). (p. 88)

Perhaps what is missing is helping students who have grown confident in the strategies they employ to let go of the foundation they have 'set in stone,' in order that they may grow into more experienced public, interpretive and situated writers. Teachers of composition would need some knowledge and experience with post-process theory, in order to recognize which students might be ready to move beyond the idea of writing as a singular process and onto developing their own situated processes developed out of each specific and variable writing situation, not unlike Smagorinsky and Smith's (1992) third position.

Petraglia (1999) accounted for what he perceived as the failings of the process movement as:

Sacrificing a growing awareness of the situatedness and complexity of writing to the greater gods of process enabled theorists, researchers and teachers to do something they very much wanted to do: develop strategies and heuristics that were applicable to general writing-skills instruction. (p. 52)

Ewald (1999) identified a problematic paradox of post-modern pedagogy where the removal of foundational truths such as writing

process theory demands that teachers embody a different form of authority in the classroom. A teacher must invoke, almost as foundational, a stance of critical exchange. She called for teachers to reveal their theoretical and ideological stances to students, while also “uncovering their methodologies” (p. 129). Her ideas pair well with bringing stories of writing into the classroom, so that the discourse cycle of IRE (Initiate, Respond, Evaluate) is broken and dialogic conversations can become central experiences in learning. This supports the idea that student knowledge is valued and participates in the construction of knowledge, while at the same time the invisible ‘teacher as writer’ is brought into the classroom.

Couture (1999) was critical of writing instruction that focused students on modelling technique rather than emulating expression. She distinguished these by noting that, “to master a technique we employ a device, we model what our teachers or other masters do or have done; to master expression we strive to emulate others, to be like them, worthy of them, perhaps even better than them” (p. 30). She called for moving the teaching of writing beyond device, which separates the creator from the created, to an understanding of teaching writing as design, where “writing is both will and action, internal agency and external product” (p. 31). Although she believed process theorists also desired this shift in pedagogy, the desire remained largely unfulfilled.

Ironically, I believe the first generation of process theorists were all post-process writers. However, in an era of reductionistic and formalistic thinking, generally before qualitative research gained a strong foothold in the academy, the goal was to make teaching writing or the learning of writing more accessible in concrete ways. In my opinion, Donald Murray, Peter Elbow and Donald Graves knew full well about the complexities of writing, including the multiplicity of their writing processes, but their era was charged with the task of change and, for change to reach the classroom level, it must be commodified (Russell,

1999) and ‘sold’ to the masses (in this case, teachers). Theory, therefore, underwent a significant diet, allowing it to fit on a poster.

It is not irony when Russell (1999) claimed that the era of post-process, in its move to provide more refined tools for student and teachers to enter, interact and extend activity systems, would undergo a similar commodification process in order to extend its influence. It has taken forty years for “the winds of change” to facilitate a paradigm shift of writing process theory that Hairston (1982/1994) projected into being. However, the teaching of writing at the secondary level is covertly entrenched in the language and ideas of process writing theory. For those like me who tackle, embrace and resist writing in post-process ways, however, we owe it to our students to share our stories, which move beyond the simple and under-conceptualized to consider new possibilities. I feel I am a post-process writer teaching and researching in a process world.

### **The Craft of Writing-and-Teaching: Self-study and Autobiography**

Murray (1991/1994) declared that “all my writing – and yours – is autobiographical” (p. 207), going on to expand on this as follows:

We are autobiographical in the way we write; my autobiography exists in the examples of writing I use in this piece and in the text I weave around them. I have my own peculiar way of looking at the world and my own way of using language to communicate what I see. My voice is the product of Scottish genes and a Yankee environment, of Baptist sermons and the newspaper city room, of all the language I have ever heard and spoken.

In writing this paper I have begun to understand, better than I ever have before, that all writing, in many different ways, is autobiographical, and that our autobiography grows from a few deep taproots that are set down into our past in childhood. (p. 208)

Murray suggested that the use of personal narrative in various genres is an important piece of composition pedagogy. The exploration of the questions and subjects that drive an individual has the potential to reveal insight into the self. For my study, the purpose of autobiographical writing is at least two-fold: firstly, it is a subject of deep familiarity to a writer; it can be drawn from in multiple ways without a need for external research. Secondly, autobiographical writing suggests a need for introspection that may prompt a writer to examine writing processes previously invisible to the self.

In my study, I positioned the creative autobiographical narratives written by participants beside the stories of their creation, in order to understand the writing experiences and processes of the participants better. Wiebe (2002), in her paper “Good writing: linking the personal to the academy,” argued:

the inclusion of the personal is so pivotal to the production of meaningful writing that it must not be reserved only for the noted and the scholarly, but encouraged among students at all levels of higher learning [...] I make a case for the inclusion of the personal in the academy, particularly in the ways tertiary students learn to become writers. (para. 9)

Like Wiebe, I believe opportunities to write about the personal in academic settings are important in developing writers who can learn through and about their own writing.

### **Teachers’ Autobiographical Writing in Search of Pedagogy**

Educational research has taken an autobiographical, narrative turn in the areas of professional development and growth (Witherell & Noddings, 1991; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988a; Florio-Ruane, 2001). This research explores if, and how, autobiographical writing completed by teacher, researcher and students contributes to furthering understanding of writing processes.

Frank's (2003) study used childhood neighbourhood maps as initiators for writing with elementary teachers who were fearful of writing and teaching writing. She drew from her personal experience with the writing institute to further her understanding of writing and, similar to my own transformation through autobiographical writing, experiences linked with theory, Frank was able to transform from seeing herself as a non-writer to a writer, while developing greater awareness of and reflection on her writing process.

Frank offered this powerful personal experience to others by crafting a similar experience for her participant teachers. By means of the course Frank developed, her participants, who initially defined a writer as a professional, began to see themselves as writers and, subsequently, as more effective teachers of writing. While I recognize that these are adults, the literature is replete with teacher/writer transformation stories. Perhaps if secondary students' educational experiences included similar writing experiences, the adult teacher would not need educational experiences to transform from non-writer to writer.

Frank's study asked participants to illustrate a childhood neighbourhood as a starting place for conversations and writing about experience, memories, etc. She noted that teachers drew from personal experience for writing topics; the writing process they engaged with illuminated differences between revision and editing; as they grew more confident as writers, their confidence as teachers of writing grew. Further, she claimed that they had shifted from revision based on form to content, clarity and coherence. Teachers were able to let go of the need for initial correctness that often led to writing paralysis. However, Frank cautioned:

Identifying themselves as writers was not sufficient for becoming effective writing instructors. It was not until these teachers reflected on their own practices, making them explicit as they learned about personal expression, choice, time, response, revision and modeling, that they took advantage of their writing identities and took this knowledge to their own classrooms. Learning about writing

pedagogy and identifying themselves as writers who could reflect on the difficulties of the writing process enabled them to change instructional strategies within their own classrooms with their own elementary students. (p. 193)

In Frank's work, I see the double layer of a teacher finding value in a particular professional development experience and then offering that experience in a pedagogical setting to her own students. I, too, work from a similar double layer where I extended the opportunity to write autobiographically which I found so productive, in order for student participants to reflect on writing processes and awareness of writing.

Portalupi (1995) used autobiographical writing to explore past experiences with school in order to write her future teaching self. "Years later, as a student once again, writing process offered a way for me to sit on my front step of learning" (p. 275). Her exploration contributed to deliberate practice, a present and current self-awareness and an envisioning of self in the future, an unrealized hope for my study. Elbaz-Luwisch (2002) examined how teachers in a writing workshop setting narratively constructed themselves, how they used writing and how they constructed voice. In particular, she noted that teachers' ways of using autobiographical writing included recovering resources, revealing questions and juggling the personal and social in relationship. Further, she identified the multiple nature of voice as it navigates the private and the public, which may appear as conflicted or contradictory, as a potential space for exploration and empowerment. Thus, writing grows out of the process and becomes a way to know. One of Elbaz-Luwisch's participants suggested that, "autobiographical writing is becoming a useful everyday tool enabling me to continually examine assumptions and patterns of living and to maintaining a dynamic of ongoing change" (p. 425). It is my belief that the tool should not be reserved for adults.

Norman and Spencer (2005) studied pre-service teachers' beliefs about the nature of writing and writing instruction. Fifty-nine elementary teachers' wrote autobiographical essays on writing experiences. The

assignment, which became the data, was designed to encourage conscious reflection on the roles writing plays in personal lives, writing development and influence on their pedagogical practices. Categories and themes they identified included: “1) participants’ views of themselves as writer; 2) influences of other people and events; and 3) views of writing, writing development and writing instruction” (p. 28). Four key facets within the themes were: personal and creative writing were found to be the most meaningful and interesting; teachers’ effects on writing identity were both positive and negative; encouraging writing and teaching writing are different; and “the importance of writing instruction is influenced by beliefs about the nature of writing” (p. 29). Norman and Spencer noted that pre-service teachers entered the program with beliefs about their capacity as writers and how writing should be taught. Candidates needed to develop a theoretical framework for “thinking about writing development and instruction. Such a framework should help candidates accommodate the tension between more formal aspects of writing and the importance of ideas, meaning and individual writing preferences” (p. 37). These understandings about writing seem to come to fruition when teachers are provided opportunities to link autobiographical writing and theory.

A critical observation for me lies in the fact that the teachers’ beliefs about writing and writing instruction were formulated during their previous years as students. Further, if the present students moving through secondary schooling are never provided with learning opportunities designed to foster a meta-cognitive relationship with writing, they will likely leave the school setting believing they are not writers. Autobiographical writing seems to have many layers of learning including the process of writing, the understanding of self, and the larger social, theoretical and cultural perspective. In my study, like the studies referenced here but for secondary students, I established an environment

for students to write autobiographically for the purposes of discovering why and how they write.

## **The Craft of Teaching**

For me, the craft of teaching is grounded in classroom conversations. In Applebee's (1996) call for *Curriculum as Conversation* he argued that the most significant knowledge for individuals and society is knowledge-in-action, which is gained through participation in culturally significant living traditions with an orientation toward the future and the present rather than the past. To be fluent in the tradition requires both knowing and doing, whereas the current curricular traditions of 'knowledge out-of-context' focus on content or knowing, rather than doing or participation in the tradition.

Tacit knowledge and expectations necessary for participation within disciplines require that teachers be active participants in their disciplines, in order to guide, initiate and assist students in mediating the transition between the classroom and the broader traditions of a subject. The pedagogical knowledge required for the discipline is also grounded in the living traditions and dictates the "conventions they establish for discourse within their classrooms" (p. 105).

The discussion conventions govern and determine those things that stay the same even as the class progresses: how discussion takes place, what is talked about, and where the discussion is expected to lead. The paradoxical situation created by knowledge-in-action is that newcomers learning something new "must do what they do not yet know how to do". (p. 109)

The classroom conventions and conversations made available to students through the teacher are essential to the student's growth through 'doing with others' on to independence. Finally, in talking about effective domains of conversation, Applebee wrote:

They center on language episodes of high quality; contain enough material to sustain extended discussion; focus on a set of interrelated experiences or ideas; and are carried out in a manner that helps students enter into the conversation. At their best they are integrated, so that ideas reflect forward and back on one another, allowing reconsideration and reconstrual as the conversation continues; such conversations provide students with the opportunity to most fully contextualize and explore the knowledge-in-action they gain from their curricular experiences. (p. 127)

Generating conversations of the quality suggested by Applebee requires that teachers be insiders of both the disciplines of writing and teaching, a very difficult requirement when an ELA teacher is also responsible for, within the province of Alberta, other strands of language arts including reading, speaking, listening, and viewing and representing. These strands each have living traditions of their own.

*Opening Dialogue: Understanding the Dynamics of Language and Learning in the English Classroom* by Nystrand with Gamoran, Kachur and Prendergast (1997) argued that dialogic instruction, grounded in Mikhail Bakhtin and Lev Vygotsky's work on dialogic discourse, views language "as a dynamic social and epistemic process of constructing and negotiating knowledge" (p. xiv). Dialogic instruction requires that knowledge be conceived as continually regenerated and co-constructed between all participants. It also avoids the recitation and one-way transmission model of knowledge in order to facilitate the messy, somewhat vague, process of constructing and negotiating meaning where understanding may be transformed through open-ended conversations in instructional settings.

"Dialogic methods put a premium on close teacher-student interactions, a high degree of individualization, peer groups, open-ended discussions, and curricula and lesson plans that are not completely planned in advance" (p. 89). Therefore, a lesson plan is somewhat improvisational and must build in unplanned time designated to respond to student contributions and interactions, which makes any lesson unpredictable.

Further, what a student offers in the way of knowledge becomes critical in extending, advancing, shaping and reshaping knowledge. This cannot happen without mutual respect and trust between conversers, where the parties further believe in both the process of learning something new and the knowledge that is generated through talking. I believe that the premise of offering and hearing many stories of creation, many processes of writing and many texts arising from those conversations does let students know that their lives and processes are important knowledge in an open dialogue.

### **Teachers as Writers**

Researchers and theorists who examine pedagogical choices in the teaching of writing have long been advocates for teachers of writing to be writers themselves. The literature suggests that the best teachers of writing are, or need to be, writers (Elbow, 2000; Emig, 1971; Murray, 1968; Graves 1983, 1984). Further, the United States National Writing Project, which began in 1974, was founded on this premise and continues to design institutes where “writing teachers must write” (Nagin, 2003, p. 65).

Wood and Lieberman (2000) aligned the pedagogical principles advocated for the classroom with those used in the framework of the National Writing Project institute, where authorship, authority and authorization become central tenets for learning as either a teacher of writing or a student of writing and where teacher participants are required to be both student and teacher in a collaborative environment of writing, sharing, counsel and critique.

Perl and Wilson’s (1998) portraits of six writing teachers working with various school-aged students suggested that, “how teachers teach writing, or probably anything else for that matter, is a function of who they are, what matters to them, what they bring with them into the classroom, and whom they meet there” (p. 247). This observation makes the teaching of writing a very diverse process, one that includes a

teacher's personal relationship with writing and awareness of her or his writing process. Initially, for Perl and Wilson, the teachers writing in class looked the same, but close examination of context revealed, "that the mere fact of writing in class was not in itself as illuminating as how each teacher used writing to express his or her own temperament, tone, and personal concerns" (p. 255).

Graves (1991) noted that, "teachers who use the writing process to greatest advantage spend time working on their own writing" and include "writing as a tool for their own learning. Soon, they find their students' learning careers change as well" (p. 78). It is necessary for teachers to become insiders of the process with which they ask students to engage. McClay (1998) offered the idea that some of the tensions resulting from a desire to write in conflict with time demands of teaching may be resolved in the interweaving of the two, where personal writing becomes a teaching resource.

### **Pedagogy of Writing**

Courtland (1990) identified that teachers need to understand and make conscious their personal and implicit theories of writing in order to construct new meanings. She noted that the nature of the process approach to writing needs extensive time to precipitate change because it relies on people, their understanding of writing and their ability to reflect on, question, critique and take risks based mostly on themselves.

Teachers arrive in the classroom with intricate personal narratives that shape their pedagogical thinking, their curricular choices and, in particular, their writing instruction. Their own experiences with writing deeply influence their teaching of writing. Attitudes towards writing and understanding of writing process are first grounded in personal experience and only later in theoretical and pedagogical understandings. Further, an individual's self-awareness of her writing process and her relationship to the practice itself contributes to the understanding of and teaching of

writing. How these narratives are attended to and then enacted in the classroom influences a classroom teacher's beliefs about student writing and instructional practices, which then entwine with individual students in a classroom who also carry with them a personal narrative of writing, learning to write, and previous teachers' influences.

Casey and Hemenway (2001) focused on the need for balance between freedom and structure. They followed a group of students who had experienced an intensive, research-oriented, collaborative writing workshop in grade three through to high school, where student participants were interviewed in grades six, eight, ten and twelve. The act of tracing keen and motivated writers through a series of substantially less rewarding writing experiences left the authors feeling a profound sense of waste and loss. Highly motivated students who loved to write and were proud of their writing lost their motivation, enthusiasm, voice and ownership over the course of an education that failed to develop "a balance between freedom and structure in the writing curriculum" (p. 68). Perhaps the ideal teacher "would provide time, support, and real audiences for writing; it would unite both fiction and nonfiction, process and product, content and form, and freedom and discipline; it would include talk about writing, global revision, opportunities for feedback and publication, and high, but realistic teacher expectations" (p. 74).

Perl and Wilson (1998) suggested that effective writing teachers "offer invitations to their students to become writers" (p. 259). As I became a writer in my own sense and acknowledgement, I wanted to offer that same invitation to students. Effective writing teachers create communities in the classroom, which encourage inquiry, reflection and writing. Perl and Wilson summarized the principles of a writing process approach as follows:

Begin with real writing, not with skills or exercises; work from strengths; listen for and help students discover their emerging meanings; respect individual difference; establish

an atmosphere of trust; risk making mistakes oneself by being a writer and learner in the classroom, too. (p. 258)

For Perl and Wilson's research participants, creating this space helped guide "students through acts of meaning-making that entitled the students to think of themselves as writers" (p. 254).

In Murray's (1984) *Write to Learn*, he called on the reader to make the process he suggested for learning to write a writer's own:

This book will provide you with the process as I see it now, based on my own study of other writers, writing process research, what my students have taught me, and my own writing experience. This is a model that you should adapt and change to fit your own thinking style, writing habits and writing tasks.

You should learn how to write from how you write, as well as from how others write. (p. 12)

He clearly identified that what he understood about writing grew out of a compilation of writers, including students, professionals and him, coupled with research. In this book, Murray repeatedly returned to the interviews he collected and carried out with professional writers, as they allowed him "to converse with writers living or dead, to hear what they have to say about what they went through as they wrote" (p. 214). Although the professional writers' stories would complement the classroom experience with a certain authority, they are far removed from the immediate environment of the classroom where the teacher is in relationship with the students.

Elbow (1973) also invoked his own story about why he wrote *Writing Without Teachers*.

The authority I call upon in writing a book about writing is my own long-standing difficulty with writing. It has always seemed to me as though people who wrote without turmoil and torture were in a completely different universe. And yet advice about writing always seemed to come from them and therefore to bear no relation to us who struggled and usually failed to write. But in the last few years I have struggled more successfully to get things written and to

make them work for at least some readers, and in watching myself do this I have developed the conviction I can give advice that speaks more directly to the experience of having a hard time writing. I have also reached the conviction that if you have a special difficulty in writing, you are not necessarily further from writing well than someone who writes more easily. (p. viii)

Writers who experience some difficulty with writing and need to share their stories (partially as motivation, authority and humanity) create a space for sharing the challenging narratives of and about writing. Students able to hear that even accomplished writers struggle may feel less intimidated by the process. Although the writing theorists of the academic world do not speak to students directly, they can speak through a teacher's personal writing philosophy, the sharing of writing processes and stories of writing and learning to write. Classroom teachers are the conduits for the theory of writing research to reach students; they are their students' expert writer. If writing researchers present their theories and research within personal contexts, I believe it is appropriate for teachers of writing to make their process more transparent to students for critical examination.

### **Crafting a Study**

Like Carol Lee (2001), I too am interested in occupying the role of researcher/teacher. My research, focusing on the experiences of real junior high student writers within a real school context outside of the urban, offers a specific look at how students' experience writing, while at the same time serving as a matrix and catalyst for consideration and change in practice, when I return to teaching ELA. While many seeking 'accountability' and apparent certainty turn to empirical research, I believe that empirical research, out of necessity, oversimplifies the writing process: hence my decisions to work qualitatively.

This literature review was ordered and divided cleanly into three sub-sections. While the order of the literature review implies discrete elements, like writing, it is a far more complex tangle of writing process, pedagogy and autobiographical writing. There are two central and dominant issues throughout the literature. For me, the first issue is learning to write and it is implied within all the literature. It can be seen within the early process theorists' frames of research, which juxtaposed and compared inexperienced with experienced writers (Murray, 1968; Perl 1979/1994; Flower and Hayes, 1980/1994; Sommers, 1980/1994; Rose, 1980/1994). I draw attention to this because I have come to believe that the teachers students encounter need to be models of experience for the students in their classroom. The second issue is in learning to teach writing, which in the literature is frequently accomplished through the use of autobiographical writing in teacher education settings (Frank, 2003; Portalupi, 1995; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2002; Norman & Spencer, 2005).

These two sub-sections meet within pedagogy where the importance of conversation (Applebee, 1992; Nystrand, 1997), in this case about writing, is highlighted. In the dialogic conversations, personal writing processes and teaching writing are intermingled and blended. Within these conversations, it is important for teachers to support and develop consciously the meta-cognitive language of writing that will enable students to delve deeper into the issues they encounter in writing.

The early researchers on writing process all came to the conclusion that writing teachers need to be writers, else they would likely under-conceptualize writing (Emig, 1971). The mirror image of this concern, while not stated directly, echoes through the early researchers, when they noted that inexperienced writers' conceptual processes of writing at times interfered with writing quality (Perl 1979; Flower and Hayes, 1980/1994; Sommers, 1980/1994; Rose, 1980/1994). Concerns developed around issues of composing, revising, editing, framing the writing problem and blocking. Frequently, researchers drew attention to students'

uncomfortable relationship with ambiguity, inability to suspend judgment, a lack of knowledge about the influences surrounding their writing and the challenges of revising work in meaningful ways beyond editing. Students also understood and applied teaching advice, comments and strategies as algorithmic rules rather than the heuristics they were often intended to be. A common thread was the need for inexperienced writers and teachers to claim a more sophisticated and complex understanding of the recursive process of writing. I believe this research implicitly called for more dialogic conversations about writing.

Within writing process theory, revision has become a significant issue. For me, revision can be the most external and visible strategy associated with teaching writing and, as such, has frequently received significant prescription in a teacher's effort to teach and ensure an understanding of the writing process. This has resulted in prescriptive teaching practices designed to reveal processes such as revising as a separate stage following a complete draft (Sommers, 1980/1994; Myhill & Jones, 2007; Dix, 2006b), where editing and error detection was often the primary concern (Perl, 1979/1994).

Connected to students' willingness or unwillingness to revise was their level of inspiration and the tendency to see revision at a lexical and not at a semantic level (Flower and Hayes, 1980/1994; Sommers, 1980/1994). Inexperienced students also tended to apply strategies that were meant to be flexible and responsive in prescriptive ways (Sommers, 1980/1994; Rose, 1980/1994). Further students struggled to establish rhetorical objectives for writing and thus were unable to direct their revisions in productive ways. In general, student writers tended to struggle with the ambiguous nature of composing and revision and also desired to know, have and apply definitive answers and responses to this multifaceted task.

While these themes are extracted from the early process theorists, they remain issues because they are the actions, behaviours and attitudes

somewhat typical of the inexperienced and novice writer. Research will not eliminate these issues as writers need to grow into a more sophisticated writing practice, but it may provide a way of transitioning students into more experienced writers through providing a more complex understand of writing when teaching. Further, an important idea from the later work is the observations that while students are applying meta-cognitive knowledge about revision and demonstrating a wide range of revision behaviours, they lack a meta-language necessary to articulate that knowledge and, at times, are too conceptually focused on revision as a deferred macro-strategy (Myhill & Jones, 2007; Dix, 2006b). Students need more help developing an understanding of very early and ongoing revision strategies.

Another salient observation, implied but not stated, is that teachers must also develop new conceptions of revision in order to teach a more nuanced understanding of it. Much of the later research I highlighted continued to draw attention to the teacher's limited and over-general knowledge of writing (Hillocks, 2006; Smagorinsky and Smith, 1992; Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2006; Myhill & Jones, 2007; Dix, 2006). If teachers either do not have the knowledge or are not applying that knowledge to the educational encounters they craft for students, then the students they meet are limited to general writing process.

Within the literature following the early process theorists, the focus shifts from the individual's writing process to the social and interactive work of writing. This research draws attention to the risks: exposure and socially constituting ways writing participates in the making of identity and culture (Lensmire, 1993, 1997). The writing issues addressed will not evaporate because each new student learning to write, in each new classroom he or she encounters, must work through his or her own process within the social system they must participate in.

The next piece of this puzzle is the choice of autobiographical writing as the frame for student writing. Frank (2003), Portalupi (1995)

and Norman and Spencer (2005) all worked with either pre-service or practicing teachers on autobiographical writing in an effort to understand and even further the teaching of writing. The dominant theme in their research suggests that teachers of writing who engage in writing come to this through autobiographical writing coupled with reflection on philosophy and process. A second common theme I see is the power of autobiographical writing to frame meta-cognitive learning both about the self and the act of writing. A third theme examines how this writing participates in envisioning new and integrally connected roles of writer and teacher of writing. Within my research there is also another envisioning, that of researcher and the role of writer.

The two dominant issues, learning to write and teaching writing, meet in the section “The Craft of Teaching,” where a teacher must be both a competent ‘knower’ and ‘doer.’ Their knowledge-in-action (Applebee, 1996) should offer insight into writing issues such as preferences for writing conditions, frameworks for planning, student understanding of composition and revision, the use of heuristics, and rules and potential solutions for writer’s block, to name but a few. Further, a teacher who has mastered her or his discipline has the ability to situate writing for students beyond the school setting and into future contexts. The conversations also serve to build a community of writers who draw on each other’s experiences with writing both to broaden and deepen their writing abilities. It is through these conversations that students are introduced to theories of writing. Sustained dialogic conversations where students are full participants with available stories of writing bring more knowledge into the classroom (Nystrand, 1997). At the heart of this research experience is the teacher as writer, with stories to offer students.

Finally, researchers believe that what they put forward is a story intricately tied together of learning to write or learning to teach writing. The story must be heard, adapted and retooled by both the teacher and the student to suit the individual and the context (Elbow, 1973; Murray, 1984;

Graves, 1991; Perl & Wilson, 1998). Students and teachers are then able to reflect forward and backward drawing on many visions of writing process in order to construct their own philosophy and relationship with writing. The crafts of teaching and of writing come together.

# Chapter Three

## Words Wait For Companions

The ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future. I have argued that a life as led is inseparable from a life as told – or more bluntly, life is not “how it was” but how it was interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold. (Bruner, 2004, p. 708)

Merriam (1992a, 1992b) has suggested that one of the key qualities of qualitative research is its inductive nature, where interpretations, theories and concepts arise rather than are tested, and where the design of studies is emergent and flexible. Guba and Lincoln (1994, 2005) noted that a researcher’s paradigm frames a world-view, defining the ontological, epistemological and methodological questions available to her or him. The narratives that bring us to a particular research question both frame the puzzle and participate in the untangling.

Schultz (2006) focused on the increasing role qualitative research has played in research on writing, because of its ability “to investigate how particular people in particular social contexts interpret or make sense of everyday interactions” (p. 359). She noted that research extending out of the social turn:

suggests that a single composition cannot be understood apart from the particularities of its creation or its surround. Written texts from the classroom, for instance, always reflect not only the audiences and purpose of the author and his or her readers, but also the history, values, and intentions the composer brings to the piece, as well as the assignment and context in which it was written. In addition, writing positions the writer in a particular way, enabling him or her to take on new identities. (p. 368)

It has the ability to focus on an insider's (or *emic*) perspective that is simply not available to experimental studies. She critically commented on the current drive for empirical studies that reinforce the accountability movement of high-stakes testing by seeking to generate generalizable outcomes, which tend to produce formulaic, narrow writing through similar pedagogical practices.

For this case study, I drew on the qualitative traditions of narrative inquiry and arts-based research. Narrative inquiry seeks to understand and make meaning of experience where the stories told have the potential to enrich the lives of both the researcher and the participant. This study's narratives are layered first in the participants' telling of their autobiographical experiences through writing, and then retrospectively telling the stories of the experience of creating the writing, thereby getting at the processes of writing that were specific to the individual participants. I combined an arts-based research task with the traditions of narrative inquiry in order to know and represent knowing differently. The participants' drawings centered on the experience of writing. My study, therefore, is not wholly situated within either tradition.

Merriam (1992a) has asserted that, "case study design is employed to gain in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved. The interest is in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than specific variables, in discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19). According to Stake's (2000) classification, my case study is an *intrinsic* one, where the primary purpose is a better understanding of this particular case and not theory building or comparison across cases. It is a study of the particular, drawing on the context of the case, historical background, physical setting and participants' direct experiences.

My study of a grade-nine ELA classroom, led collaboratively by Ms Natasha Harris and me, began in early April and ended in late June. All participants created original autobiographical writing, which we

explored, revised and read aloud in an effort to ‘hear’ the writing processes of those present in the classroom. Ten sixty-minute classes of conversation and writing comprise the heart of the data.

Yin (1994) identified several skills necessary to be a successful case-study researcher, including being someone who should: ask quality questions and interpret the answers, be an excellent listener aware of personal ideologies, be responsive and adaptive to new opportunities, have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, and finally, “be unbiased by preconceived notions, including those derived from theory; hence, a person should be sensitive to contradictory evidence” (p. 56). Where my position diverges with Yin’s is in the use of the word ‘bias,’ a notion that is grounded in positivist thinking. It is my positioning as a researcher (who is also a teacher and a writer) that makes me qualified to undertake this research. This positioning generates the very questions I pose, thus ‘recognizing, questioning and shifting perspectives’ broadens interpretations rather than narrows or skews them, as the term ‘bias’ suggests. However, Yin’s observations of being open to contradictory evidence are important to consider.

Ainley (1999) addressed the complementary and conflicting roles of teacher and researcher in school-based contexts. Identifying the roles of parent, teacher and researcher, she also made brief comment regarding the role of the academic discipline: in her case, mathematics; in mine, ELA. She commented on the silent presence of the unmentioned discipline; in my case, I explicitly brought the discipline forward to be examined. These roles are always present and are about “ways of behaving, and about the perceptions and expectations other people have of that behavior” (p. 45). She discussed entering the classroom as either an observer or an experimenter. I entered as an active experimenter collaborating, intervening and teaching. She noted that by adopting an experimenter role, the researcher can become invested in student success, which can, at

times, be in conflict with the role of researcher. This was a tension I felt frequently over the course of this study.

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) outlined several guidelines for assessing quality in autobiographical forms of research. They concluded that high-quality autobiographical studies are those which seem plausible and resonate with the reader, that support insight and analysis while taking up problems and issues arising in the making of educators.

Autobiographical studies have an obligation to improve the learning situation for both the self and other, to reveal genuine character development, and to place emphasis on setting and context, while “offering fresh perspectives on established truths” (p. 18). Authentic voice is necessary but not sufficient for establishing scholarly status. With regard to representation, they suggested that edited conversations must have coherence and structure that generate argumentation and compelling evidence framed and arranged for a sense of wholeness. Complications and tensions are frequently present and the interpretations of all data should both reveal and interrogate relationships, contradictions and limitations (pp. 16-19).

Although focused on teacher education, these guidelines provide a starting point for establishing trustworthiness and meaningfulness in research conversations, writing, illustrations and interpretation. The authors believe “the aim of self-study research is to provoke, challenge, and illuminate rather than confirm and settle” (p. 20). In working with a teacher’s and students’ biographical stories of and about writing, it is my obligation as a participant–researcher to construct a text that reflects on and considers the guidelines they have suggested, while also seeking other methods, standards and frameworks for assessing quality.

The traditions of narrative inquiry and arts-based research both live within the broader framework of qualitative research, where a wide range of methods are employed in attempts to understand better the meanings people bring to their lives. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) made use of the

metaphor of researcher as *bricoleur*, someone who “produces a bricolage of, that is, pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provide solutions to a problem in a concrete situation” (p. 2). The *bricoleur* uses whatever tools of the trade are available.

## **The Tradition of Narrative Inquiry**

What good is a theory if it makes no difference to the human condition, or to human experience? Like Polkinghorne (1988) and Coles (1989), I come to narrative disconcerted by a nagging feeling that research and practice are often insufficiently integrated. As a practicing teacher and a doctoral student, I have often heard deeply embedded narratives about theory as only located in an ‘ivory tower,’ unattainable and unrealistic in the real world of teaching. Yet I do not believe this.

The resonance I sought required listening to other voices, both of student and teacher. Although working from a psychiatric perspective, Coles (1989) suggested that, “hearing themselves teach you, through their narration, the patients will learn the lesson a good instructor learns only when he becomes a willing student, eager to be taught” (p. 22). The desire to learn with and from students in order to facilitate my and others’ teaching in the future is central to my interest in this research topic.

Bateson (1989) looked to define life as a composite lived improvisationally rather than as an already composed and constant state. She argued that, “we need to look at multiple lives to test and shape our own” (p. 16). As my students heard the narratives of others in relation to writing (including those of Ms Harris and myself), they were exposed to accounts of writing that may afford new and different possibilities for them. For me, meaning and understanding of experiences are negotiated and constructed in specific and local ways. Students’ and teachers’ writing

experiences live with them through several years of schooling, shaping and reshaping the stories they know, tell and retell.

In the opening quotation of this chapter, Bruner (2004) offered the idea that the habitual telling of our stories structures not only the very experiences we *have* had, but also those we *will* have. In this way, my student participants who did not see themselves as writers may well be structuring their futures as non-writers. Knowledge is not out there, waiting to be attained or grasped, but rather individuals in relation to personal background, experience and prior understandings build knowledge through the telling and retelling of stories. Constructions of understanding and identity (e.g. ‘writer,’ ‘non-writer’) are open to revision when trusted and competent constructions are “brought into juxtaposition in a dialectical context” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 113). I believe what students tell themselves about writing contributes significantly to their identity as writers.

Dewey (1938/1963) argued for a theory of experience in which one experience must connect with a further experience. To that end, the quality of the experience becomes significant in two respects. The immediate one is either agreeable or disagreeable, while the second is “its influence upon later experiences” (p. 27). However, Dewey noted, “the *effect* of an experience is not borne on its face” (p. 27). The challenge to educators becomes orchestrating experiences that promote desirable future experiences. To this I pose the question, “Why do students’ writing experiences not seem to promote the identity of ‘writer’?”

### **Conversational Companions**

Conversation was central to the study. The data I listened to and looked at existed in the form of spoken words, offered in public and private conversations, as well as in written texts of autobiographical creative non-fiction. They also existed in artistic representations of how participants explained and interpreted their writing experiences. The

diction, metaphors, slang, structures, anecdotes and analogies used by participants all contributed to my understanding of their lived experiences.

In conversation, ideas interact, bouncing and colliding, to create novel and unpredictable possibilities. Conversations have a spirit of their own and can lead participants in directions they never expected to go. Feldman (1999) observed that conversation appears to be externally driven, but yet internally owned by the participants. It requires cooperation and collaboration, as each response contributes to the shaping of the next. Through the act of recording and transcribing conversations, the researcher has time to slow down the improvised drama of the classroom, allowing for exploration, reflection and stillness not typical in daily classroom life. No one truth is out there for dissemination, only layers of more sophisticated understanding.

We say that 'we' conduct conversation, but the more fundamental a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a fundamental conversation is never one that we want to conduct. Rather, it is generally more correct to say that we fall into conversation, or even that we become involved in it. The way in which one word follows another, with the conversation taking its own turnings and reaching its own conclusions, may well be conducted in some way, but the people conversing are far less the leaders than the ones led. No one knows what will 'come out' in a conversation. Understanding, or its failure, is like a process which happens to us. Thus we can say that something was a good conversation or that it was a poor one. All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own, and that the language used in it bears its own truth within it, i.e. that it reveals something, which henceforth exists. (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 345)

Gadamer's belief that conversation emerges from the participants with a "spirit of its own" reflects, for me, the power of conversation. Conversations are unpredictable, complex occurrences that are shaped and reshaped throughout the interaction. No one individual controls and directs

the conversation; rather, its collective interaction transcends any possible meanings one individual could intend or enact on her or his own.

My participants were afforded opportunities to probe into another's experience, to a greater or lesser degree. As they engaged in conversations about writing process, moments of insight were generated through the sharing of rich and vivid recollections of personal writing experience, personal examples of writing and narratives of instructional experiences. Clark (2001) suggested that good conversation requires flexibility, intuition, exploration, listening and silence. These qualities contribute to autonomy and revive the enthusiasm for growth in practice. Although he was speaking of teachers' professional growth, I suggest that student writers can benefit from a sense of agency and a community of practice, which encourages reflection on writing.

Specifying the exact intent of a conversation in advance is impossible. To engage authentically requires trust that the process of conversation will yield something previously unthought, unsaid or undone. As Webber (1986) observed, there is "the opportunity to be known, to gain self-understanding, to give something to the other, as well as a chance to delight in the inter-subjective nature of human understanding" (p. 67).

The previous discussion of conversation leads to an extensive challenge inherent in conversation within research settings. Unlike an interview protocol, a conversation is not controlled, and therefore, its unpredictable nature poses challenges to the researcher during data collection and analysis. The very nature of conversation can turn it in both fruitful and rich directions and banal and unrelated directions. The stories participants include, the questions they ask and the interjections they make can result in abrupt shifts of direction and tenor as other participants select and focus on specific details. At times, possibilities that were once there simply become lost to a new direction.

### *Conversation and personal understanding*

Doll (2002) believed that, “In conversation lie our hopes for both convergence and transformation: We become transformed as our differing views converge on that which is presently beyond us, and the situation itself changes or becomes transformed as we go through the convergence process” (p. 49). Through conversation, we come together both to speak and to listen in hope of transformation. Perhaps others, reading the narratives of a particular classroom, will find both resonance and discontinuity that may interrupt their own story, creating new possible ways of listening, teaching and writing.

Hollingsworth and Dybdahl (2007) drew attention to the role of conversation in narrative inquiry. They discussed the fluid nature of epistemological and theoretical perspectives that grounded their Berkeley group by noting that there may be more than one epistemological or theoretical positioning present at any given moment in a conversation or research inquiry. I would like to draw attention to the idea that both teachers and students have knowledge-in-action (Applebee, 1996) regarding personal philosophies and/or theories of writing. For me, this requires that I remain open to participants’ worldviews, listening for moments of continuity and discontinuity in their experience of writing, while listening for moments of continuity and discontinuity in my own experience.

### *A three-dimensional landscape*

Clandinin and Connelly (2000; 1988a) described narrative inquiry as involving a metaphorical three-dimensional landscape. They arrived there by mapping their understanding of narrative onto Dewey’s understanding of experience. For Dewey, the fundamental ontological category of knowing is experience and all inquiry proceeds from it:

The regulative ideal for inquiry is to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment – her life, community world – one that “makes possible a new way of dealing with them, and thus eventually creates a

new kind of experienced objects, not more real than those which preceded but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive (Dewey, 1981b, p. 175).” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) viewed the space of narrative inquiry as follows:

With this sense of Dewey’s foundational place in our thinking about narrative inquiry, our terms are *personal and social* (interaction); *past, present, and future* (continuity); combined with the notion of *place* (situation). This set of terms creates the metaphorical *three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and the social along a second dimension, place along a third. Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have a temporal dimension and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of place. (p. 50; *emphasis in original*)

Living in a landscape structures our sense of being and generates interaction. In this landscape, I attended to the people, both individuals present in the study as well as those who live beside the participants in the context of their lives. Further, as the study commenced in April the relationships among all the participants had been developing for at least seven months. My entry into the field added more layers.

The continuity of experience requires the researcher to consider past, present and future. Within the context of the participants, they arrived with past experiences, experienced the research project and then carried forward to the subsequent year of school. Within the context of the study, the past includes the preparation and execution of the study, the present (at this point) is the writing of this dissertation, and the future is the (hoped-for) reading of the study by others. How each experience maps onto the landscape is only ever a partial story. The landscape emphasizes the temporality of knowledge generation that can never be represented in any entirety because any representation involves selectivity and emphasis

grounded in a particular experience. Inquiry as experience moves through time where continuity of experience grows out of previous experiences and participates in structuring future experiences.

As a double insider, both a writer and a classroom teacher, I looked out from a position of relationship to make sense of the writing classroom as a partial member of that classroom. I learned to listen, see and feel what is specific to the situation I had entered. In the end, the lines between researcher and participant blurred, as it is 'I' the researcher, 'I' the teacher and 'I' the writer who have undergone the greatest transformation of understanding, while searching out glimmers of participants' growth in understanding.

The third dimension of place parallels situation. A classroom imposes situations, but they are always mitigated by the individual's experience outside of the classroom. The individual participants each had stories; as a classroom of students, they had collective stories of classroom experiences. Further, they are nested in the social continuum of a school context. The particular landscape of school subtly imposes ideas of who is a writer, and what a writer does; this, too, has served to carve the landscape.

### **In the Tradition of Arts-Based Research**

Sullivan (2006) and Eisner and Barone (1997) suggested that scientific methods are incapable of addressing the complexity of human experience and, therefore, turn to artistic richness and alternative ways of knowing. Sullivan noted that a central thesis in educational inquiry practices is that, "research is a *transformative* act that has an impact on the researcher and the researched" (p. 22). Research with an arts orientation tends to be "interested in improving our understanding of schooling and

how the arts can reveal important insights about learning and teaching” (p. 20).

What is the potential of this study to engender growth in the teaching and learning of writing? This study makes no claim to generalizability; rather, it explores a particular on its own terms. However, Eisner (2006) made a case that an *n* of 1 *is* generalizable when one considers ‘generalization’ differently from its mathematical or statistical referent. He suggested that it is done all the time with literature, poetry and works of art. He used the example of a great play such as *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, where it is made possible to understand situations around the labor of a traveling salesman. He suggested “characterizations that are artfully crafted of classrooms, teaching practices, school environments, perform important cognitive functions. They give us a structure with which to organize our perceptions” (p. 15). Perhaps my particular will open spaces for others to notice where intersections, resonance, diversions, and contradictions exist in order to turn inward as the self becomes storied as a writer.

### **Defining arts-based research**

Arts-based research has opened a space for researching, writing, representing and presenting in alternative and artful ways. Eisner and Barone (1997) defined arts-based research “by the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or design elements that infuse the inquiry and its writing” (p. 73). They identified seven features of arts-based educational inquiry: “the creation of a virtual reality; the presence of ambiguity; the use of expressive language; the use of contextualized and vernacular language; the promotion of empathy; personal signature of the researcher/writer; the presence of aesthetic form” (pp. 74-78).

These authors suggested that not all these features will necessarily exist in a single artful inquiry and there may well be others too. In considering the features they see as evident in arts-based research, I note aspects of my research as follows: the tradition of narrative inquiry seeks

to build a virtual reality of a particular moment in time, with particular people in a particular place; the partial reality created draws the reader into the research with the intent to produce an account that resonates with a reader in real ways; ambiguity is expected and welcomed for what it offers in the way of differently seeing, listening and being.

The research project involved intense work with teacher and student participants writing in expressive linguistic forms. Further, the research texts produced include personal and participant poetry, brief narratives/anecdotes and participant drawings. The recorded conversations from the classroom and between individual participants embedded the vernacular and the contextualized in the data and its representation. Participants' voices are positioned centrally in the data representation.

As a researcher, my voice and signature are imprinted on this work alongside those of the participants. The aesthetic form exists in alternative ways of coming to know, writing as an art, drawing as a representation. The final form has grown out of aesthetic practice. While an author does not control a reader's response to a text, Rosenblatt (1995) identified two key purposes for reading: *efferent*, which is to carry away specific, potentially abstract or analytical information that a reader maintains; and *aesthetic*, which is grounded in the experience with affective elements creating sensations, feelings, images and ideas. Rosenblatt used the word 'transaction' to describe the process of reading, where "transaction lacks such mechanistic overtones and permits emphasis on the to-and-fro, spiraling, nonlinear, continuously reciprocal influence of the reader and text in making meaning" (p. xvi). The meaning exists between the reader and text.

While a dissertation's purpose is to provide analytical information that may remain with the reader after the reading, that is not this dissertation's only purpose. The style and decisions I made as an author aspire to shift the continuum of reading toward the aesthetic. Where "aesthetic reading will require affective elements with mixture of

sensations, feelings, images, and ideas” (p. 33) – it “must focus on experience, live through the moods, scenes, situations being created during the transaction” (p. xvii). This is of particular importance in the choric drama and found poem (in Chapter 6), the found play (in Chapter 8) and the imagined talkback session with students (in Chapter 10).

A central idea in arts-based research that emerged for Eisner (1993) was that “experience is the bedrock upon which meaning is constructed [...] I came to believe that humans do not simply have experience; they have a hand in its creation, and the quality of their creation depends upon the ways they employ their minds” (p. 5). Not unlike Bruner’s (2004) idea that the stories we tell come to structure the life an individual is capable of living, the experiences we have construct and constrain our future experiences. By providing participants with an opportunity to talk and draw about writing in an intensive alternative experience, participants employed their minds in an endeavor to create new experiences and, perhaps, allow a reinterpretation of old ones. Here, form shapes available understanding and, by shifting forms to participant-generated drawings in order to express writing experiences, new understandings that were perhaps unconscious became available.

### **Form and Knowledge**

Eisner (1993) believed “that the process of image making could help children discover part of themselves that mostly resides beneath their consciousness” (p. 5). It is for this reason that I employed the use of drawing to help me understand the experience of individual writing processes. In school, students spend extensive time accessing their knowledge through the traditional art of writing. The combination of autobiographical writing reflecting on experience and conversations about writing process juxtaposed beside representational drawings of their experience at times generated new insights, extended or supported them and, at times, proved contradictory to previous ones. “The arts provide a

means through which meanings which are ineffable can be expressed [and] the arts afford opportunities to use and develop their minds in distinctive ways through learning to think within a distinctive medium” (Eisner, 2003, p. 343).

Eisner (1993, 2003) argued that both the content and form of what is taught in school contributes to shaping students’ minds, thus both what and how we choose to teach profoundly affects how and what students are able to think about. I do consider myself a writer and now see myself as an insider to writing with personal experiences, understanding of processes and general observations to offer students. I am not, however, an artist, nor am I teaching drawing as a specific art. I chose drawing as a medium for representation because it was a familiar and common experience for students. As I expected, some participants were fearful of exposing their perceived lack of artistic ability. However, the purpose of the representation was not artistic creation for the sake of creating art, but for the sake of narrating their knowledge visually, and therefore, I stressed to students that their artistic talent was in no way being judged.

#### *Drawing as a form of knowing*

I first encountered representational drawing as a research tool through Ellis (1998, 2006), who advocated the use of pre-interview activities as a way to focus participants and researchers on the ideas participants find salient to the research topic. However, I have extended her idea beyond the pre-interview context to integrate it as a central form of data.

A few studies have used participant drawing to explore experience. Weber and Mitchell (1996), in particular, studied pre-service and experienced teachers’ drawings in relation to teacher identity; Hickman (2007) studied pre-service art and design students’ educational placement encounters through visual art; Kendrick and McKay (2002) studied children’s literacy through participant drawings; and, in the area of organizational change, Kearney and Hyle (2004) studied the emotional

impact of organizational change in an educational setting. While two of these studies focused on teachers, one on students and one on an educational setting itself, they are all grounded in the idea that visual representation has the potential to reveal things that may be unavailable through other forms of data.

For example, Weber and Mitchell (1996) wrote, “drawings offer a different kind of glimpse into human sense-making than written or spoken texts do, because they can express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the not-yet-thought-through, the subconscious” (p. 304). While Hickman (2007) considered drawing separately from art-making as sometimes art and sometimes not, he noted that, “drawing is sometimes said to facilitate thinking, in the same way someone can talk themselves into understanding” (p. 316). Kearney and Hyle (2004) underlined Vince’s argument “that drawings may be a more specific or direct route to the emotions and unconscious responses or feelings underlying organizational change (Vince, 1995)” (p. 362). Beyond organizational change, emotions and unconscious responses or feeling may exist in understanding personal writing processes and experiences.

Although Hickman’s (2007) study was focused on teacher candidates skilled in the arts, he outlined features that characterize research with art-making at the centre:

- visual art forms can capture the ineffable, helping us to gain access to the more elusive aspects of teaching and learning enterprise and reveal phenomena which would be difficult to perceive and understand through words (and numbers) alone;
- they demand our attention, engaging both affective and cognitive faculties;
- they can present a whole reported episode at one time, enabling the viewer to see relationships between the whole and its parts;
- they can provide a rich yet economical, multilayered source of information by using, for example metaphor, analogy and iconography;

- they can transform the apparent mundanity of day-to-day reality into something more meaningful through altering our perceptions of the ordinary;
- they are widely accessible, through the use of shared visual conventions. (p. 322)

Kearney and Hyle's (2004) findings suggest that participant drawings can provide a more succinct representation of an experience, require participant interpretation and provide access to emotions and feelings. They acknowledge that open-prompt structures in drawing directions provide space for participants' unique experiences. My study provided participants with an opportunity to explain their interpretation of their drawing in both a classroom setting with other participants and a one-on-one conversation with the researcher. For example, when I created my own visual, autobiographical timeline of significant writing experiences, I realized that much of my writing process was and is framed and constructed around the fear of illuminating my perceived weaknesses to others. The selection of key moments succinctly outlined my perception of inadequacy and the fears associated with it. Before creating the drawing, I was aware of these fears, but unaware of just how much they shaped my writing processes, choices and perception of self as a writer, an idea I further explore in Chapter 5. For me, personally, the drawing made explicit and conscious what countless words and conversations about writing had not.

Kearney and Hyle also commented that the structure of the prompt contributes to the manner in which the drawings may be interpreted. Where comparison across participants is required, more structure may be needed. However, in this case, the particular individual experience is the focus of the research. Therefore, I tried to keep the prompts flexible and less structured. That said, I did find it helpful to survey the drawing data as a whole with a series of questions, further elaborated in Chapter 7.

For the initial drawing experience, three options were provided to participants:

1. Draw a picture of what writing means to you;
2. Draw a timeline of significant writing experiences in your life;
3. Draw two pictures: one of writing when you are inspired and one of writing when you are not inspired.

The final drawing experience asked student participants was, “Please draw your emotional response to writing in general or to this specific experience of writing.”

## **Assembling Traditions**

Mello (2007) argued for a distinction between ‘arts-based’ and ‘arts-informed’ research in narrative inquiry, where in the former, the arts infuse the inquiry in the collection of data and the form of the inquiry from the stage of conception, while arts-informed research situates the artistic form within the analytic process and representational form. This study is designed so the arts infuse the study from the beginning as a way of knowing and as data. Further, the analysis and representation was guided by arts-based practices and, consequently, the study is more arts-based than arts-informed research.

### **Representation**

My study is about the experiences of many writers and, as a participant–researcher, it is also about the experience of writing a research text. The nature of the two traditions, narrative inquiry and arts-based research, encouraged explorations in form; however, both of these traditions are young in their development and can reside at the margins of the more traditional. Both recognize the need to position the research within a scholarly conversation. Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) “discussions of the boundaries of formalistic and reductionistic ways of thinking make it clear that the kind of research text is shaped by the ways of thinking of those who read it” (p. 167). This idea poses a challenge to

research at the edges, because, while I believe it is important to push the boundaries of representation through the shaping of research texts, which include original poetry, a choric play, a found poem, a found play, director's notes and a play review, the text must not stretch beyond the audience. Within my study, there was always a tension between scholar/writer and academy.

Within the tradition of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described transforming field texts into research texts as requiring reading and re-reading. The re-experiencing of field texts sets them in relation to one another, generating tensions, gaps, silences, continuities and discontinuities; the stories may then begin to interweave and threads emerge. In the transition, the inquirer is re-storied, intents shift and new research puzzles develop; all this leads to a researching of field texts in the composing of research texts. Interim texts may be drafted, a space Clandinin and Connelly referred to as in-between field and research texts. Like writing, the approach of narrative inquiry and arts-based research to writing research texts is not a linear moving of field to final text; rather, it shifts and moves as understandings grow through a writer's observations, negotiations and revisions: "This sense of continually moving back and forth between being in the field, field texts, and research texts is always present as we negotiate the inquiry" (p. 135).

The writing of the research was shaped by artistic practice. Richardson (2000) encourages "experimentation with point of view, tone, texture, sequencing, metaphor, and so on" (p. 936), in an effort to nurture individual voice, self-knowledge, and topic knowledge. Writing is always partial, local, and situational, and that our self is always present, no matter how much we try to suppress it – but it is only partially present, for in our writing we repress parts of ourselves, too. Working from that premise frees us to write material in a variety of ways: to tell and retell. There is no such thing as "getting it right" – only "getting it differently contoured and nuanced" (p. 931).

Although writing in relation to the field of sociology, Richardson (2002), like Eisner, has claimed that form is essential to the construction of knowledge.

How we write has consequences for ourselves, our disciplines, and the publics we serve. How we are expected to write affects what we can write about; the form in which we write shapes the content. The standard sociological article is the form in which sociologists have been expected to report their research. This format, however is simply a literary technique and not the only legitimate carrier of social scientific knowledge. (p. 414)

Richardson (2005) reminded readers that, “Postmodernist culture permits us – indeed, encourages us – to doubt that any method of knowing or telling can claim authoritative truth” (p. 706).

The traditions of narrative inquiry and arts-based research are often entwined, according to Mello (2007). The blending of these two traditions may include “creative field text gathering, creative research text presentation, empowering one’s core researchers/participants, inviting readers to make their own conclusions, supporting construction of personal knowledge landscapes, and honoring multiple perspectives” (p. 215). She positioned arts-based narrative inquiry as “pushing the boundaries of the qualitative research landscape” (p. 219), by noting that through honouring art, providing multiple aesthetic perspectives and not relying on the search for truth and generalization, academic discourse is changed. It is in this spirit that I have produced this dissertation.

# Chapter Four

## Stucco And Stone

I find it difficult to maintain faith in my stories, to believe that my experience is significant. And yet the more personal the stories I write, the more readers recognize their own stories. We articulate the experience of others when we speak of our world in our own voices.

Our students need our listening. They do not know—as I did not know—that what I had to say was of value to others. We must instill and support the always-fragile faith in our students that their stories are significant. We do it by sharing our stories and the stories of their classmates and by listening to what each student says and what is not yet quite said. (Murray, 1991, p. 18)

I chose to work within a curricular setting of an English Language Arts classroom, because the explicit teaching and learning of writing in Canada exists within this setting. The inclusion of both the teacher and students as participants, as well as opting to work within regular class time, situated the research within a real-life context that was at once multifarious and messy. In my own reading, it appears far more writing research is conducted with teachers, be they pre-service or more experienced, than with secondary students. Very few studies seem to consider the relationship between the teachers' stories and the students' stories of writing. Furthermore, as Pritchard and Honeycutt (2006) noted, significantly more research has been conducted with college rather than secondary students.

I met the University of Alberta research ethics requirements by writing a proposal, addressing ethical issues and questions, drafting letters of invitation to participate for both the teacher and student participants,

informed consent forms and consent forms for using participants' work (see Appendix F). I then commenced negotiating approval for the study from the school division and the school. The school division's superintendent was contacted in writing seeking permission to research within what I call Stabler school, which was granted; I then sought and was granted permission from the principal of Stabler. The study was carried out in a rural secondary school of fewer than 700 students.

Ms. Natasha Harris, the teacher participant who agreed to participate in this research, is an experienced English Language Arts teacher. She has lived in the community and worked at Stabler school for over fourteen years. The study required an ELA teacher who was also a writer and so my knowledge of her as a playwright directing performances of her own work at drama festivals was important in identifying her as my desired participant. She has written several plays, completed a Masters degree in 2007 and, at the time of writing, had just started a doctoral program in Education.

The research study commenced at the beginning of April and continued through to late June of the same school year. At the time of the research, Ms. Harris had three ELA classes, two grade nine and one grade seven. She and I discussed the advantages and disadvantages associated with selecting each grade. Natasha felt that her grade seven students were not suitable for the research project due to lack of maturity and productivity. Consequently, we opted for the Grade nine French Immersion class, for several reasons.

Students in French Immersion tend to be slightly stronger academically, according to Ms. Harris. This was not a qualification I particularly required; however, they were a group of students whom she felt had more curricular space for a research study, because of their collective competence. As there is only one French Immersion class per grade in the town of Wheaton, these students have been together, with few exceptions, since kindergarten, as evidenced in a grade one birthday party

story where several of the author's current classmates were in attendance. Their sense of community had created a fairly open and trusting atmosphere among themselves, one that Ms. Harris felt would be beneficial in creating a positive rapport for the research. The class was significantly smaller than its English program counterparts, with only twelve students in total and, therefore, often moved at a quicker pace.

Because of their French Immersion background, the students frequently struggled with English spelling in handwritten products, as also evidenced in some drawings included in the study (see Appendix A). Since most written drafts were typed (including initial and final drafts, with the exception of prewriting), student participants corrected handwritten spelling errors on their own. Beyond these reasons, Ms Harris felt that this class would be more interested in engaging in the research project and tended to be more insightful and self-aware, with perhaps a little more maturity than her other grade nine class.

Her choice of class came with strengths and weaknesses. The small size of the class was a distinct benefit for several reasons. With only two small groups of research participants, I was able to alternate sitting in with each group of students. This allowed me quickly to develop a personal rapport with the student participants. The size of the class also contributed to a more manageable data corpus. Further, in my experience, small class sizes contribute to the ability to do more and go deeper into the curriculum. Since these student participants were used to one fewer period per week, they were also used to and expected independent work to be assigned.

The level of trust and open atmosphere within the class was simultaneously a strength and a weakness. As a strength, the students had a working community that allowed for what I suspect was a greater than average trust. They also trusted Ms Harris and therefore, by extension, trusted me. However, at times the students' long-standing relationships also fixed individuals into pre-determined specific roles.

## **Ms Harris**

Ms Harris was familiar with writing process theory and enacted that theory within her classroom in her own way. Originally a French major and English minor, she eventually settled into teaching junior high language arts, dividing her teaching experience into three separate and distinct eras. The first era focused on the teaching of French. During the second era, she started to teach ELA, but tended to place her energy and enthusiasm on drama. This was a significant period in her career for the purpose of my research, because it was then she was most actively writing plays for drama productions. She is a playwright and has written several collectives for student drama productions in order to compete in provincial zone competitions.

This interest in writing is one of the key reasons I sought to work with Ms. Harris. It was important for the teacher participant to consider herself a writer. Currently, in her self-identified third era, she is concentrating on ELA teaching and her professional development focus has shifted to the teaching of reading and writing. Some seven years ago, she committed to a professional development group focused on comprehension and communication. Ms. Harris' professional assignment also included a lead teaching position within the school division more generally, which provided professional development in assessment practice.

## **The Class as an Ensemble**

The student participants were self-selected from the class. All members of Ms. Harris' grade nine ELA class were invited to participate through an information/consent letter and an introductory conversation about the research (see Appendix F). The nature and purpose of the research was discussed with their parent via phone conversations. As this was a case study of an actual classroom, complete anonymity cannot be guaranteed. Fourteen people were present for significant portions of the

research, while smaller groups of four to six were present for the remainder. As in any classroom, lives intertwine and participants' stories, either written or conversational, were often linked to one another over time and/or were shared publicly. The information and consent letter explained the terms of the privacy aspects of the research process. All data presented is with pseudonyms. The affiliated schools, communities, and school districts have been given fictitious names to further facilitate anonymity and confidentiality.

While the whole class participated in the creation of individually themed autobiographical writing and the accompanying activities, only those students interested in the research component participated further. Their participation included collecting drafts of writing and reflections completed during the project, as well as their agreeing to records being made of private and public conversations and of drawn representations of writing experience.

The initial nine students who elected to participate in the research study were grouped together in two smaller writing workshop groups (and the non-participants in a third), so that their conversations and work could be audio-taped. Within this structure, the class functioned as a whole on the writing project, so that all twelve students were able to participate in the planned lessons. Out-of-class time was necessary to accommodate individual conversations with the researcher. Additionally, one student who had initially opted out of the research subsequently came to the conclusion that she wanted her voice to be heard. She and her parents then provided permission for some group conversations, her first and last piece of writing, her drawings and a private conversation with me to be used in this study.

#### *Student participants*

The following contains a thumbnail description of the student participants (six female and four male) by way of brief introduction.

Chapters 6 through 9 all contain significantly more developed accounts of the students.

*Diana* was the most keen to participate in the project and was eager to get started, acting as a cheerleader for the project. *Colleen* was a quiet, dedicated student open to new experiences, who occasionally missed class to attend band. *Adriana*, a farm girl and the youngest of three sisters, was very studious, somewhat quiet, but very willing to search for ways to improve her work. *Dan* was incredibly quiet – a true invisible chameleon. He appeared nervous and rarely spoke, and had a reputation for not completing his work. *Kenton* was an outgoing socialite, tending toward making the class laugh with his antics, who also participated in band. *Aden* appeared to be a sharp academic student, with a worldly knowledge devoted to wit. *Avery*, the class clown, drew attention to himself whenever he spoke. *Shelly* openly resisted the very premise of the study, showing resentment by expressing her dislike for personal writing. *Tatum* had a tendency to dominate the conversation with banter and was not always productive. *Karly*'s insightful nature was immediately visible through her observations and contributions to conversations, but her initial rejection of the study clearly alienated her from her classmates' experiences.

### **Sequence of Events**

By late March, ethics clearance had been granted by the university, the school division and Stabler school. In early April, I attended half of one of Ms Harris' ELA classes in order to present information to her students regarding participation in the study, where I provided a copy of the invitation to participate and consent form to all interested students and a complementary parental set of consent forms. I followed up with contact by phone to students' parents in order to address any questions or concerns.

Wednesday, April 9, the first research session was conducted in order to have students represent their experiences with writing in an artistic drawing. Students then showed and interpreted their drawings in the designated small groups, which were determined collaboratively by Natasha and me.

Each of the three writing cycles had three scheduled sessions. The first session was dedicated to a pre-writing activity, the modelling of that activity and small-group student conversations regarding writing plans. The second session was to model revision strategies in a whole-group setting and then recount every writer's story of drafting in a small-group setting in order to provide and receive feedback on the draft to this point. The third session was dedicated to reading aloud a final draft in some form. This session of each cycle tended to vary the most, because in cycle one it took the form of whole-group sharing; in cycle two, only a few students had a final draft, so sharing was redirected into a whole-group conversation regarding why students had not completed the writing, which then also began cycle three session one; the final cycle session three was a whole-class celebration, where all students present read aloud their favorite piece of writing completed over the course of the project.

The following is an outline of research session activities and dates.

- Wednesday, April 9<sup>th</sup> – Initial Drawing Session to represent writing experiences. Three choices of prompts were provided.
- Monday, April 21<sup>st</sup> – Cycle 1 Session 1 – Planning and drafting using a map of a childhood place for brainstorming.
- Monday, April 28<sup>th</sup> – Cycle 1 Session 2 – Stories of drafting and peer revision.
- Monday, May 5<sup>th</sup> – Cycle 1 Session 3 – Whole-group reading of final draft.

- Tuesday, May 20<sup>th</sup> – Planning Session – Natasha and I planned all of Cycle 2 and outlined Cycle 3.
- Wednesday, May 21<sup>st</sup> – Cycle 2 Session 1 – Planning and drafting using a personal photograph for brainstorming.
- Friday, May 23<sup>rd</sup> – Cycle 2 Session 2 – Story of drafting and peer revision.
- First  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Wednesday, May 28 – Cycle 2 Session 3 – Sharing session was scheduled, which turned into a whole-group conversation about students’ failure to have a completed draft. Last  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Wednesday, May 28<sup>th</sup> – Cycle 3 Session 1 – Planning and drafting using a storytelling technique of telling an autobiographical story in third person and then having it told back to the participant in first person.
- Wednesday, June 4<sup>th</sup> – Cycle 3 Session 2 – Story of drafting and peer revision (poor attendance due to field trip conflicts – changed the small groups to male- and female-only)
- Friday, June 6<sup>th</sup> – Cycle 3 Session 3 and Final Drawing Activity – Whole group with each participant reading aloud the piece of writing of which they were the most proud. Students then represented their emotional response to this writing experience or writing in general through drawing.
- June 17<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> – Private Conversations with student participants.

The private conversation had three specific purposes. I had developed a series of general questions arising out of the research experience for all students (see Appendix C). Then I prepared a set of questions connected to each individual student around themes and issues specific to him or her. Third, the private conversation made a space for

student participants to provide observations, questions, concerns and ideas that they may not have wanted to present in the public forum of the classroom. Although both the collective and individual question had been prepared, the conversations that ensued were allowed to flow in directions dictated by the conversation itself, with brief moments of checking to see if anything major had been neglected.

### **Writing the Research**

The participants contributed three key sources of field texts including whole group, small group and personal conversations, original autobiographical texts and participant-generated drawings. The conversations were either one large group or two small groups and comprised the most voluminous field text. When I recorded the larger group, I edited out those students not participating in the study. At times, either Ms Harris or I guided the students' conversations, while, at other times, student groups were left on their own to work through the conversation process. The conversations with student participants, at times, had the ebb and flow of natural conversations, while at others it was stilted, them following a protocol sheet designed to guide their conversation and keep them on track. There were moments when student participants appeared to forget about the tape recorder in their smaller groups and carry on into distracting or off-topic shenanigans or productive and focused conversations, while at others they might remember the researcher presence with direct references such as "goodbye Ms B."

The student participants were divided into two groups for drafting and planning and revising: the first, Avery, Aden, Diana, and Shelly and the second, Colleen, Tatum, Adriana, Kenton, and Dan. The sharing session of each section tended towards whole group. I alternated sitting with each of the smaller groups and Ms Harris floated between the other group participating the study and the group of three not participating in the study.

As frequently as possible, Natasha and I held debriefing conversations immediately following a research session, but at times Natasha's commitment to teach another class interfered. We also scheduled two planning sessions where the bulk of our ten research sessions were outlined, one at the beginning of the project and one before cycle two. However, each post-conversation carried elements of fine-tuning plans, along with reflection on the previous experience. Private conversations between Natasha and me included logistics and scheduling concern, pedagogical choices and rationales, planning and execution of writing, reflection on students, the study, writing and abstract theoretical discussions. Natasha and I both openly shared our observations of students, their work and their conversations. This was also a time to get an initial sense of the small group I was unable to sit in conversation with on that day.

Written texts included anything I could convince students to hold on to, as it related to a piece of writing they were working on. This might include for any one participant pre-writing, maps, brainstorming, first, second and third drafts of writing and reflection notes. Some students provided me with copies of the photograph they used as the impetus for their second piece of writing. There were also three drawing activities, two of which were to reflect a participant's writing experience. Both the drawing and the individual participant's comments about her or his choices and interpretation were critical to generate understanding of this piece of data. The third involved generating a map of a childhood place. The study of participants' texts is relevant in that they were the on-going work that drew an individual's attention to her or his writing process. The analysis of quality, quantity and style of the texts was never the purpose of the research; rather, the concrete experience of writing something and then having space available to discuss the experience was the central purpose.

### *Tense use*

The issue of tense in a document of this nature is challenging; for example, participants often spoke of past, present and future writing experience and events. Therefore, a series of rules were developed to guide my writing:

1. Participant research conversations and analysis of specific conversations are written in the past tense.
2. As a research participant, I have two voices: participant and researcher.
  - a. When I spoke as a participant, the past tense is used.
  - b. As the researcher making general observations, referring to interpretations of data, or drawing conclusions, the present tense is used.

### *Transcripts and transcription*

I chose to audio-record all sessions, which generated twenty-five tapes, because in most sessions the two smaller groups were recorded. The transcripts vary in length from 9 to 80 pages, depending on whether it was a single, small-group session on the short side or a whole-group conversation, sliding into small groups and then into a debriefing between Natasha and myself on the longer side. The volume of the transcription dictated that it follow the completion of the research sessions. In order to acquire deep familiarity with all transcripts, I listened to the conversations repeatedly, both at home and while driving my car. I duplicated the tapes for the purpose of securing the data in more than one location and to allow for transcription. I hired a transcriber and required a standard confidentiality agreement to be signed (see Appendix F). As each transcript was completed, I listened to the tape while simultaneously reading the transcript, in order to verify it and record the attributions of the text in the transcript which also facilitated close reading and listening. This was necessary because at times there were fourteen potential speakers. Occasionally, on very short or single-word turns it was difficult to determine the speaker beyond gender. I repeated the process of listening to the conversations and reading the transcripts one more time to verify the

accuracy of the transcript. If, at a later date while reading a transcript, I encountered text that did not seem appropriate or was simply confusing, I always returned to the taped conversation.

Initially, transcripts were transcribed verbatim and include any repetitions, interjections and clarification points. However, in order to ease reading and clarity, circular statements, interjections and repetitions I judged unnecessary to meaning were edited out of the excerpts included in the dissertation. Further, when a speaker's turn served no specific purpose in advancing the conversation, it was also deleted. For example, if a statement worked as an affirmation for the other speaker to continue, it was removed for expediency.

Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were maintained by providing pseudonyms for all participants, school districts, schools and towns. Further, persons mentioned casually in the conversations such as other students, teachers and family members were also provided with a pseudonym. However, as I mentioned earlier, the nature of a classroom study makes it impossible to guarantee anonymity. Even within the community, it is challenging to attend to anonymity because they are the only grade nine French Immersion class in the town of Wheaton. As the study is removed from its local and immediate situation, and the distance from the field texts to research texts grows, so does the individual's anonymity.

### ***Data analysis and representation***

Field text interpretation included reading transcripts, making notes and observations of topics, issues, concerns, and then searching for threads and themes within the broad categories. As the process continued, the data was revisited several times by means of reading and listening. At times, key word searches were also performed on individual transcripts. During data analysis, I was continually considering representational choices for the research text. I eventually settled on chapter titles from the poem *Dedication*, allowing each chapter to emerge from the data in a form that

suited what needed to be said. Transcript sections included in the dissertation were identified by both the cycle and session, and whether or not it was a whole group or small group conversations. I feel it is important to know when in the process a particular conversation occurred, and therefore, the cycle and session numbers are important. The following abbreviations were used for transcript identification: C#S# indicates cycle and session; WG is whole group; SG is small group; ID is initial drawing session; D is debrief or planning session; PC is private conversation.

Ordered lines of generations may be made to exist on paper through a historical lens, but the writing classroom is not so orderly. The maze of personal and social relationships, the sheer number and variety of writing experiences a grade nine student arrives with, conscious and unconscious, encounters with writing theory and the context of any one classroom come together to define what is possible for a group of students and a teacher. It can never be replicated, only slowed down.

The irony is that, in the middle of living, learning and teaching together, life moves so quickly and so improvisationally that it is next to impossible to see the collective ensemble for being too close. The meaning I explore here focuses first on the teacher participant and me as writers, who embark on a journey to engage students in learning to write through sharing their stories of writing. The next chapter, Chapter 6, focuses on the ensemble as it is woven together, where the preferences and tensions are tangled. This chapter explores the social context of the study and then takes up the question, “Are you a writer?” The final three data chapters of the study home in on refined sections of the web with individual students as writers engaged in the project. It moves to visualize writing literally in an effort to see or not see what is heard in the conversations, or read in the writing. Resistance is met and becomes a central theme. Now the past generations of historical research meet the present participants in this dissertation, they combine to tell new stories of writing that may evoke new possibilities.

# Chapter Five

## Invisible Presence

Tapping into our writing selves and the stories that emerge, however partial, however incomplete, and a work-in-progress, and however hesitantly or eagerly, can open up a world of “innovative writing instruction” for our students, our colleagues, ourselves and others yet unknown to us. (Kinloch, 2009, p. 103)

Teachers, students and researchers all have stories of writing. The teacher is always present in the classroom. She, as a person, is visible. However, her relationship with writing, her processes of writing and her emotional attachment to writing are often invisible, perhaps even to her. Our autobiographies travel with us, they frame our personal philosophies, our actions and, in the case of teachers, our pedagogy. These are the stories that, as teachers, have come to frame our relationship with writing, have exposed us to various pedagogical approaches and contributed to attitudes, skills and beliefs regarding the very nature of writing and writing instruction (Norman & Spencer, 2005). Therefore, I believe that teachers of writing should reflect on how their biographies, as they relate to issues of writing, situate them in the classroom.

As documented in Chapter 2, writing process theorists, for close to forty years, have suggested that teachers of writing need to be writers. However, I believe teachers of writing need to be more than writers. They need openly and reflectively to consider their experiences of writing as potential tools to be used in the classroom, thus making both their stories of process and their actual writing available to students. In other words, they must explore their autobiographies both privately and publicly, assess what they know about writing and the process of writing, and then use their knowledge as insiders and relative experts to teach writing. Through

exploring their relationship to writing, teachers create opportunities for their tacit knowledge and automated processes related to writing to be consciously reopened, examined, assessed and then restoried as *possible* strategies for students to employ.

In the tradition of narrative inquiry, the researcher becomes an integral subject within the topic of inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Casey (1996) observes that narrative researchers “need to attend to internal patterns and priorities,” because each narrative is highly constructed and shaped by “particular patterns of inclusion, omission and disparity” (p. 234). This chapter endeavors to create partial portraits of Natasha and myself as writers. It identifies some of the themes that recur in our writing lives. As Pinar (1988) points out, “Understanding the self is not narcissism, it is a precondition and concomitant condition to the understanding of others” (p. 150). This is why Natasha and I as writers and teachers are presented before the students, because we carried our invisible presences with us into this classroom and ‘our’ biographies explicitly became part of how and what we teach. The teacher crafts the learning experiences and provides the backdrop for all classroom experiences. Our stories (literally) became the basis of instruction for this project and, as such, were implicated in constructing the student participants’ experiences.

## Inspiration

You asked, “How do you teach writing?” and just as you said that, it came to me that maybe it’s narrative, maybe it’s your narrative, that’s all that you can offer, because that’s all that you know, your story of your frustrations and your successes, you can offer your students, and if every teacher did that ... (PC 1, p. 17)

Natasha’s revelation wove together ‘our’ stories as writers and teachers. Her above observation became one premise of this research. Natasha and I are writers, in large part, because we perceive of ourselves as writers, or at least we tinker sufficiently with our definition of writers allowing ourselves to enter the exclusive club occasionally. We both have stories of writing.

We are also teachers of writing; we are insiders with particular and individual knowledge. This chapter explores the framework Ms Harris and I offered to students in an effort to teach writing. It outlines how and why we constructed students writing experiences through our own stories. As I see it now, there is significantly more to do, but at the time this was our effort to make visible our writing selves. We are ‘our’ students’ experts, their skilled writers. Natasha’s implied question, “If every teacher did that [shared her narrative]?”, suggests a synergistic ripple effect. If every teacher revealed herself as a writer through articulating her writing process, students would have many models to draw from in constructing their own process.

I see three elements that each teacher who endeavored to tell her narrative would need to attend to: first, explore her own writing, themes and relationships; second, begin to construct stories of and about writing designed to explicate writing processes, preferences, issues and tensions in an effort to teach writing; third, invite students into engaging with these

stories, probing with questions, and then by extension adding their own stories into the mix.

Each of the following stories has three potentials. First, it reveals beliefs about writing and issues around writing; therefore, it renders visible the themes and patterns related to both Natasha's and my autobiographies, which exist behind the scenes of our teaching. Second, it articulates processes we employ that can be highlighted or extracted and elaborated on for instructional purposes. Thirdly, reflection about writing can and should have pedagogical consequences that encourage growth in practice.

### **Natasha: Playwright**

Natasha's important recurring themes as a writer revolve around trust, purpose and inspiration, with a hint of 'change the world.' She has seen herself as a writer for years longer than I have and perhaps has a greater sense of faith in her processes of composing and revising, although they too are not without frustrations. The brief anecdotes she told contribute to a partial view of her story as a writer. The following anecdotes could be mined for her students, because they reveal great insight into both writing in general and process in particular.

I have left her stories mostly intact with some excision for economy, because the re-visioning I do in listening to her story and now retelling it provides an example of how a writing teacher could pause to examine her own stories, reveal her own themes, her own passions and frustrations, as she considers how best to help her students.

#### **Inspiration, Trust and Purpose**

Natasha writes in two ways. She has the creative writing of plays, and then academic writing for her Master's, a more recent re-addition to

her repertoire. Her plays were written for performance in drama competitions.

I think a lot of the plays that I've written, I've been inspired to write, you know. The one about anorexia started because I asked the students to all write a monologue... I think I was inspired because I started to research, and I discovered, "Wow. What an issue." Then the play about the family abuse was the same thing. In both of those cases, I was definitely inspired to tell a story that would make a difference to people... ending the play about domestic abuse. I could not find an ending. I try not to get frustrated because I think that blocks you. If you're frustrated, how are you going to keep writing? I was home sick, I started to play music, that gave me the inspiration for the end of the play. But I always knew that I would be able to find an ending. I can remember the kids. We were rehearsing... "But we don't have an ending, Mrs. H."... but it always comes, maybe you have to find a creative way, like the music. (PC 1 p. 13)

Although Natasha only shares this story with me, her narrative of playwriting reveals extensive knowledge of her process and subject matter that could be made available for students. It reveals how she uses others as inspirational sources, how research into a topic is important, that a social message drives her writing and that reaching her audience is essential. With regard to process, she trusts herself, works to avoid getting frustrated and knows that with time, patience and creativity an ending will come. She also intuitively knows that her students do not have the same faith in their writing. Each part of the narrative I have identified could be expanded to explore more in-depth specifics.

Earlier in the conversation, Natasha suggested that writing is like "climbing a mountain; it's also a lot of trust of your own abilities, and trust of just getting out there and doing it" (PC 1, p. 1). She worried that her students were unable to "trust that it'll work out. I think there's more a lack of trust that it doesn't matter what you do, it's not going to be good" (PC 1, p. 1). For me, this line of thinking prompted further conversations about students' ability to trust themselves as writers.

## Writing Frustrations: Voice and Assessment

Natasha needs to be connected in order for her writing to flow. She is blocked when she feels disconnected from the writing. In this extract, she starts by discussing academic writing for her Master's degree.

I guess you have to find why you're doing it. It's your voice, what you want to say. I struggled with my literature review, because it's not for me. Even a paper is for me to learn and grow, and the literature review is, but I, I can't insert enough of me in there, and it's probably the hardest thing I've ever written to keep, you know motivated. I hate it. I hate it! ... This beast that I just cannot tame. You encounter those frustrations when you're a writer, but you can usually get over them with time, or thought, reflection, conversation. I'm going to get there, but its kind of that trust. You have to have trust and faith that, yes, you will get there. (PC 1 p. 3).

Voice is the center, the heart, of writing for Natasha. Historically, she has experienced frustrations while writing that were resolved in different ways including conversations with students/actors, listening to music, and/or trusting the process. When she struggled with her literature review for her Master's degree, she still believed that she would reach her goal. Trusting that voice can come through even the most difficult writing projects is an important tool to overcoming a struggle.

Natasha's literature review was more prescriptive writing, and she talked about a tentative balance of self and others in the writing assignment. In discussing her assignments for students, Natasha struggled between providing structure and freedom (Casey & Hemenway, 2001), and opportunities for resistance and compliance (Elbow, 2000). Some students needed strict directions or they feel paralyzed, while others were constrained by the rules and guidelines. Her observation and reflection on her own experiences in a university course writing a literature review she hated forced her to examine how assignments can both resonate with or cause dissonance for students. She wondered how does "making students write" allow them to "say something" or allow them to "own their

writing”? Where are students’ opportunities for this kind of voice and ownership?

The next anecdote from Natasha is about her first unsuccessful writing assignment for her Master’s course. A classic response to the question, “Why didn’t I get the grade I deserve?”.

I got 7 out of 10, and I just, I was convinced there’s something wrong. Somebody did not read this properly, because there’s something wrong with the person who marked this that they didn’t see that I’m better than this. That’s very immodest, but that’s how I felt. What is wrong with you people? I can write, how come you can’t see that? ... but when I looked back I realized, it was my organization. I didn’t weave this together the way I was supposed to. I went chachunk, chachunk, chachunk logically. Totally logical when I should have known better. It was totally disconnected. I basically took the prompt and chopped it up and did one, two, three when I should have had a theme, and let it flow, and I knew that. But when you’re not in that habit, you don’t apply your practice to yourself, right! What you tell the kids, you don’t necessarily ... (PC 1, p. 9).

This story offers the opportunity to reveal to students that Natasha is still working on her writing, sometimes fails to take her own advice and that her identity as a writer is also tangled up with marks. She did what many students did, she blamed the teacher’s misreading of her assignment for her own decisions in writing, but Natasha also re-examined the text to discover the flaw of not developing a theme. While her plays were driven by theme, she did not transfer that knowledge to her new writing context. As she said, she cut the prompt apart and went ‘chachunk’. She laughed at the irony of not following her own advice and suggestions for writing.

Why do I write? Well, I don’t know. I guess my first instinct would be because I enjoy it, but also because I have something to say ... the only reason I ever started to write plays was one of our adjudicators said to my group you guys are more talented than the script, you should write your own. So, why do I write? I wanted to say something to kids about being them. They often had a message a moral and learning was going to happen. It was like that health

curriculum kind of thing...when you're writing a play and it comes alive on stage, and I just think, okay, there's 200 people in that audience, how do you know how that's going to change their life? I've sat in those seats. You've sat in those seats, you know the stuff you take away, and it changes you. Yeah, I can say it changes you forever. Maybe not profoundly, but it's all those little changes that add up to you being a different person. So I have something to say, but also it's a little bit of that 'change the world' thing. (PC 1, p. 9)

This story contains several possibilities. The issues and beliefs related to writing include, motivation for writing, social messages, being competitive in a competition, changing the world through words and production, and students learning from both the experience of collaboratively writing the play and viewing a production. On process, it has the potential to reveal the role of audience, the role of deadlines (such as competition dates), the crafting of a social message without insulting an audience and how works are validated through an audience. Each of these potential directions for a classroom story needs elaboration. The process of identifying and developing the potential themes in 'our' writing stories establishes pedagogical connections and reflections.

Natasha is her students' expert and she has extensive personal knowledge to offer, which is something that until she participated in this research she had not considered as relevant to or useful in her classroom. My understanding is that she had used her knowledge as a writer, but she was neither explicitly reflective about how she has used her experience, nor did she enter her knowledge into the classroom conversation as a starting place for students.

Natasha's story is one of trusting the process, finding inspiration and affecting her audience. As Natasha embarks on her doctoral work, new writing stories are coming into existence, ones that may challenge her themes. Some challenges will be old and faithful, while others will be new and grounded in the less familiar discipline. I suspect these might come with more frustration and less enjoyment, but they all have the potential

for the classroom. I hope her academic writing provides a space to say something for both her and her students in the future.

*Aside: Parallel purposes*

An aside in a play allows the character to step out to whisper directly to the audience members rather than simply have them overhear. Here, as the researcher, I step out to whisper observations regarding the research process as parallel to living the stories of classroom dramas. Rereading and re/visioning Natasha's story of viewing her own plays as an audience member, I am struck by the deep parallel of her story and the story of my research. As students enact a play on the stage for an audience, that audience is privy to a new story, a new narrative and potentially a new way of seeing the world. There is no guarantee that the story will contribute to change, but all the little experiences, the little stories, grouped together have the potential to shape and reshape the stories we tell ourselves and each other, as Bruner (2004) suggests. The power of story in relation to the end quotation of Chapter 1 lies in what apples are taken away, sometimes by the tellers as they re-story their own possibilities, sometimes by the listeners.

### **Susan: Resistant Writer**

Much of the story of my transition from non-writer to writer was revealed in Chapter 1. Here, I will focus primarily on the back-story of how deeply entrenched my resistance was both to writing and to calling myself a writer. I highlight three themes that have coloured every writing experience, every moment of teaching writing and contributed heavily to this research. I call them my three Fs: fear, failure and fraud. They are so intertwined that I cannot separate them. In consequence, I will relate three stories that personify how my autobiography with writing goes with me into the classroom, as both researcher and teacher.

Other than this next story, I do not remember writing in school. In grade eight, my social studies teacher asked for a research report and I wrote about the history of the Barr Colonists, my home-town story. Although some of the information has stayed with me over the thirty-some years since I wrote it, what I have come to believe sustained this memory has far more to do with the highly prescriptive process of writing that was required at the time rather than the actual content.

Mr. Smith required that all research notes be written on a single cue card. I was meticulous in cramming as much information on my cue card (on both sides) as possible, in order that I would receive a good grade. This single cue card was the only reference we were allowed to use during the writing of the final draft of the report, which had to be completed within class time. I was a slow writer who, after years of conditioning regarding poor spelling and illegible handwriting, needed extra time. My card was so jammed with notes that Mr. Smith allowed me, on my own time, to finish writing my report in the library after school and at lunch. I believe he was trying to control two issues in writing by this means: first, develop effective note-taking strategies and, second, to prevent plagiarism.

I remember feeling punished for being a slow writer, despite wanting to do well. As a child, I struggled with spelling and neatness in handwriting. (I still do.) These two difficulties, only one of which has to do with writing, were often the only comment on my papers besides a percentage grade. The structure of the writing process was extremely rigid. Take notes, organize on a small cue card, transpose them into a finished report and supply both the cue card and the final copy for marking. No deviation was allowed, except extra-supervised time.

For me, this story has come to represent how teachers in an effort to see 'invisible' processes simplify the writing process and create constraints to the writing process that are artificially designed to provide accountability for process (Graves, 1983, 1994; Calkins, 1994; Atwell

1987, Myhill & Jones, 2004). As for me, I was afraid of failure and desperate to comply (Elbow 2000). At this time, writing was mostly about the physical act of pen to paper and not about ideas. Spelling or rather not making spelling mistakes was my deepest concern. I complied with the prescriptive process so that I would sufficiently succeed.

### **Becoming a Reluctant Teacher of Writing**

Sliding forward through time to the winter of 1988, I arrived at my curriculum course, *Teaching English Language Arts* for English minor students. One of the course assignments included a piece of creative writing, with a workshop approach being employed during class time. The final pieces of writing were collected and bound into an anthology, including a poem written by our professor who modelled for us that teachers of writing should themselves write.

My original draft worked in two-line stanzas with a question-and-answer format that was immature and limited in originality. It derived from real experience, in that my grandmother had died a few years earlier. I used the writing to help me sort out feelings about her. In that way, the writing was somewhat cathartic and, perhaps, my first remembered foray into creative autobiographical writing that I now embrace both for myself and for this study. Re-reading the poem, I was struck by the lack of punctuation. I know that, at the time, this absence was not a style decision so much as a lack of confidence. I was never sure of where or how to punctuate such work, so, rather than show ignorance, I chose to use none, except for the end question mark. To me, this appeared consistent, and limited potential exposure as a fraud, but it did nothing to enhance the writing. I did not attempt another poem for fifteen years. I was not a writer, so why pretend?

I hated this experience. It felt scary to show my peers my work. I found it threatening and uncomfortable. I had little or no experience with

peer revision or publishing. I feared being exposed as a fraud. I was not a writer and I never intended to be one; I only needed to teach writing.

### **Assigning Writing Not Teaching Writing**

By now there is a pattern, a fear of writing and a fear of exposure. Worse yet, the social studies (my major) job I dreamed of (not that you have to write there) never materialized and I became a full-time, junior-high ELA teacher (my minor). I spent much of my initial years of teaching feeling as though I was a fraud. I struggled with grammar, spelling and punctuation. I particularly remember one day in the hallway showing a colleague I respected something I had written, to which she gently noted, “*Sentence* is spelled with an ‘e’ not an ‘a’.” As the grade nine ELA teacher, I was mortified.

During class, I assigned lots of writing, enough to be considered a tough teacher with high expectations. My mother bought me a hand-held spellchecker to assist with my feelings of inadequacy. I eventually did get significantly better, but I still lacked the confidence to write spontaneously on the board for many years. How could I, a teacher paralyzed by the mechanics and correctness of writing, ever really teach writing? During that time, I assigned a lot of writing rather than taught it. I never wrote for pleasure and I did not create models for students to work with or from.

I was lucky to have met a teaching colleague who became my editor and is now known as ‘Val-check.’ She is significantly more advanced than Microsoft. She makes editorial changes, recognizes intentional breaks in convention for stylistic purposes and frequently calls to provide mini-lessons on punctuation and grammar. In my years of teaching, I have taught many students each year who were also paralyzed by their weaknesses in grammar, spelling and punctuation. I knew their coping strategies for hiding their weaknesses, because I used them too.

Eventually, I started writing more on the board, thereby revealing my flaws to students. As a pedagogic consequence, I was also in a position

to share my strategies, show empathy and encourage them to try less familiar but specific diction. Now, I feel confident that this choice allows students to take risks in their writing and it makes me more human in the classroom setting. I was performing a job for which I did not feel qualified, but at least now I was using my weaknesses to help students who struggled with the same fears and flaws as I did. I reframed my flaws into new stories to help students. When I wanted them to use editors, I told Val-check stories. When I wanted students to take risks, I told stories about my fears. I started to bring my actual and unpolished writing into the classroom, to revise with them, to learn with them and to teach them more strategies.

My story is filled with failure, doubt, questions and tensions. It is a story that positions me as a relative novice in the classroom. I am in the process of restorying my relationship with writing and the teaching of writing. I am coming to know writing in more intimate ways and with each writing endeavor I have more to offer others as possibilities. I am becoming my students' expert. Even though I have grown to be writer, this is a story I still choose to put on in order to create a connection with students.

### **Making Visible Our Invisible Narratives of Writing**

As Perl and Wilson (1998) note, how teachers approach a classroom to teach writing is always connected to who they are, their experiences, their beliefs and philosophies. They suggest that each teacher who writes in the classroom uniquely reveals his or her nature, outlook and any unease. In this section, Natasha and I present the circumstances surrounding a piece of text we had written, we both define our rhetorical problems and we identify specific elements and strategies of our writing

process in an effort to make the invisible present and open to conversation. As such, it also provides the first look into the classroom setting.

While Graves (1983) saw extensive opportunities to compose and revise with students, he recognized that a student's use of a modelled strategy was not "a one-to-one expectation: here is the modeling session, now do it" (p. 49). Further, he believed that modelling with students contributes to a teacher's deeper understanding of her or his writing process. In my experience, this is true. The act of working directly in front of students either composing or revising requires that I produce for public hearing the thinking I am engaged with. This act brings a consciousness and heightened awareness to an experience that is typically silent and internal. At times, I find myself understanding my decision at the point of utterance. The meta-cognitive thinking required to articulate what, why and how I am doing something in the moment does not seem to be as present when I am composing alone or revising in private.

### **Creating Multiple Models**

Models of writing can be intimidating to student writers. Professional models may appear perfect and impossible to reach and textbooks models may feel too rigid, too vague or distant and removed from students' experience. We chose to share our own writing with real strengths, real flaws and real questions or concerns for revision. The limited timeframe of the study did not allow for composing in front or in the midst of students. While not ideal to tell the story of our process, we did bring our middle-of-the-process to life through retelling. We attempted to show them some of the back-story.

Although we told our creation and revision stories in each of the three cycles, the following pair of stories provides the best example of both Natasha and I engaged in revealing our writing selves and our processes, while at the same time requesting student assistance with revision. The initiating activity had been to bring in a photograph of

personal significance. I had brought two photographs, both of my two-year-old son, Samuel, and myself. Ms Harris had shown a photograph of her brother who died in 1989. She later changed her subject matter to her son, Aaron, and she explained her rationale for the change to the students.

Our narratives served several purposes. Students were provided with a sheet to guide their small-group conversations. Each revision session for students was to be divided into two rounds of conversation (see Appendix E). The first round focused on the story of creation, the context, purpose, audience and form of the writing, while the second round focused on revision concerns and writing issues. First, we tried to provide a context and circumstance for a piece of writing, including background information such as photographs, maps, descriptions, personal interests, conversations with others and any issue of writing not directly related to process. Secondly, we revealed information about ourselves as writers and about our personal choices and decision-making processes during this particular writing experience. Thirdly, we modelled the elements and form we would like the small conversation groups to mirror. Where Natasha and I both shared significant details and answered all the question prompts in a narrative of writing experience, in general, the students were far less successful with this style of sharing.

#### *A pair of creation stories*

I have elected to divide our stories of creation into two sections with my story told first as it was chronologically experienced by the students. However, the real experience was a continual unity.

I've given you a sheet that describes the two different rounds of conversation. The first one is the story of the creation. "How did you come to make and create this piece of writing?" And here I'm looking for all kinds of details, but not so much about the text... I'll tell you my story. I was working from two photographs... I'm kneeling and my son Samuel is upside down, and I'm holding him by the waist, his legs and feet are up here (on my shoulders), his head is down and I'm tickling his tummy and we're both laughing. The other picture...we ended up basically

kissing, kissing noses and that's when she took the picture. So from those two, I have a sense of relationship captured in a moment in time and I decided to write a poem. I was supposed to do my homework last night, but I was baking a cake 'cause he's turning two, on Sunday. I got up early, at six this morning, to write this poem. I'd done lots of brainstorming the day before so I worked from those phrases. I also saved it in four drafts, so I brought three and four with me. You can see I started already thinking about things that I would want to change and revise. My purpose for writing it is several-fold: one, Samuel, and myself, and secondly to have something that sort of captures my idea of what pictures do for us, right? They're living moments that become solidified in a photograph, and yet that moment was before, it was after, it keeps moving, and it's dynamic. So I'm trying to capture that in my poem, I don't think I'm quite there yet. I want it to be specific to the situation but I also want it to be universal...so that Mrs. H might think of her own son when she reads it. It's not so much about the picture but there are elements of the picture in it. I wrote it this morning, probably in about a half an hour...I was impressed that I got a poem that I will share and I'm not totally embarrassed to share.

Major struggles, I said before, I've never been able to write about Samuel before. So this is a big stretch for me. I sort of pushed myself and forced myself to write on a subject that I haven't been comfortable writing about. Then I thought of the other purpose, Mrs. H said: wouldn't it be neat to take the poem, once it's finished and take the two pictures and maybe scan them so that they're a little smaller and frame them so that you have the two different pictures, one at six months and one at a year and a half with this poem in the middle, because even the two show relationships over time?

That would be sort of your round one conversation, you're telling the story of what you wrote, why you wrote it. And then you, in round two of the conversation, you'll share what you wrote and ask for your specific feedback. So I have some very specific things that I would like some help with. Do you (Natasha) want me to continue or do you want to tell your story? (C2 S2, WG, p. 1)

In this account, I have moved beyond many of the themes that colour my past writing experiences, because I am aware of them.

However, glimmers related to fears of inadequacy are present in lines like

“not totally embarrassed to share.” I established the circumstance, including a short time frame for the physical act of composing (a common concern for students), how family and relationship were getting in the way of homework, and implied that not all writing needs to take considerable time (particularly if it has been in process with activities like brainstorming). One thing I missed telling the students was that the desire and idea for this poem had existed since the taking of the first photograph at six months of age.

The rhetorical problem I wished to address included my desire to create a poem that would capture how photographs represent our lives, to write about my son (a previously blocked subject) and to reach a broad audience. Ironically, the very relationship I so desperately wished to capture in writing was the very thing (baking a cake for his second birthday) that was keeping me from my writing. The direct writing processes I revealed to students included saving in multiple drafts, preparatory marking for possible revisions and using peer conversations to shape and direct the writing. Each of the above elements could be paused and drawn out for further elaboration in order to draw students into the conversation.

Ms Harris: I could tell my story. Do I have a story? I changed my topic. Last night I tried to write and I couldn't. Actually I did, I wrote two pages, but I was afraid. I thought, 'Oh, I can't bring that here and bare my soul for my students.' To say this about my writing and about my brother, do you know what I mean? Like it was just too, too close. And not that I wouldn't share something personal but then when you have to look and you have to tell me; well that part doesn't really work, I thought; I don't know if you guys would do that to me because of my topic. Okay? So I decided I should change my topic. Then I started thinking; I can't write about anything funny. Yeah, so I guess that was my challenge. So then, well, I do know a person who makes me laugh all the time.

Students: Aaron.

Ms Harris: My son, Aaron. Yes, in addition to you guys, but my son, Aaron. What story can I tell about Aaron? I thought it's good because Aaron was in their class.

Ms Bowsfield: Oh, okay.

Ms Harris: They know him...it didn't really come from a picture although once I picked the story, I had to frame it; why am I telling the story? I think... did I go through all the parts; ideas, purpose... Oh you know what I thought my purpose might be, we were talking about this in one of the small groups, do you need to know your purpose before you start writing? And I didn't really, you know I thought; oh it's just to record history or something. Then I thought, you know what, this is the kind of story I could tell at his wedding.

Aden: Ho ho.

Ms Harris: Right. I've selected not to have a picture, I broke the rules in the case that I didn't go looking for a picture, I just picked a story, right? Um, and because it was a story...

Tatum: Bad.

Ms Bowsfield: No, no that's...

Ms Harris: I found a picture, okay? Robert and Aaron at Halloween. It's a story about Aaron, but it's actually a story about both of my boys. It ended up being there are two opposites in this picture, the picture really you know, you have a pumpkin and you have a Mexican.

(Laughter)

Ms Harris: So, they're not alike at all and my story's about how my boys are not alike. (C2 S2, WG, pp. 1-5)

The context Ms Harris shared with students was her fear of baring her soul to them and placing them in an untenable situation of needing to critique not only her writing, but also her relationship with her brother and his death. Instead, she chose a funny story about her sons that, while still personal, was far safer with less emotional risk. While she had written two pages on her brother, she was unable to complete or bring in that writing. This story established the idea that writing can be too personal to reveal in a classroom context and this may have created the space for the next session's discussions where students talked at length about the fear of judgment and exposure that comes with personal writing, which is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Beyond being the context for her new piece, it revealed a hidden writing process, an invisible solution, one where the writing is discarded before it is ever finished or revealed to an audience. Frequently, the delete key makes tracing or examining writing processes challenging. The rhetorical problem Ms Harris opted to address defined the audience in one of two ways: a story for a wedding or a simple remembrance. Her purpose was not only to tell a funny story, but also to frame that story around a theme making the writing work beyond a punch line.

On process she revealed that she “broke the rules” by not working from a photograph. She appeared to feel guilty, enough so that she found a picture, after deciding on the story that could have represented her theme, even though it had not been a catalyst for the writing. Tatum teasingly chastised her for her action, which allowed me to draw attention to how controlled from the outset and the outside their writing typically was and that they were uncomfortable defining their own goals and reasons for writing. It also highlighted for me as a researcher how rigidly processes are sometimes prescribed in order for the teacher to be able to view them, perhaps to the detriment of students’ abilities to define their own frames and constraints for writing and their own processes. This rigidity is so entrenched in the culture of school that even Ms Harris, who knew full well that the photograph was simply a starting place for writing, felt she needed to supply a photograph in order to comply with what was requested. In many ways, she did what I know some students do and worked backwards through the assignment to supply evidence of process retrospectively. I am left wondering how often students feel guilt when their actual process does not coincide with the scripted official story.

#### *A pair of revision stories*

The second round of conversation on peer revision day included each person reading her or his original text to the respective small groups after soliciting specific feedback about areas of concern within the writing. Again, Ms Harris and myself modelled in a whole class setting the frame

of the small-group discussion we wished to see and continued to reveal 'us' as writers. We made certain to keep our stories (both literal and figurative) open to revision as we invited students into the conversation. In the moment, I remember feeling that the conversations were satisfying.

First, I invited student comment on my poem *Pictures of Relationship* in its final version (not the version commented on during the following exchange), which immediately follows. I requested specific assistance with clarity and diction as it related to my theme.

### **Pictures of Relationship**

Noses kiss  
Fingers entwine  
Embraces comfort  
Knees and tummy tickled  
Booboo's erased.

Smiles skip between  
as laughter flows through bodies  
and touch links the separate  
while warmth holds the present.

Frozen by stillness  
captured moments  
dance to defy  
definition  
as the background  
slips from focus.

Living and breathing  
held upside down  
lost in now.

Exposing love's eccentricity  
it captures dynamic eternity  
statically preserving time.

Students revealed awareness of elements in writing such as vocabulary, connotation, and the use of repetition for poetic effect among other general poetic principles. The conversation was sophisticated and focused on the task, although somewhat confusing as more than one

person talked at a time. Referring to the word 'statically' the following exchange evolved.

Ms Bowsfield: Okay so, maybe not poetic? The idea is incredibly important to what I want to capture...

Ms Harris: Oh, okay.

Ms Bowsfield: That here's this picture and it's static, it doesn't change, but the relationship grows and changes and was different after and was different before the moment, so that's dynamic. So, the event is dynamic, but the picture becomes static. I'm looking for ways to convey that. Does anybody have any other words I could use for static?

Ms Harris: You used a word already, somewhere, you said 'frozen,' didn't you?

Ms Bowsfield: Yeah, I've got 'frozen by stillness.'

Ms Harris: Do you guys want a thesaurus?

Adriana: Yes.

Diana: Like travelling, trapped in a something of time.

Adriana: Trapped is more like...

Diana: Trapped in... Trapped in a, trapped in a... um...

(A few people talking at once here, brainstorming.)

Ms Bowsfield: I want to be careful, too, about the connotations...

Shelly: Yeah.

Ms Bowsfield: ...Of words, 'cause there's a couple in here that I don't really like the connotation of the word, for example, 'invades'...

Shelly: Yeah.

Ms Bowsfield: I know what I was going for, you know how when your body gets taken over by laughter...maybe; chuckles swim the bodies, or giggles swim the bodies or something that's softer.

Ms Harris: Trapped, I agree with the connotation of trapped, what about captured?

Adriana: Unmoving.

(More brainstorming)

Ms Bowsfield: Maybe what I need to do is look up picture words, words that are related to pictures.

Adriana: 'cause captured is kind of ...

Ms Harris: Or look up trapped, what did you say?

Diana: Trapped.

Ms Harris: Trapped and captured, you know, if you look up the verbs...

Ms Bowsfield: Yeah and try and find... so doing some thesaurus work there might be helpful. Did you find anything else, Tatum?

Tatum: It's not as strong, they're not strong.

Ms Bowsfield: Okay. Kenton, you noticed that I kept wanting to say statistically, but it's statically, you said it wasn't very poetic, and 'unconventionally' isn't very poetic either. (C2 S2, WG, p. 8)

As a writer, I revealed myself to be particular in my word choice as it related to the theme in the poem. By articulating the theme of the poem to students, they were able to focus their feedback and revision suggestions on areas of the poem they felt needed work. There was excitement in the air as several students talk at once and as one student initiated reaching for a thesaurus, to which Ms Harris then offers getting a thesaurus as a possibility for all students. The student participants made real suggestions; their interactions were overlapping and built on one another's ideas. In the middle of the experience, it felt like the students were invested in improving how the poem communicated the message I wished to convey and many of the suggested changes throughout the entire transcript were incorporated into the version of the poem I brought in to share as polished.

Although the level of conversation surrounding revision was concrete, focused and elevated, the student participants' peer revisions never attained this level of conversation and frequently reverted to single-line statements and answering questions. One reason for this was the time commitment it took to review a piece of writing in detail competed with the need to get through each writer's work during the class time. They also struggled to stay focused on an individual piece of writing. Would this improve for students with more experience? As the responsibility for deliberation (Lensmire, 1997) was fostered with students through modelling and practice, the teacher's stories could withdraw from the position of central story to learn from. Making more time and space for students' stories to become the central discussion.

Further, rereading this exchange revealed that not all students were invested. The classroom is an immediate place; it is always *now*; it is always fast. The boys in the class remained completely silent. Aden, Kenton, Dan, and Avery did not speak during this portion of the exchange. I wonder why not? All but Dan have strong representation in their smaller groups and at times they are more vocal in whole-group conversations. As a researcher, I have distinct advantage over the classroom teacher in that I have a transcript to dwell with, to see moments of the drama in slow motion. To create freeze frames and ask questions. Although I can pause, I can never supply answers only more questions. What kept the boys silent? Was the silence resistance, disengagement, or simply nothing to say? Would they value learning about writing through other's experiences?

Bellow is the final copy of Ms Harris' *The Monster Story*. Although not the exact version discussed in the provided transcripts, it may help to clarify the following conversation.

### **The Monster Story**

My boys, from birth, have been polar opposites. Where the eldest is calm, quiet, and reflective, the youngest is active, unpredictable, and, at times, wild. Considering their opposite natures, I have always wondered whether they will be close when they grow up. Being typical brothers, several times my hope in that has been shaken.

When my boys were young, we had a morning routine. I would wake big brother Robert first, gently shaking him awake, quietly cuddling him for a moment. Then I would go across the hall to wake his little brother.

That morning when I left Robert to wake Aaron, I followed our routine: quietly opening his door, crawling up onto his bed, and sitting with my back against the wall. Aaron woke from his warm and safe sleep and crawled onto my lap. And, as always, we cuddled and talked. Aaron was just starting to put sentences together.

This morning, he had a story.

“Monster gone now, Mommy.”

“Oh, there was a monster in your room last night?” I asked.  
“What did you do?”

His response? “Monster gone now. I say, ‘Go eat Robert’.”

Ms Harris was uncertain of her purpose and audience in her *Monster Story*. She had framed the story around her two boys, who are very different, and a concern she felt as a parent that they would not be close and choose to be friends as adults. She chose this story to indicate where this concern was coming from.

In Ms Harris’ context story leading into the following class exchange, she desired comments on the effectiveness of her ending, which was like a punch line. She worried that it was too abrupt, but did not want to insult her audience and become annoying. The class feedback suggested the ending was working to produce the humour desired.

Diana then moved the conversation into issues of clarity, when she identified two specific places where Ms Harris’ writing was unclear. The first was in the use of names and ages, the second was around who wakes Aaron up. Ms Harris suggested that she had intentionally left names out until later in the story. Although she did not explicitly state why she left them out, it may have been to create a wider audience appeal of a mother’s fear that her children will not be friends. Diana confidently identified her concern and suggested a revision of positioning a name earlier. Ms Harris affirmed Diana’s concern and re-examined the text leading to the most significant changes in the version which precedes this paragraph. Next, Diana identified an area that Ms Harris had not noticed, a far riskier move on a student’s part:

Ms Harris: Well, I thought about putting that old back, I thought about putting that there. “I would wake Robert first, then I would let him wake up slowly and I would go across the hall to wake his little brother,” and now I am kind of establishing Robert’s the oldest and then I could put Aaron’s name in, probably where it still...

Diana: And also that sentence that you just read, it kind of sounds like you left Robert to wake Aaron up, like you didn't go wake Aaron up.

Ms Harris: Oh, okay.

Diana: You said, okay, Robert, you can go wake him up.

Ms Harris: Read that part, Diana.

Diana: "That morning, when I left Robert to wake Aaron..."

Ms Harris: Okay, oh!

Shelly: It does!

(Someone laughs)

Karly: Oh.

Ms Harris: Yes, it does now that you point that out.

Ms Bowsfield: Yeah, the, the line above it is crystal clear; "then I would let him wake up slowly and I would go across the hall to wake his little brother." Make that...

Diana: Maybe if you mention that you woke up Robert and then you went to go wake up Aaron.

Ms Harris: Yeah. But you're right, the way it's worded, so I could look at that wording. (C2 S2, WG, p. 14)

There is risk to credibility in exposing one's writing to students. However, as McClay (2006) notes, it does allow a teacher to adopt a learner stance beside her students. Ms Harris' surprise at being 'caught out', in the sense that she missed something, delighted the students, but she took it in stride, as a place to work on her writing. It also revealed the writing as unpolished and still open to revision in a sense unrehearsed. She validated Diana's observations as two areas she would specifically examine during revision and then did. As a writer, Ms Harris revealed herself to be someone who was not perfect, sought improvement and enjoyed having her students revise with her on her writing when she took the time to thank her students and expressed the hope that they would feel as good as she did, after their revision experiences.

Even though Ms Harris was a writer, her writing and stories of writing had remained somewhat distant from her classroom. Previously, she had not consciously chosen to reveal anything of her own writing life. She had not actively revised her own writing in front of her students, so this was a new experience for all. She had shared models of her own

writing, but she had not provided opportunities to consider the text a work-in-progress.

*Aside: Wishful revision*

Early in my analysis, I recognized a weakness in my research design, namely, as storytellers of our writing, Ms Harris and I simply did not go far enough or deep enough reflectively. More work was needed to mine *our* stories for meaning, processes and teachable moments, in some ways to identify the moral of the story. While I had selected a kindred spirit in Natasha as writer, I had not built in enough time to explore her relationship to writing and her stories of writing. In retrospect, I wished for more conversations about her pedagogy and writing practice as stories to explore alongside my own pedagogy and writing practice.

One possibility I now envision is to have written stories, prior to commencing research with students, that we then shared with each other and worked through a similar process to that which we would eventually request from the students. This could have added a number of nuances to the study. First, it would have created a conversation space between us grounded in our writing. Second, as a peer pair talking about our writing, it would have created reflective opportunities to consider our writing practice in order to become more self-aware. Third, our professional conversations could pose questions to our writing about how, when, why and what we want might want to highlight within a story for students' benefit.

I recognize the irony of preparing stories to tell students, which makes them more distant and removed from our immediate and unpolished writing. Perhaps the imagined conversations I referred to would simply be a rehearsal space for us to work through acquiring the introspective and critical stance we might need to automate as *we* endeavor to develop new and spontaneous stories for students.

## Using ‘Our’ Writing to Teach Writing

Graves (1983) believed that both the craft of teaching and the craft of writing were necessary in order to teach writing. In the previous section, Natasha and I paused to explore our craft of writing. The models we composed for students and the stories we told of its creation are filled with moments that can be responsive to students’ needs, needs which are identified through the craft of teaching. We endeavored to craft teaching moments through illuminating our personal craft of writing in conversation with students. This chapter began by exploring how Natasha and I experience writing, because our historical relationship with writing colours our actions and beliefs about writing. It then moved into the story of crafting a particular piece of writing. We were building a “communal frame of reference” (Atwell, 1987, p. 78) to refer and draw back to as we progress. We attempted to establish conversations that might lead to transformation, as Doll (2002) suggested.

### **Patience With Our Processes**

My favorite story of my writing process, one that I tell and retell to students, could be titled ‘be patient with yourself’. Slowly, I have come to accept the quiet time of reading, thinking and false starts necessary at the beginning of a writing project. Although it has taken six years of a deepening conscious awareness and many reminders to be gentle with myself when these moments of non-writing occur, I am now able to identify a lack of productivity as an important stage in writing and thus be more patient with myself at those times.

The physical inactivity, avoidance and starts and stops can be very frustrating for writers. For some, maybe many they may not be recognized as a part of the writing process. Murray (1989) referred to the frustrating inactivity prior to writing as “the essential delay” (p. 29). During this time, the writer “must be patient; he must wait for information; insight, order,

need, voice. He must not write to write” (p. 36). For me, this period of time before writing had been crippling, but as I learn about my writing processes I am able to be more patient and trust, as Ms Harris does, that “it will come.”

I use this story in the classroom in two ways. The first to inform students directly that silence, frustration, and a lack of output are a part of my writing process and therefore reflect opportunities to identify whether or not this challenge of starting a project exists for them. The second way I use it is to remind me to be gentle with students at times when they appear not to be writing.

Ms Bowsfield: One of the things that, for myself, that I’ve learned, about writing is I spend a lot of time doing nothing, and being mad at myself.

Shelly: I don’t spend any time doing that.

Avery: You spend a lot of time just thinking and getting bad ideas.

Ms Bowsfield: Typing the same line, typing, erasing this line, doing that.

Shelly: I’ve never done that.

Ms Bowsfield: No?

Shelly: No.

Avery: Then when you find a good idea it just flows.

Ms Bowsfield: Right. So I might have three days when I am writing something big, of nothing. And I’m mad at myself those whole three days, and then all of sudden, bam, ten pages pour out.

Avery: Yeah.

Diana: Hmm, hmm, yeah.

Ms Bowsfield: And, I realized, that if I stop being mad at myself for those three days, then it comes a little quicker occasionally. Or, that I just simply need that time.

Avery: That’s so... some of mine. Most of my assignments happen...(ID, SG, p. 9)

In this moment, two students, Avery and Diana, heard my story of frustration and could relate. Avery echoed my comments and with the line, “You spend a lot of time just thinking and getting bad ideas,” he simultaneously infers that he and I are both “You.” This identification

with my story validates his story of frustration. A frustration with getting good ideas so deep that it may have contributed to his plagiarism, discussed in Chapter 8. Shelly, a self-confident writer who believed writing ability is innate and not changeable, claimed she never experienced the inability to get started with a good idea and was unable to relate to the experience. In sharing my frustration, both with myself and the writing process, I hoped to give rise to moments where students could see themselves in the experience and ideally allow more patience, more time to search out the information they need, the insight, order, need and voice necessary to a developing idea. Hearing that others have similar and different experiences broadens each individual's knowledge of a possible range of experiences.

This realization of the importance of the time I spend preparing to write, thinking or writing and repeated cutting, where no product is visible, was pivotal in my journey to perceiving myself as a writer. While I realize that not all writers will find this a familiar experience or an important personal understanding of writing process, I believe the public telling of the story opens opportunities for students to hear how others work through moments of frustration during the early writing process. Further, these composing activities could be categorized as pretext revision (Myhill & Jones 2007), providing a label for a concept I can offer students, one I had intuitively come to know as a writer.

### *Universality*

Many ideas in writing, such as universality, are often abstract and it is important that supporting examples make connections for deeper understanding. The poem *Pictures of Relationship*, previously included, was grounded in a set of particular photographs with the desire of creating a universal (this is the word I used with the students in conversation) appeal regarding relationships between mother and child, as it is captured in images. Poetry is often challenging for students to understand and write. In trying to explain the idea of universal appeal, in that they have

been someone's children, an autobiographical relationship whatever their home situation, I referred directly to Dan's photograph of his sister and her funny face and Ms Harris and her sons, in hopes that both Dan and Ms Harris could see their photographs throughout my poem.

As the class progressed, the idea of universal appeal was brought up again and Ms Harris stopped to ask if her students understood:

Ms Bowsfield: And I'm also looking about how it, how is it specific and how is it universal? Could you see yourself in it, could you see your own photograph applying to it, that kind of thing?

Ms Harris: Okay, guys, do you understand what universal means?

Shelly: Yeah.

Ms Harris: That someone in the United States would understand this and someone in...right? That, that it would have meaning beyond... my story about Aaron, if I wanted it to be universal, you guys are going to understand it differently than a stranger would, right? But can it still appeal universally? (C2 S2, WG, p. 7)

This teaching moment of a very abstract idea was deeply embedded in the contextual moments of the classroom. Could we have added layers of sophistication? Certainly, but definition of the concept grew out of the examples cited in the class. Explicit connections between examples were made to the concept and to each other. The concept was linked to contextual examples such as the previous brainstorming session, my poem, and Ms Harris' *Monster Story*. The students had two concrete examples of writing and several moments in a conversation. Did they understand or use the abstract idea? Some did. Colleen and Adriana both thought their poems might have a wider audience appeal than just family or a memory preserver. Colleen believed her poem might support understanding for those who are different and Adriana desired to appeal to teenagers who took grandparents for granted. Perhaps moving forward individual pieces of writing might support audiences beyond the teacher, the class and themselves.

### *Missed and taken opportunities*

A tension that exists in both writing and teaching is between the missed and taken opportunities. In the moment, conversational directions are set that may or may not be diverted. As a piece of writing develops opportunities to add ideas can be seen and taken, seen and not taken or simply missed. When a teacher adopts a conversational approach in the classroom, the class as a whole contributes to the direction of a lesson. Ironically, the more a teacher values the unexpected moments of insight arising out of genuine conversations, where the students are engaged and willing participants, the less she can direct and control the insights, because the other conversation participants shape and reshape the conversation through their contributions.

One opportunity during cycle one when I wished for a more detailed script to direct the actors/student participants concerned the difference between revision and editing. In a moment, conversations can shift directions. The students were familiar with my preference for poetry and my avoidance of prose in general and narratives in particular. However, I had intentionally elected to write in prose, which was not my strength.

The narrative of a canoeing accident I was involved in when I was ten contained many elements a teacher might want to see in an autobiographical event. The plot was exciting, fear and suspense needed to be developed. There was tension between the slow leisurely experience of an evening canoe ride and the furious pace of an accident that endangers a character's life. It contained natural morals regarding boating safety, life jackets and listening to parents. This autobiographical moment from my life had the potential to be a strong and effective instance of writing.

For me, the difference between revision and editing was a more significant issue than the more specific technical issue of tense switching. In my experience, tense switching falls under editing, has the potential to become an algorithmic rule that needs to be adhered to and then inhibits

the writing process, as Rose (1994) has suggested. As students learn to write, firm rules are applied which eventually need to be softened, such as ‘never switch tenses,’ which eventually needs to become ‘never switch tenses without a purpose or control’. However, for students, concrete issues of editing often take priority, because the issues are not as ambiguous and uncertain. When Tatum brought in issues of tense, there was an opportunity to really explore how I approached revision as opposed to editing, but the opportunity was subsumed by questions of tense, an area that may provide more confidence for students, particularly these French Immersion students who had extensive experience with verb tense across two languages.

Ms Bowsfield: So, a lot of the changes that I made are changes that came out of suggestions that we talked about after I’d read it the first time. Particularly the sound, the shortness of sentences, wanting to keep that pace (snapping fingers) of how fast everything happened.

Tatum: On, um, the paragraph that it says ‘almost too late, I see a boat’ is it ‘I see’ or ‘I saw’?

Shelly: Um hmm.

Ms Harris: Depends how you look at it.

Ms Bowsfield: Yeah, and you’re right. There’s ‘tense’ issues because you’re telling a story that’s present and past. That’s what I was saying where this is not a final copy for me, I haven’t gone through and done tense revision. I haven’t gone through and done punctuation revision for dialogue.

Shelly: Yeah, I kind of saw that.

Ms Bowsfield: No, I do them... right now my revisions are substantive. They’re about the content and I’m not even reading for mechanics. That’s editing to me, and doesn’t usually add to the content of my writing...there’s probably more places that I have present and past tense mixed together. (C1 S2, WG, p. 3)

In my experience, students struggle to understand revision. The skill of editing is far more concrete. With eight years of red-pen reception behind them, they know how to recognize spelling errors, dialogue and

punctuation issues, tense shifts and some mechanical errors. Unfortunately, they are often not as strong at idea enhancement, organizational changes and style choices that are more substantive than error detection and correction.

Where I had been interested in exploring how I used short choppy sentences in quick succession to reflect the pace of the event and the layering in of juxtaposed environmental sounds of natural serenity beside the cacophony of an accident, the students' attention was drawn elsewhere. I had provided students with a photocopy highlighting revisions, additions and deletions, so that they were able to hold onto a concrete example of revision. In retrospect, I wish I had taken more time, perhaps been more insistent, to explore and discuss the substantive revision I had and might yet undertake.

There were really two lines of conversations in this exchange: while revision and editing became somewhat lost, the issue of past and present tense became more involved. This is a simultaneous strength and weakness of conversation as one idea is picked up and directed out of a group interest, while another is dropped and left behind. The challenge in a classroom is to know which will be the more fruitful, productive and or significant. Unfortunately, the moment arises without notice and moves forward so quickly that it is often only in retrospect and reflection that the missed opportunity is even noticed. At other times, like this one, one might recognize the fruitful direction, but the conversation partners might be unwilling to participate. I wonder if this inherent issue in conversation is a significant reason for the struggle to build dialogic classrooms. The conversations partners need to trust that both content and process may reveal interesting knowledge.

When students are learning to write, they are often given blanket 'rules' about writing. These rules include ideas like 'never start a sentence with and, but or because,' or 'always have three points in a paragraph' and 'never switch tenses.' Rose (1994) suggested that for students who

experience writer's block "these rules seem to be followed as though they were algorithms, absolute dicta, rather than the loose heuristics that they were intended to be" (p. 95). He described how a useful heuristic, when perceived as an algorithmic rule, could become debilitating and block writing. Initially, students need firm rules, but as their writing progresses, it is important to revisit 'rules' provided in younger grades to facilitate writing and reframe them as working guidelines with exceptions for style, effect and purpose.

The previous exchange provides an example of how the very nature of conversation can be both problematic, as it flows along without allowing the side eddy of exploration, while at the same time it productively returns to the issue that started the discussion. There was a real tension between the direction I wished the conversation to move in and the interests of the student. Perhaps one of the significant appeals for the students of the conversation about tenses was noting my errors in tense use. While I feel comfortable and believe there is an advantage to revealing my writing weaknesses and becoming a learner alongside students, not all teachers would be willing to risk personal exposure. Graves (1983) noted that teachers as writers need not be experts, but they do require courage, suggesting that, "there may be an advantage in growing with them, learning together as both seek to find meaning in writing" (p. 43). Another possible reason for their interest in pursuing the issue of editing is its less ambiguous nature and a limited conception of revision.

#### *Discussion, conversation and dictatorship*

In this instance, the lesson came from the students and it was Ms Harris and I who learned. Intentions are mostly invisible, but in this case the students noted a glaring incongruence between our intentions and our actions. A central tenet in this study was the indispensable role of conversation in learning about writing and in the classroom in general. To help students focus on the subject and tasks at hand, we had generated

protocol sheets. While the sheets were never intended to be prescriptive – ‘answer this question first, talk about this next,’ and so on – they were often followed as a prescribed format that inhibited real conversations which tend to flow back and forth, fostered by genuine interest. Students’ turns tended to be short and unelaborated, whereas our turns as teacher and researcher tended to be long and detailed. Far too many times ‘we’ or ‘I’ dominated the conversation, an ironic observation made by the students.

After a long session of talk, where Ms Harris had revealed her writing choices, she paused:

Ms Harris: Do you feel like you know something about my writing? What’s our next step?

Avery: Group discussion.

Ms Harris: You talking about your own writing. From my example, do you have an idea of how to do this? Okay. Do you know what we missed; if you had questions? Because otherwise, you know what happened, I talked and you listened, but in your groups, are we going to have, does it say discussions? It says conversations.

Kenton: Big difference. (*sarcasm*)

Ms Harris: Was that a conversation?

Avery: There was a large difference.

Karly: No, that was dictatorship.

Ms Harris: Dictatorship. So does anyone have a question?

Colleen: To add to the conversation (*layer of sarcasm*)?

Ms Harris: Yeah, can we have a conversation? Okay, so do you think that you might be able to have a conversation in your group or is it going to be a dictatorship?

Karly: We’ll see.

Ms Harris: We’ll see.

Kenton: Um hmm, dictatorship. (C2 S1, WG, p. 9)

In looking back over the transcript of the class thus far, it had been far more lecture than conversation. Ms Harris spoke for 157 lines in 25 turns, while the remainder of the class contributed nine lines in single-line turns, and I had eighteen lines in twelve turns. The students’ concurrent study of Russia in social studies may have contributed to the word choice of ‘dictatorship,’ but they were fully aware of the irony that we failed to

shape a real conversation. We needed to leave more space for the students to respond and question both our written stories and our implementation of instructions.

The study was deeply rooted in the idea that conversations extend and expand ideas. However, during cycle two, we enforced silent writing time. In cycle one, very few students had effectively used class time provided for writing, so in order to facilitate writing, we placed constraints on when, where and how students wrote. I struggled with this decision, because writing at my own pace, in my own time and space, and when I was ready was a critical component of shifting my perception of myself as a writer. Yet, once again we had taken that control away in an effort to produce product within a limited time frame – a dilemma of the writing classroom perhaps.

Time in schools is a slippery issue always in tension. It is an invisible resource critical to learning and often blamed for challenges and failures. Natasha and I talked too much and when she or I talked too much it limited the students' entry into the conversation. It shortened the time allotted for small-group conversations where students would have more opportunities to talk. In the case of forced silence, it is the trap I have fallen into many times. Pressed for classroom time, I want students to be on task and I forget the lessons I have learned as a writer that thinking and talking are important components of writing.

I also recognize that there is an irony about adding teacher stories to the mix – teachers get to say more. As I see it, the solution to this is in rehearsing this way of being in the classroom. First students need more experience trusting that what they have to say contributes valuable knowledge, second they need more practice listening to others' stories so they can extract what might be relevant to them in the form of specific strategies, assurances or even rejection of a possibility. Over time I see that teachers' responsibilities shift. Initially, they might be the primary provider of examples of process in the classroom, but ideally that

responsibility would shift to students. Of course, it would be necessary to avoid the dictatorship trap Ms Harris and I fell prey to, through actively and dialogically requesting both response and questions from the students about our writing. Eventually, the students would take over the conversation and their idiosyncratic processes would become the primary story.

### **Composing Strategies**

One specific moment where we used our knowledge as writers to plan a pre-writing lesson was during cycle two, when we decided to use a strategy Ms Harris called a ‘word splash’. The purpose of the strategy was to focus students on the photograph they had brought in order to reveal details and possible emotional responses. She believed it would be helpful to her students by allowing them to focus on the picture in a concrete way. Further, by sharing word splashes with other students, each student was responsible for his or her time use without being overly prescriptive. We hoped this would resolve some of our concerns noted in the first cycle where class time provided for students was used ineffectively.

Ms Harris introduced the word splash as an idea generator. She outlined two significant concepts she used as a writer. The first was brainstorming as idea generation and exploration, and the second was a warning not to pick a specific direction and limit exploration, at this point. She briefly described how she might approach her photograph and let students know that she would be sharing her work with them.

Ms Harris: I think that to get my ideas going I would do something that I’m going to call a word splash. I would look at my picture and I would think about words that fit with that picture, that fit with that moment, that fit with that day. For all of you, were you there, when the picture was taken?

(Most affirm that they were there.)

Ms Harris: I was there, I may have taken this picture, I don’t actually remember, it’s an old picture, but I can kind of remember that place and, that event, and so I’m

just going to splash words, I'm going to put mine up on the board and you guys can put yours on paper. And do you understand what I mean by a word splash? Words that come to mind about that picture, it might be about that day, that event, it might be about those people.

Ms Bowsfield: You might think in your five senses. What you see, what you hear, what you smell, what you touch.

Ms Harris: What's really important, I think as a writer, that you don't pick a direction at this exact moment. When you pick a direction too soon, I don't think your writing is as rich as if you explored all those other things. So Kenton, when I ask you to do a word splash, I'm really asking you to explore all different places. Do you know what I mean by that? Okay, and I don't think that that's a waste of time or a waste of ink or anything like that because I think that, you know, we'll come, we'll come back to some of those ideas after, you may even use your word splash when you're writing, okay? (C2 S1, WG, p. 4)

Ms Harris also had a caution for students as an experienced writer not to narrow their subjects too quickly, but to take time and explore directions even if they did not appear to be particularly useful. Using her insight into her students, she directed this comment to a student who did not see much value in exploring writing. Ms Harris expected resistance from certain students when she asked them to try a process she was suggesting. Kenton and Aden both generally rejected brainstorming and drafting as useful strategies for generating writing, as evidenced through public comments and their failure to hand in anything other than a final draft much of which is addressed in the next chapter.

Despite my frequent requests and repeated reminders to save all writing, including brainstorming and scrapped starts, none of the students turned in their word splash for this piece of writing. However, the transcripts revealed that the students' stories about their photograph and their word splash were connected to the writing pieces they completed, indicating that the activity indeed seemed an idea generator. This story is the first of many instances of resistance directed towards controlling process in this dissertation. While Kenton was the explicit target of this

comment others also clearly resisted providing access to their actual processes. I am further interested in Ms Harris' anticipation of this resistance in relation to her conscious knowledge.

### *Saving multiple drafts*

Murray (1989) observed a trend that has grown dramatically with the technological revolution of computers:

Back in the olden days when we wrote with typewriter and pen or pencil, it was possible to trace the history of a text through its drafts. Revision was visible. Today most of us write on word processors, and our false attempts, early drafts, and revision are dispatched to some mysterious graveyard by a punch of a key, never to be seen again. (p. 76)

One personal strategy I have found helpful in tracing the history of a text and preserving possibilities that I shared frequently with students was to save in multiple drafts. I referred to the strategy during each cycle. In cycle one, it took this form:

What I often do is save most of the drafts, right. So, I've done it the first time, and so when I started revising, I saved it as something new, so that I had my old, if I needed to go back to what it was to see how it was before I started making changes. That's something that you can do, 'cause I have lots of students say, "I did it all on computer" But that doesn't mean that a record of your changes can't exist in different ways, right? (C1 S2, WG, p. 5)

I showed examples of draft three and four of my poem *Pictures of Relationship*. I tried to encourage students to see how using the 'save as' feature on the computer would allow them to see how their writing evolved. This could be an asset for students who believe in only revising as they write, such as Aden. He could have a draft available, to reveal process to a teacher, without the effort of creating an elaborate back-story. Students who only revise as they write run the risk of destroying other possible and potentially valuable ideas. Saving in multiple drafts is a simple solution if a student's resistance is only to the extra work that demonstrating a process requires. However, I suspect the issue is more

complex when students are consistently just printing twice. Further, it is difficult to know if Aden's and Kenton's comments regarding revising while writing, described in the next chapter, are actually about the act of revising or about the act of editing.

In cycle three, I showed students some of my writing that prompted the eventual direction that *Understanding* took. When I was exploring ideas and possible topics for writing, I wrote several pages of what I referred to as 'drivel'. Even though the pages had not evolved into completion, they were valuable in that they contributed to the final product. This was writing that never went anywhere and included partial stories and paragraphs, unfinished sentences, single words or phrases and notes about what I wanted to accomplish. However, the writing did eventually evolve into the short vignettes or dialogues between an adult and very small children as they grappled to understand death.

Diana could have used this strategy, but did not, when she wrote a three-page story for her final cycle and then simply deleted it by means of 'select all'. When I asked her if what she had written was important to her final poem, she was confident that it was not. If she had saved it, perhaps in looking back over it, she might have seen that the writing of the story helped in some way toward her final choice of a poem. In my experience, I have noticed that when I delete large quantities of text it is usually out of frustration that what was written was not working. However, when I reflected on the text that was now not usable, I often realized that writing it was not a waste of time and in fact had been instrumental in shaping the direction the writing was now moving toward. In other words, when I stopped being mad about wasting my time, I realized I was indeed not wasting time, I was revising on a very large scale either do to a conceptual or genre shift.

In some teaching settings, 'using writing process' has come to mean '*hand in two drafts*'. By saving in multiple drafts, a student is easily able to meet teacher requirements of producing drafts without subverting

the intention to preserve the process. A draft could simply be each sitting of writing, where a student reads back what is previously written, uses the 'save as' feature on the computer, makes changes, and carries on with the writing. As technology becomes more significant in the classroom, it is necessary for a teacher to explore how the technology can be used to support writing processes rather than interfere with them. For me, the days of a hand-written copy, edited and then typed into the computer are gone, but that is because I, the writer, have embraced drafting on the computer. However, I still struggle to find useful ways to have students illustrate the progression of their writing in practical terms that are not perceived by students, as make-work-projects.

According to the students, the requirement of 'you must hand in a rough copy and good copy' is still very present in their lives and their solution to the 'problem' is often to simply print twice when they were done. Although this research project was more elaborate than simply hand in two drafts because students were required to work with their draft in their peer groups, the production of rough copy good copy was still an expectation of the study. At the same time, as I embrace and prefer the computer as a thinking tool, I need to remember that Tatum saw the ease with which changes can be made on the computer as detracting from her writing while Karly simply preferred to write by hand because that was the way she got her best ideas.

### *Cut, paste and keep*

One other strategy similar to saving in multiple drafts that I shared with students was to cut and paste ideas at the end of the document so they were not lost or deleted. The concrete example I shared with students was the piece *Understanding*.

All of this [pages of partial notes] is just brainstorming and possibilities, places I thought about going. At one point, it was becoming a poem. So I keep everything as I go along and just sort of grab it if I need it and keep going or push it down to the bottom. I hand things in to my thesis advisor,

and tell her, ignore everything after this line, because it's the stuff that I'm not sure I want to cut, yet, I might need it. It might have been a really good idea, but I don't know where it fits yet. (C3 S2, WG, p. 3)

I also related the story of how a poem I had been working on and then mentally abandoned by placing it at the end was seen as valuable by my Master's supervisor and ultimately ended up in the thesis at her suggestion. From the study, there was no specific evidence of students using this strategy, but through my telling twelve writers have heard of this strategy.

### **Revising and Editing Strategies**

How students use modelled strategies in their own writing is not correlative in nature. In cycle one, during the modelling of revision, I requested help from the students with creating suspense and tension in my canoe story about a boating accident. Ms Harris suggested the use of sound to foreshadow the climax.

Ms Harris: I like what you said about foreshadowing, 'cause as soon as you said something about a boat engine, I knew, partly because we know this story, but I was wondering if your foreshadowing could be, you could throw in maybe more sounds? Throughout the piece, because both times it was a boat engine, but were there other sounds?

Ms Bowsfield: Right, so contrast the calm and the quiet when we're further out, with the... And there was probably a lot of noise on the beach, because there was probably a hundred rowdy, noisy campers with a lot of children. Okay, so sound might be the way to build some tension then. (C1 S2, WG, pp. 4-5)

As noted previously to illustrate my understanding of revision, I had provided students with a hard copy with original text and suggested changes for my *Canoe Story* and then walked through the choices I had committed to since the previous revision session. I used several suggestions from the previous class for revision, including ways to create

tension, the use of short choppy sentences, a clarity issue regarding wearing and removing our life jackets, and ways to create the effect of a fast pace. I drew attention to explicit changes that resulted from the previous revision conversation with them, such as the increased use of sounds to contrast the peacefulness of nature and noise of frantic fear. I showed students where I reorganized and/or added details into the text in order to provide clarity.

I return to Graves (1983) in that students did not directly apply models. However, I believe I can make a case that Adriana attempted revisions parallel to those modelled. For example in cycle one, she adopted several suggestions from the peer revision session; in cycle two she shifted from prose to poetry. Ms Harris had illustrated a complete subject switch and I had talked about genre shifts.

Adriana used revision suggestions the most effectively to improve her writing. Her cycle one, writing focused on her cabin at the lake and read like a list of fun activities the children in her family played. I suggested that she pick one or two stories “that she had shared from [her] map” and “showed us what life was like” at the cabin (C1 S2, SG, p. 14). Many of her revision decisions mirrored my canoe story revisions and her revised piece was significantly more effective with four short but more detailed elaborations of events at the cabin.

### *Reading out loud*

Ms Harris shared a powerful editing strategy, when she commented on the awkwardness of her writing after she had read it aloud to students. Referring to her oral reading of the *Monster Story* seen previously:

Ms Harris: Okay, and the other thing, that I found interesting was I haven't read it out loud before, when you read your work out loud, that's where you notice the glitches. Because, up here, um, I forget where this sentence is, '*many times my hope in that ever happening has been shaken*'. That felt awkward when I read it out loud. It didn't feel awkward when I wrote it.

And also; *'I would wake the oldest first'*, felt awkward when I said it out loud. Have you guys read your work out loud yet?

Shelly: Yeah.

Avery: Nope.

Ms Harris: Probably not until right when you do it today.

Can you pay attention, when you're reading, to where you feel awkward? And if I had a copy, I'd almost put a star there or you know, just...

Ms Bowsfield: As you're reading.

Ms Harris: I think that where you feel awkward, might be where you want to make a change. So I think I'd change it in those places. So, do you have other suggestions for me? (C2 S2, WG, p. 12)

When she identified a specific sentence that was awkward and suggested that was a place she would star and target for revision, Ms Harris was both illustrating her own writing process and offering students specific strategies for improvement. The strategy was grounded in her work, and represented a specific example that students can make concrete connections, too. By sharing her own draft writing, she made space for her writing to need real improvement and may possibly legitimize her position as a practicing writer. At the same time, she provided a concrete strategy for writing improvement that her students may choose to use in the future.

I reinforced this strategy later that day in small group with Diana.

Ms Bowsfield: I noticed when you were reading it there was quite a few times that you stumbled...

Diana: Yeah, there's one sentence that doesn't make any sense whatsoever.

Ms Bowsfield: I found it's really helpful, that reading it out loud, it makes a big difference...

Shelly: Um hmm.

Ms Bowsfield: To your work, and that would be my number one suggestion for revising your work, especially when you are doing it on your own.

Shelly: Yeah.

Ms Bowsfield: Because you, it forces you to slow down and read it the way it is. (C2 S2, SG, p. 6)

Shelly, a fairly strong writer, agreed with this strategy, acknowledging that she was already using this strategy to edit and revise

her work. Over the course of the project, Diana came to see reading her work aloud as a valuable strategy, particularly when she was alone in her revision. In private conversation, Diana identified two important ways her small group helped her with revision and editing. First, group members provided a sounding board and suggestions for change on a specific issue or a global scale, and second, the act of reading out loud to them helped her pinpoint areas of her writing that were either awkward or unclear. She felt she would continue using this strategy even when she was alone.

In this classroom, Ms Harris and I were the experienced writers. Our processes for composing and revising are varied and flexible. Each new writing experience we encounter draws on several experiences providing us with a wealth of practical knowledge. Sommers (1980/1994) concluded that inexperienced writers tend to “understand the revision process as a rewording activity” (p. 78), focusing on “lexical changes but not semantic changes” (p. 79), whereas experienced writers believe that revising “is finding the form and shape of their argument” (p. 81) and then attending to the readership of the piece.

The examples and strategies Ms Harris and I shared with students varied in complexity. At times, the revisions we shared lived at the lexical level, such as in reading out loud for awkwardness, but at others changes such as saving in multiple drafts, cut, paste, and keep, and my attempts at foreshadowing and developing tension are far more semantic in nature. However, both the inexperienced and experienced writer might use each strategy in very different ways. For example, reading out loud can be designed to error hunt, correct awkwardness and search out lexical repetitions, or it might cue the author beyond awkwardness to issues of clarity, substance and conceptual repetition.

The use of technology in drafts can be as simple as print one copy, complete spell and grammar check, and then print a second copy, in order to satisfy a minimum draft requirement for an assignment. Or it can also be a recording device for partial ideas, potential forms, reordering,

additions and deletions, and so on, so that less is lost through the delete key. As the experienced writers in the room, Ms Harris and I had stories of composing and revision that, when articulated, become available, even to ourselves, as a possibility for next time.

*Aside: Responsibilities for possibilities*

As I consider how to use the stories of writing in the classroom context, I am drawn to Lensmire (1997) for guidance. For teachers, he defined three responsibilities specifically important during sharing time, that I would like to extend to all times that students interact through both conversation and writing. First, the teacher must establish learning environments that encourage response and deliberation where plural and common understanding becomes available to many. This is accomplished through seeking to understand what another is attempting to say through their story. Lensmire was not referring to agreement, but deliberation of ideas though what I would call ‘common experiences’.

Second, the teacher must “stand with the underdog” (p. 105) in order to establish fairness. As the authority in the room, teachers lend their knowledge and power to stories that might remain marginalized. Third, a teacher expands the range of possibilities, of stories, of deliberation available to students, “so as to expand, again, what is available as directions for living” (p. 107). This may include bringing in their own stories, retelling the stories of others from the near and far past, or encouraging students own untold stories.

For me, the first and second of Lensmire’s (1997) responsibilities are linked. The autobiographical writing I required of students placed them in a position to deliberate both on their lives *and* their writing processes. Lensmire was critical of workshops that do not take up the imposed meaning of students’ stories. While this study was not designed to explore fully the social implications of an individual’s autobiography, I can now see how it would be beneficial for students engaged in the project of becoming in both the greater sense as human beings and the more

narrow sense of learning to write, to question, probe and possibly revise the stories of themselves.

Lensmire's (1997) third teacher responsibility is to expand the world of possibilities, while he was referring predominately to the social project of *becoming*. More specifically, I want to turn towards the focus of my research and *becoming a writer*. Students need to rehearse being a writer; they need experiences that story them as writers. This is where as a teacher I must go further. I need to craft my stories of writing to reflect consciously on my autobiographical themes and how they impact students. In crafting stories of writing, I may also consider how the themes I include do the transgressive work of challenging the dominant – the dominant theories of writing or of being. My most transgressive story would be choosing to be a single mother in a small town, but it also shapes the lives of my children: they did not choose to be fatherless, they were simply born into a family that does not conform to the traditional. But today perhaps whose family does? Perhaps mine is an important story to help students rehearse living in non-traditional ways, but it is more than my story, so I must consider both how it would impact my students living in this small town and my children living beside those to whom I might tell the story.

### **Listening To and Using Teacher Narratives**

Atwell (1987), Calkins (1986), Dyson (1997), Graves (1983; 1994), Lensmire (1994; 1997), Luce-Kapler (2004), Murray (1989), Perl and Wilson (1986) all use story, frequently as chapter openers, to capture the reader's attention, draw in the burgeoning writing teacher or scholar and to set up a relationship of trusted confidante. In order to convince, they tell a story; in order to illuminate, they tell a story; in order to argue, they tell a story; but, most importantly, in order to teach writing, they tell a story. Secondary students are far removed from these experts and telling their stories would be silly and decontextualized. But our telling of our stories, Ms Harris's and my stories of writing, positions us in the

classroom as knowledgeable learners continuing to value the very thing we so desperately wish to teach. How is it that an expert's story is more: more credible, more worthy, more interesting and more likely to make difference?

In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow (1973) proclaims:

Though much or all of this may be in other books—some of which I have probably read—it seems to me my main source is my own experience. I admit to making universal generalizations upon a sample of one. Consider yourselves warned. I am only asking you to *try on* this way of looking at writing process to see if it helps your writing. That's the only valid way you can judge it. And you will try it on better if you sense how it grows out of my experience. (p. 16, emphasis original)

I suggest that, just as he offered a process of writing through his own experience and narrative, so should we as classroom teachers. We are the 'sample of one' writer at the front of the room and central to our personal philosophy of writing are our experiences. Teachers provide students' first encounters with theory and it is through us that they come to experience writing. If students are resistant perhaps even afraid of revealing their actual process, then offering a process of writing through us and asking them to try it on to see if it helps their writing may fit better if our real experiences are shared. By speaking our writing process aloud, we also need to acknowledge how other's processes may differ and, therefore, honour those other processes that come to the conversation.

Natasha's profound comment that perhaps our narratives of writing are an integral part of teaching writing is an idea I continue to reflect on. "It's [our] narrative, that's all that [I] can offer, because that's all that [I] know, [my] story of [my] frustrations and successes, [I] can offer my [audience], and if every [researcher] did that..." (PC 1, p. 17), what a powerful collection of ideas researchers and teachers could create. Perhaps Elbow (1973) and Eisner (2006) were both right. We need to make a universal "generalization upon a sample of one," where the main source of

knowledge “is my own experience” (Elbow, 1973, p. 16). The stage was now set. Perhaps Ms Harris and I were rehearsal exercises before the performance.

The end of this chapter is a pivotal point that moves to look into the students’ experiences. Ms Harris and I revealed some of our struggles and now it is time for those of the students to be revealed.

The story does not merely connect action to action. It also recounts struggle ... The key struggle of life is that of psychic transformations: of breakthroughs in the way one perceives events, imagines oneself, understands others, grasps the world, acts ... A story then not only links actions; more profoundly it links transformations. (Novak, 1978, p. 53)

In the next four chapters, the students’ struggles are presented. Ms Harris and I continue to work to assist students with transformations. The drama of the classroom continues and the students’ actions at times create tensions or reveal challenge and more. Some, such as Karly, experience a breakthrough in how they perceive an experience. Colleen imagines herself writing poetry; Diana seeks to understand others, while Avery grasps at the world when his performance does not match his desire.

## Chapter Six

### Let Them Go

Not incidentally, students' theories about writers, texts, and readers are constructed in large part through the kinds of writing they are asked to do, the ways in which their writing tasks are structured, and the ways in which their writing functions in the classroom community. (Sperling, 1996, p. 55)

This chapter surveys the students' experiences with writing in an attempt to develop a contextual picture of how writing functioned in this classroom community, with a new kind of writing task and a new structure. The tensions of this classroom were interrupted in order to let them (the students) go. Students knew how to do school writing. They knew how to perform on assignments written ('traded') for marks.

This was different; we were asking them, as Diana described in her final drawing (discussed in Chapter 9), to step beyond their 'comfortable box', their framework, towards a new boundary. Their writing for the study resulted in tensions, preferences and resistance being made more visible. Polanyi (1966) reconsiders "human knowledge by starting from the fact that *we all can know more than we can tell*" (p. 4; emphasis original). Drawing out students' tacit writing knowledge requires conscious attention and probing until the students come to believe that what they have to say is important to their own learning and may even help someone else think about writing processes.

"It's like no one ever has conversations *about* writing..." (ID, SG, p.7). With this statement, Shelly captured one of my fears regarding writing in school. We, classroom teachers, are so busy assigning writing we often forget to stop and talk about it, in order to uncover students' understanding of writing (Lipstein & Renninger, 2007).

This chapter starts with a brief survey of students' choices and knowledge regarding purpose, audience and form of the writing they undertook during the study. In classroom conversations, students were asked to articulate the rhetorical situation they attempted to address. The next section begins with a compilation of student ideas in the form of a brief choric play in which the teacher attempts to hear the needs of many, a common and frustrating situation in a public school classroom. The lines are drawn directly from transcripts or from student writing itself. I offer it in this form as an efficient way to share students' voices about a significant range of subject matter, audience choices, forms and physical preferences.

The student participants talked about where they like to write, the conditions they prefer to write in and the writing instruments they gravitate toward. Individuals revealed the role that planning played for them, the 'lies' that are told about planning and the perceptions that surround it. Conversations with the students revealed preferences regarding personal and distant writing, freedom and constraints, and revealed that some believe the ability to write is innate, while others at least hope it can be learned.

The final section opens with a found poem addressing the question, "Are you a writer?" It attempts to capture the important story of who perceived themselves as writers, who believed that 'writer' is only a job that they will or will not do, and who believed that to be writer, one must enjoy writing and do it willingly.

## **The Rhetorical Situation**

Students identified and addressed the rhetorical situation established for this research in various ways. At times, they had a clear, articulate understanding of the rhetorical problem they set for themselves;

however, more frequently they were unable to represent the “writer’s own goals” (Flower & Hayes, 1994, p. 67) in order to further their specific piece of writing. The second session of each of the three cycles was devoted to revision. Participants were asked to relate the story of creation surrounding the piece they had brought, including responses to: Where did your idea come from? What is your purpose for writing? Who is your audience? Where and when did you write? Why did you select the genre you did?

*Purpose for writing: “I don’t know”*

Interestingly, one subject or topic that never entered into the conversations or writing was stories of school. It is a noticeable absence considering the unusual interconnections of this class. The one exception to this was Dan’s missing piece of writing, a three-sentence paragraph, where he talked about meeting Kenton, his look-alike, on the first day of kindergarten. Perhaps the stories Ms Harris and I, told which centered on family or distant childhood but not school, unintentionally contributed to this omission. Was the audience too common, too familiar? Or perhaps the sheer number of hours these students had been in a room together rendered any story too obvious, too uninteresting or perhaps too close.

Given the autobiographical prompts, the subject matter tended to be personal, especially whenever the individual’s purpose was also personal. However, many of the pieces maintained a reserved distance. In school, writing is assigned. Flower and Hayes (1994) suggest that, “an audience and exigency can jolt a writer into action, but the force which drives a composing is the writer’s own goals, purposes, or intentions” (p. 69). The most common response to a question about purpose was “I don’t know.” Only a few students were able to articulate a purpose: for example, Diana felt it was “just a memory and remembering when I was young and stuff” (C2 S2, SG, p. 5).

Surveying students’ purposes, I noticed that Colleen subverted the project for her own purpose, namely an exploration of a specific genre.

Adriana wrote a letter to her sister, Sasha, to explain why she had “freaked out over toothpaste.” The two of them had laughed and made jokes while writing the letter together, prompting Sasha to write back. Karly wrote what she called “a hate letter.” She had chosen to remain outside of the study until this point and, in her frustration, she wrote a powerful and angry piece to vent. Ironically, she accomplished what I hoped to achieve, which was for students to find their own reasons to write.

Kenton, Dan and Avery struggled with purpose. They had not written to the typical standard they would have for Ms Harris. However, during the study I did not see their actions as resistant, only absentminded, too busy to make time or perhaps it was not their preferred type of writing. Kenton even felt somewhat guilty, like he was failing me, when he said, “It feels like I’m just not putting any effort into this, this project” (C3 S2, SG, p. 10). Avery’s piece entitled *Pointless* was a clear example of limited effort and perhaps a sign of the covert resistance I would later realize and attend to. He developed his idea from watching *South Park* where, “There’s this scientist, and everything he said was completely pointless, but then he came to a good conclusion every time” (C3 S2, SG, p. 1). However, Avery did not seem happy with his writing.

*Dogs are warm and furry. I like to play fetch with them. They are nice. A cow goes moo. They’re fat. Steak comes from cows. Steak is good with barbeque sauce. Barbeques cook food outside. Outside is where my beach volleyball court is. I play vball on that court. Volleyball is my favorite sport. It’s not pointless to me like this writing is. (C3 S2, Avery original draft)*

Avery said in the small group, “You know what I’ve noticed is that none of us ever really have a purpose for writing” (C3 S2, SG, p. 5). He agreed that his work to this point had limited substance and claimed writing was never for him; he was doing the writing to meet his obligations and, in many ways, to please his teacher, Ms. Harris, and myself. He claimed he needed to have marks or a specific subject or he did not get ideas.

*Audience: "I don't know"*

The removal of marks limited the role of teacher as 'audience' and the students tended to be confused. Although considered an important element in a writer's goals for writing, the imagined reader is an almost absent rhetorical element articulated in the student participants' conversations about writing. The most common audience students identified was "I don't know," which evolved into "Anyone who would want to read it," or "I don't know why anyone would want to read it." Even Diana struggled initially: "I don't have an audience, and ... I don't think that they really want to read this because it's probably really boring to them" (C1 S2, SG, p. 11). Kenton, Avery, Aden, Dan and Shelly all struggled to see who might want to read their work. When an "I don't know" audience was in play, then students tended to be significantly less invested in their writing, which generated limited ideas at best, with the exception of Shelly. For those who did suggest an audience, it was most frequently family or other teens. Adriana's letter to her sister produced the clearest audience, one genuine enough for her sister actually to reply.

Students who lacked a sense of the effect they wished to have on their reader, because they were unsure who if anyone would want to read their writing, produced writing of lesser quality than was typical of their work handed into Ms Harris for assignments. Further, because many students were unable to identify an audience, they were also unable to generate goals related to their relationship with the reader. Their voice, or their projected self or persona, remained unarticulated.

Besides the audiences students were attempting to address, through the writing, the project relied on the peer-audience relationship for peer review. So while this was not necessarily the intended audience of any given piece of writing, it became a factor students considered while writing. Diana, Shelly and Kenton all preferred a greater distance from their work than perhaps autobiographical subjects allowed. The tensions they highlighted are further discussed in the "Preferential Tensions"

section below. Lensmire's (1994) work addressed some of the risks of peer audience with elementary children. He reminds us that audiences are sources of both risk and reward. While an audience may reject the author, and or the work itself, they can also be affirmative and encouraging. A writer's relationship with audience is ambivalent, with both a sense of exposure and a desire for support.

### ***Form***

The forms students elected to write in included poems, anecdotes, paragraphs and narratives. At times, their understanding of form seemed confused. For example, Avery stated that, "I picked, like, the narrative genre, because I don't usually write narrative stories; I usually write like fun stories, something different" (C2 S2, SG, p.7). He appears to misunderstand that a narrative is a story and that that is what defines the form or genre, not the style or subject matter. Shelly "just did a narrative genre because you can't really write about a picture and it not be a story that I can really think of, other than a poem" (C2 S2, SG, p. 12). She seemed to associate a picture with either the story of the picture or a story prompted by the memories connected to the picture. However, when I read my poem *Pictures of Relationships*, I tried to illustrate how a poem does not have to be a literal rendering of the story of the picture.

Aden chose his genre during cycle one "because I like writing stories ..." (C1 S2, SG, p. 8). He preferred writing stories to writing essays, because "you can't really be really imaginative with those" (ID, SG, p. 6), which linked his preference of genre to the ability to be imaginative. Tatum contradicted herself early in the study when she talked about form: "I'm not very good at stories, but I'm really good at poetry, except for my poetry sucks" (ID, SG, p. 2). Over the course of the research project, Tatum opted for narrative, although frequently her narratives were more anecdotal than fully developed, until the final cycle when she wrote a complete story.

For Adriana, “I’ve never actually selected a genre for my writing ... I just write it. Yeah, I just write it, it could be anything it wants to be.” (C2 S2, SG, p. 20) Colleen was conscious of her perceived weakness with poetry from the first day of the study, believing, “when it’s a story, or a paragraph or something like that, I’m just better at it, I don’t know, it just works better for me, for some reason” (ID, SG, p. 2). She felt similar to Adriana when she said, “I didn’t really know what I was going to do, but I thought I was probably going to write an essay or, like, paragraph ... that kind of writing. But then I ended up doing a poem ‘cause it just worked that way” (C2 S2, SG, p. 20). Perhaps, consciously or unconsciously, her selection of poetry for every piece, as well as focusing on this in both drawings, was grounded in her desire to develop more confidence with this genre.

The students were frequently frustrated by the lack of constraints and several students were incapable of articulating the rhetorical problem. They floundered with inexperience. However, now their experiences are a part of the landscape of learning to write. They each heard about alternative audiences, the shifting and evolving nature of form and instances of defined personal purpose. For most students in the class, significant work was needed on their understanding of form. In the future, these students need more instruction in and experience with defining the rhetorical problem, representing an audience and setting goals for both the writer and reader (Flower & Hayes, 1994). They also need to develop a more comprehensive meta-language for discussing composing and revision.

### *Questioning the quality of writing*

In general, most students produced a lesser quality of writing for the study than they would have typically produced for Ms Harris. We attributed this to several factors. First, there were too many unfamiliar experiences, but Ms Harris remained hopeful that “they’ve hit some hurdles, and they’ll be okay in the next one” (C2 S2, D, p. 31). Second

was a lack of purpose that even she had experienced. Third was a lack of experience with reflective autobiographical writing and Ms Harris questioned, “I don’t think they think back on events the way that we do?” (C2 S2, D, p. 30). Fourth, we felt that the students had very limited experience with controlling their writing, which was something Ms Harris believed “hardly ever happens” (C1 S2, D, p. 32). The final factor we considered was the links between purpose and marks. Natasha asked, “Because what drives them? What are they used to driving them?” (C1 S3, D, p. 3). Marks? She went on to ask, “If there is no mark, what is the purpose?” (C1 S3, D, p. 4). Ms Harris noted her students’ unfamiliarity with what I was asking of them, “We know they’re not writers and they’re not used to this process” (C1 S2, D, p. 33). In an effort to encourage taking risks, we decided not to assess the writing students completed. We also decided to let the cycles evolve and provide familiarity through repetition of experience.

*Aside: Alternative representation*

The issue of representation is present in all studies. When I was frustrated with my own writing process, I began flirting with the improvisational collective play as a metaphor for the classroom, in order to explore writing subjects and preferences. The core of the drama is built directly from the transcripts or student writing. However, the crafting of specific lines – for example, when the cast speaks collectively or in pairs – occasionally derived from the essence of meaning rather than exact words. Dan’s struggle with lines is represented through gestures and single words more than complete phrases or sentences. In some ways, it is both a summary of the previous section and an introduction to the next. The teacher is represented singularly, but combines both Ms Harris and myself, and ultimately is intended to represent any teacher who attempts to hear and address her students’ needs. The final line is completely crafted as a teacher’s response to the tensions and desires of all.

## A Brief Chorus

Imagine a blank stage. As the audience settles into seats, the lights dim and the stage goes to blackout. Then, full lights up. Ten students dressed in typical fourteen-year-old fashion are now standing on stage. Each student occupies a piece of the stage alone, but they are not uniformly positioned around it. Some face the audience, others stand in profile and Karly faces the back wall. Six girls. Four boys. Writing is clutched in reluctant hands. A teacher is in the middle of the group, but standing alone as well. The collective comes to life with single lines shattering the silence.

*Shelly:* No one ever has conversations about writing.

(Uncomfortably glancing around at the others on stage)

*Diana:* It's kind of, well, I've never talked about this.

*Karly:* Hate letters! Memory?

*Diana:* My place is no place...Bracelets represent, A  
Wedding Dress.

*Adriana:* I wish I knew my grandparents.

*Colleen:* Friendship, A different kind of cousin.

*Aden:* Sleep...Kenton's house.

*Kenton:* Food, hiking.

*Avery:* I *have* no ideas.

*Dan:* Funny Face... nope, blank.

*Tatum:* Tatum's Rock, The Stop Sign, Dance, The Rock  
Concert, The Birthday Party, The...

*Shelly:* Play places, hot tubs and the babysitters.

*Teacher:* Why do you write?

*Diana:* Remembering when I was younger.

*Colleen:* I want confidence with poetry.

Avery, Aden, Shelly: I don't know.

*Kenton:* Because I have to...

*Adriana:* I want to show other teens their grandparents are  
important.

*Kenton:* (whispering to Avery) It's important to her. It's  
important to Ms H.

*Karly:* I write to vent my anger at this stupid project.

*Diana:* (attempting to focus the class) Who is your  
audience?

*Aden:* Anyone who would want to read it.

*All:* I don't know.

*Avery:* Would anyone want to read it?

*All:* I don't know.

*Shelly:* I don't know why anyone would want to read it.  
*All boys:* I don't know.  
*Tatum:* I don't think anyone would want to read this,  
because it is probably really boring to them.  
*All girls:* I don't know.  
*Kenton:* Maybe the class?  
*Adriana and Colleen:* Maybe other teens.  
*Adriana, Diana:* My form changed from a story to a poem.  
*Dan:* (makes a move to speak but nothing comes out, just  
shakes his head)  
*Colleen:* I'm writing poems.  
*Aden, Kenton:* I only want to write funny stories.  
*Avery:* I hate essays.  
*Shelly:* I hate stories, but I can't write essays.  
*Teacher:* Do you have a place where you like to write?  
*Diana:* I do: my room.  
*Shelly:* I hate writing in my room. I can't write if it's quiet.  
*Teacher:* So you need noise?  
*Shelly:* I have three little brothers.  
*Avery:* I like writing when there's music.  
*Shelly:* I can't do it with music.  
*Aden:* I can't really write at home. I could write at school.  
It's that environment, I guess.  
*Avery:* At school my brain turns on, at home my brain turns  
off, 'cause I'm thinking of school?  
*Diana:* Oh, no, I really don't like writing at school, 'cause  
it's kind of pressured.  
*Aden:* School is better than writing at home for me.  
*Avery:* That's why I like to finish my homework  
assignments at school.  
*Shelly:* Better at school, like in a desk, at school.  
*Avery:* I just *think* better at school.  
*Shelly:* I know! That's the only task at hand.  
*Kenton:* Some days I can write easily, other days I can't  
write anything; I have a total writer's block.  
*Teacher:* You need to write in a desk?  
*Tatum:* I tried at home, on the couch or in a desk. I have to  
go work at my kitchen table and then I just want to  
eat...  
*Colleen:* It doesn't work at home.  
*Kenton:* I work better on the computer. It is the  
environment that I'm working in.  
*Colleen:* Well, Sometimes my room, sometimes the  
computer desk.  
*Adriana:* It has to be peaceful.  
*Diana:* It can't be quiet. It just drives me crazy.

*Adriana:* It's better for me outside, I just went behind the shed in this old rusty truck, sat in the back seat.

*ALL at once: (single words associated with individuals)*  
home, school, pen, computer, quiet, music, background noise, home, school, desk, couch, table, marks...

*Teacher: (frustrated)* Can I ever satisfy everyone's preferences?

## **Physical Preferences**

In order to avoid repetition, I tried to limit the transcripts included in this section to those ideas not represented in the play. Within this classroom, the ten participants in a class of twelve expressed significantly different wants and needs regarding where and how they liked to write. In one small group, three of the four students preferred to write and finish at school. Diana, though, felt pressured and was able to relax and write at home. Avery believed he thought better when he was at school. Students' environment preferences seemed linked to when students' ideas were the most accessible through the turned-on brain.

Another student, Tatum, repeatedly referred to her need to write in a desk. She felt disoriented by the kitchen table where she worked at home. Her association of food and place distracted her from focusing on the task she needed to complete, whereas Colleen seemed to be able to write in a variety of settings. Colleen's habit of doing homework at the computer desk did not limit her from being able to write in other locations, including school.

Interestingly, no student commented on the levels of noise during school writing time, perhaps their small class was quiet. Home was full of noise. Often siblings were a frustrating factor in the writing process. Adriana needed peace to write. She frequently chose to write on the laptop outside; perhaps this was her escape from the noise of the house that was busier in the spring, when her two older sisters came home from school. Her farm-girl life seemed to surface in her preference for peace and quiet.

Karly also came from a busy home with several siblings. She felt, “it needs to be quiet, I can get distracted very, very easily, like even just a little bit of music or something, I’ll listen to the music and I won’t do my work” (PC, p. 8).

While all students were forced to write in both places, several students had distinct preferences for writing when they were given a choice. Three students explicitly described settings at home. Four students felt school was more conducive to writing. How, then, can these personal preferences be considered by the classroom teacher ... or can they?

During the research sessions, students had time for brainstorming, drafting or revising. This time was poorly utilized by the students and, in my opinion, ineffective. Brainstorming time was the most useful to students, perhaps because of its fractured nature. The structure of the cycle’s initial drafting class also included whole group conversations, and teacher/researcher modelling, which used significant portions of time in the class. The time allotted for student brainstorming was eventually whittled down to only ten to fifteen minutes. In my experience, sustained time for writing in class is limited, by both ineffective student use and the general pressures of a dense curriculum. Students were familiar with the process of starting a writing assignment at school and finishing it for homework.

#### *Computer to pencil and paper*

Students also had preferences for mode and materials, which contributed to physical location and environmental pressures, a difficult challenge to overcome in collective experiences. Frequently in my own classroom, I have approached students to ask why they are not writing during class time only to hear, “I don’t want to start because I want to do it on the computer,” or “There is not enough time to really get into it,” or “I hate starting and then stopping.” Colleen confirmed this observation when she qualified that her mode of writing was determined by where she was and whether or not she had access to a computer and enough time to

finish. Colleen fluctuated according to practicality and situation. “If I’m at home when I start writing, then by computer, but you know if you’re at school you can’t really do that” (PC, p. 6).

All ten participants had access to a computer at home. However, their affinity for using the computer varied. Kenton identified the tension inherent between medium and environment. He liked to write at school or in desk environments, as those were where he got his creative ideas. However, he also preferred the computer, which was not always accessible at school.

Avery liked “the computer actually the most ‘cause it’s faster and I just like typing, I just get, seem to get better ideas there” (PC, p. 3).

Perhaps it was due to the fluidity of typing and the pace at which they can capture their ideas. Do too many ideas get lost when they write by hand? Aden definitely preferred the computer because it “doesn’t take as long to get what you want” (PC, p. 8). He wished he had a laptop, so that he could isolate himself and just write when he was at home. Sometimes he worked at his mother’s business, but that was “not really a good atmosphere” (PC, p. 8). Shelly liked writing in a desk, preferred writing on a computer, but didn’t “like writing at home ‘cause it’s noisy” (PC, p. 7). While her three little brothers were distracting, she felt she needed some white noise to be productive. Her needs were almost contradictory in that any noise other than her brothers’ could be helpful.

Although Dan said he could write by hand or on the computer, when he was a smaller child, “we really didn’t have a computer that worked well” (PC, p. 10) so he tended to default to writing by hand. Adriana chose her medium according to her level of inspiration versus structure. When she had a strong structural or organizational idea guiding what she was writing, she worked on paper, but when she wrote from what she termed ‘inspiration,’ she preferred the computer. Tatum said, “I hate the computer when I write because...I’ll be like looking at my story and then I’ll change it” (PC, p. 9). She feared changing her writing while on

the computer and thus chose to work by hand. Karly stated, “I like to write by hand but it’s a lot slower, but I think I write better almost if I do it by hand” (PC, p. 8). Here, Karly and Kenton’s preferences were the exact opposite, but for the same reason – their ability to think. She believed she wrote better, and had better ideas when she worked by hand; perhaps for her the pace needed to be slower to process and develop her ideas more fully. Kenton’s ideas flowed best on the computer. The tensions of materials and preferences tended to become a resource issue, either, the physical resource of computer access or the resource of time.

### *Computers and revision process*

Student’s revision processes tended to be at the heart of a preference for the computer. Colleen chose the computer for “revising or for rough copies because it’s easier to read; you just have to erase and change” (PC, p. 6). Adriana felt that when pressed for time and making structural changes, the computer works well. Kenton also liked the ease of computer changes and the use of spell check. Aden believed “it doesn’t take as long to get what you want...It takes a lot less time to revise it, too, so I guess that’s what appeals to me” (PC, p.8).

Avery articulated clearly what other students hint at when he outlined a greater willingness to make changes. “Well, on the computer I can take out the whole paragraph really fast and just change sentences and words or something. And that’s a lot harder when you’re doing it by hand” (PC, p. 4). Diana agreed that when writing by hand she was more reluctant to revise. Shelly appreciated the readability and speed of typing and, like most other students, welcomed the tools of spell and grammar check.

The less popular position seemed to be of those who preferred to write by hand. Karly separated her writing into content and editing. She did not think her “content, would be as good if I wrote it on the computer, but my grammar would be better and it’d be a lot faster” (PC, p. 8). While she recognized the tools built into the software as assets, she felt that crafting ideas her idea was more important. If resources were adequate,

this would be the easiest of the preferences for the classroom teacher to resolve.

### *Implications of physical preferences*

Physical preferences for writing are not easily resolved. Further complicating the issue are resources outside of a teacher's hands, such as time and computer access. Time for me is the most frustrating. Writing assignments that are introduced in class are rarely drafted through to completion within the confines of class time. This is problematic for students who like to write at school. I wonder if those who like to write at home have this preference because eight years of assignments needed to be finished at home? How do I balance individual preferences with such a finite amount of time? Another consideration is student use of classroom time for writing. Not all writing processes are visible pen to paper moments and, therefore, the stillness and or conversations that appear to be unproductive are frequently judged as wasting time. As a writer, I am in a better position to remember that great leaps in writing are often preceded by conversations with others or inactivity that eventually becomes productive. Ironically, I forget this frequently and need to be reminded to be gentle with both others and myself. However, sometimes students are simply wasting time.

All students in this class had access to a home computer, but access at school was dependant on the availability of a computer lab. This created a tension that some students resolved by emailing work back and forth. However, working between home and school was not easily facilitated. Presently, there is no solution at Stabler school to this resource issue and writing often becomes homework. When time is provided, both the teacher and the students can be frustrated, because the teacher wants visible progress, but the students feel like they are wasting their time starting something they will need to start over at home.

Although students identified ways the computer could contribute to revision, very little evidence of revision existed in the writing drafts they

submitted. The more common activity was editing (Sommers, 1994). Perhaps more demonstrations by Ms Harris or myself would expand student use of and exploration of this tool. Adriana and Karly had begun to articulate personal knowledge of how the computer shaped their writing processes, in both positive and negative ways. Others, such as Aden, Kenton, Shelly and Avery, believed that the computer could help them write what they wanted faster. I believe that more conversations about how the computer contributes to thinking, composing and revising would allow students to explore, shed, adopt, or reject possible strategies for using this tool to their personal advantage.

### **Preferential Tensions**

While the previous section focused on the embodied nature of students' writing experience, the following sub-sections deal with more subtle and relational preferences. These are often invisible to the teacher and possible even invisible to the students themselves.

#### ***Plan to not plan***

The post-process literature on writing process often refers to the reified steps of 'the writing process' as pre-writing, drafting, revising, and publishing. In order to become the primary approach for teaching writing, it has been commodified (Russell, 1999). Criticism is leveled frequently at elementary and secondary schools where posters delineate an extremely simplified process for students, and teachers require two drafts to demonstrate the process of revision (Graves, 1983, 1994; Calkins, 1994; Atwell 1987). Again this is an oversimplified conceptualization of writing process that was never the intention of the theorists who championed it. All process theorists believe that writing is a recursive process.

Students such as Aden and Kenton state that they prefer to do their planning in their heads and their vision of revising is done simultaneously

with their writing, as on-line revision (Myhill & Jones, 2007). Aden offers an example of how the simplified, reified, linear process of ‘first we draft, then we revise, and then we publish’ can be rejected by a student. He resists planning as a productive part of his writing process. As a relatively strong writer, he felt it unnecessary to plan in some concrete way before beginning to write and he felt that while writing on the computer, he already made revision decisions frequently, if invisibly.

Aden: I hate drafts, I...

Ms Bowsfield: Why?

Aden: I think it’s the organization. I hate it. I like revising as I write. I write the thing out and then I’m on the computer so then I just delete stuff after, I leave, come back and then I just redo it, ‘cause if you have a rough copy then you have to have the rough copy, the rubric sometimes, the good copy and if you have two rough copies or stuff like that, I really never could get all of it together at one point. I just said whatever, I’ll just write a good copy.

Ms Bowsfield: We talked about several different possibilities in your love poem. Are you thinking you’ll use some of those ideas or...? For me the record of what it was to what it became is part of the thrill.

Aden: Yeah.

Ms Bowsfield: Would you consider saving multiple drafts ‘cause you’ve already got it on computer?

Aden: Um hmm, I might I guess, yeah probably ‘cause I put a lot of work into the “Love” one so I guess I’d save more of the stuff that was more important. So like not saying that writing isn’t important but, the stuff that means a little more to myself, I’d probably do more with. Save more, work on it more, know what happened to it. (PC, p. 5)

Aden seemed to intuitively know that the requesting of drafts is about generating concrete evidence of a process that is fluid, recursive and particular to each individual. He was frustrated by and struggled with the organization necessary to produce rough copies, rubrics and good copies for the teacher. His resistance to drafting did not appear to impede his writing at this point in his school career; however, as writing assignments grow in complexity, will his current set of strategies be adequate to tackle

and effectively address the rhetorical situations of high school and post-secondary education? During the research, Aden never found his own purpose for writing. He suggested that he was more willing to revise on projects that were important to him, like the *Love* poem he was writing (for Ms. Harris and for marks) at the time of his private conversation.

Kenton was capable of articulating what did not work for him in brainstorming sessions; the abstract forms of webs were not a strategy he gravitated toward. For him, the abstract did not make sense. He preferred to write phrases, even simple phrases, but not random words. Kenton's knowledge of himself as a writer was important for him to start generating writing. To an external observer, Kenton also appeared not to plan, but he suggested that his planning existed in his head, a form of pretext revision that Myhill and Jones (2007) claim students' need more knowledge of and experience with. Like Aden, the invisible plan makes it difficult for a teacher to guide Kenton's writing instruction. His lack of visible planning posed an interesting problem for him, in that he knew he needed time limits or his ideas tended to stay in his head. He needed pressure to force himself to commit to writing and then he could be creative within the constraints of the assignment.

Kenton: I, most people think I don't actually make plans when I write, but I, I think about my whole writing in my head before I write it, I just don't write the plan down so much.

Ms Bowsfield: So it exists?... But it's done in your head.

Kenton: Yeah. Uh, probably, the pressure thing is it forces me to write something, otherwise I can go on forever just thinking about different ideas or possibilities so when I have a time limit, I know I have to write something down.

Ms Bowsfield: So you have to commit.

Kenton: Yeah, and once I commit I can make that idea interesting.

Ms Bowsfield: So you worry that you'll let yourself wander around too long... (PC, p. 16)

Kenton also recognized that thinking about writing played an important role for him, but letting himself think too long could be risky in terms of his completing it. He was a young man who often turned in late assignments. Because his planning process was mostly internal, I am left with several questions. Does he really plan or does he know that is what is expected of him, so he simply uses the jargon of process theory to provide an acceptable answer to the issue of planning? Is his knowledge and experience of planning incongruent with the reified steps of process theory? Or does he simply not know where his text will take him and, therefore, does not wish to project a plan that may shift significantly because it is partial and evolving? Does he believe that his plan needs to drive or even match his final product?

Karly, on the other hand, valued her pen and paper brainstorming process, which she found elaborate, colourful and creative:

Karly: I, my best ideas, normally I plan on the paper, yeah.

Ms Bowsfield: So before you start a piece of writing, even if you're going to do it on the computer, you try and do something by hand?

Karly: Yeah and I normally do a lot of visual stuff, I'll use a lot of colours... I use a lot of visuals, like I'll draw a lot of stick men and stuff like that. But I don't really write words down normally, I just kind of use pictures.

Ms Bowsfield: And yet that's funny 'cause you don't, you don't use pictures in your mind?

Karly: Yeah.

Ms Bowsfield: Your body needs to draw them, but your mind hears the voices?

Karly: I know it's so weird, but...

Ms Bowsfield: So you use colour when you're planning, so you'll draw with different pens?

Karly: Ms E. kind of helped me 'cause, you know like we write science notes and she's, like, highlight this and use a different colour for that. I started doing that and then the page looks so much more... And that's what I do with my notes now for everything. (PC, p. 8)

In the previous conversation, Karly referred to some specific strategies that she employed in planning her writing: by hand with coloured pens and

visuals. Her personal choices for brainstorming included more emphasis on visuals than words and the act of marking up the page seemed to engage her. Karly's note-taking strategy transferred writing and thinking skills she had learned from another class into ELA.

In a conversation outside of the study, Karly and Shelly had revealed to each other significantly different and yet parallel elements of their writing process. Karly paraphrases next:

Shelly told me actually she always sees things in her head. It's like an on-going computer kind of thing and she sees it more and, um, like, I don't see it. I have, like, another person basically in my head that I constantly have conversation with. (PC, p. 7)

An asset to her writing was this on-going dialogue she played out in her head. Karly's strategies of using colours, drawing and generating self-talk dialogue may be particular to her. However, this retelling of a private conversation between Shelly and Karly first created awareness of these strategies in each other and now I have passed them on to others. I wonder how many students run conversations or visual simulations in their heads?

The following exchange reveals several perspectives on planning writing. In particular, it reveals how students occasionally meet a teacher's requirements while completely subverting the intention behind the activity (McClay, 2004). Colleen revealed a truth I often suspect of students who adhere to the rules set for an assignment.

Tatum: For me, I don't really understand how people can actually just start writing and they can get it, right off the bat. Like Megan she can do it without a plan and she just goes and she writes and she writes.

Colleen: Not always, though.

Tatum: Usually she does that and then she's, like, 'Okay, this is my plan...pretend I did this ...'

Colleen: My mom does that. I got that from my mom, she's like, 'I don't plan, I just write it and then write a plan afterwards.'

Tatum: I think that sometimes I have to plan and sometimes I don't.

Adriana: Oh, I always have to plan, I am a person who has to be this and then this and then this. And it can't just be full out write. If I did that, it'd be really confusing. (ID, SG, p. 6)

Colleen admitted she wrote the plan afterwards and I wonder if this is an instance of the writing process being a reified step-by-step process in both students' and teachers' minds. These students have traveled past eight other ELA teachers' versions of writing process: are they experiencing rigid rules in order to provide accountability for a process that can be largely invisible, particularly when students utilize computers and the delete key in generating writing?

Over the years, in an effort to illuminate process teachers have developed rituals that became the process rather than providing a window into a particular process. When a single, final product arrives on the desk, there is no window into the author's thinking or desired goals. Aden's and other students' resistance to plans and drafts possesses a challenge to a classroom teacher, because the strategies they elect to use for planning in the writing process are invisible. Further, the teacher establishes a framework for revealing process and when a student's actual process does not match he or she is forced to generate an elaborate back-story, resist through subtle avoidance or risk sanctions imposed by the teacher. Students like Colleen, who seek to please the teacher or simply prefer to adhere to all the steps or rules a teacher might request, may now need to fabricate the process of how a piece of writing came to be. In Chapter 8, Avery's story illustrates this issue significantly. Process writing theory does not suggest to teachers that a certain number of drafts, specific outline processes or anything else for that matter are required. Nevertheless, in order to reveal internal processes and make them amenable to comment, teachers look for ways to translate planning and revising into a concrete accessible and, at times, assessable process.

Post-process theorists offer the criticism that there is no one, grand, unified process of writing and that individuals enact a piece of writing in

their own way, drawing on their own process. Specifically, Kent (1999) referred to a fundamental idea that “writing is a practice that cannot be captured by a generalized process or a ‘Big Theory’” and that “no codifiable or *generalizable* writing process exists or could exist” (p. 1, emphasis original). While students who resist process theory steps intuitively know that their process is particular to them, their inability to articulate, assess, modify or apply their strategies to specific and more complex writing tasks often leaves them bewildered as to how to achieve better grades from their writing or, ideally, to achieve better writing.

One of the key concerns I have with post-process theory is that by acknowledging each writer’s specific situatedness and interpretation, it is unable to provide concrete strategies or a useful pedagogy. So while it strips process theory of the status of Grand Theory, it offers nothing in its place, because by the nature of its very critique it cannot. Therefore, in a practical sense, I must continue with process theory, as it does offer specific and usable strategies. However, it is critical that the teaching of writing not stop at the textbook rendition of process writing theory, simply because writing is more complex than any secondary textbook can capture. One way I believe I can further students’ understanding of writing is through my stories and the stories of other students present in the class, which make room for the situated and the interpreted nature of writing as it is made public.

### *Tension between personal and distant writing*

The students of the class expressed preferences regarding the personal nature of the subject matter they were requested to write about. The majority of students welcomed the opportunity to write with autobiographical experiences at the heart. However, two students expressed a strong dislike for the personal closeness of the subject matter.

Kenton and Shelly both spoke of a strong preference for writing that was distant from them. Shelly liked “non-fiction writing better than fiction writing, like narratives, but I really love essays” (ID, SG, p. 3).

Ironically, Shelly did not consider autobiographical writing to be non-fiction. She appreciated the genre of essay perhaps because at this stage of writing it is quite prescriptive and frequently takes the form of a five-paragraph theme suitable for on-demand, time-constrained writing scenarios. She also suggested that she liked this form because she considered herself good at it:

I just wouldn't want that 'cause you'd feel so exposed writing about something personal; that's why I like having a context and then you can impress with something you know and like someone can see it and like, 'Wow that's good.' Well, and I like it having nothing to do with me, 'cause then you don't have to feel exposed like, you know... (C2 S3, WG, p. 19)

Shelly felt exposed, while Kenton did not fear judgment so much as he experienced a need for detachment. When asked what he learned about himself, he identified his preference for distance:

I found out that I don't like personal subjects as much. I guess I feel too involved with the writing. Then when I feel more detached...I write better in the third person, 'cause it makes me feel more detached from it. (PC, p. 6)

Diana's comments revealed how she handled personal topics for a school audience, in that she censored herself to limit her exposure to judgment. She also attended to her perceived audience, placing less trust in her fellow classmates than in either Ms Harris or myself, as highlighted in following excerpts:

I definitely would never write something, like, things that I write at home, I would never hand in to Ms H. because some of them are personal, and I wouldn't have a problem with her reading it, like I would definitely let anybody read it, but I'm really afraid of being judged and being told, 'Well, what the heck are you doing? This is wrong.' So I, I definitely write differently...(C2 S3, WG, p. 19)

If she was the only person on the whole planet that read it, like the two people, with you and Ms Harris, I think like that's fine because ... You know that she's not going to judge you, but if I like, if we were doing our discussion

groups and we're like reading it out loud, and my discussion group's like Avery, Shelly and Aden, and I wrote something that hurt about, like personal, I wouldn't feel comfortable sharing it with them. (C2 S3, WG, p. 22)

For her, a teacher audience of Ms Harris or me was low risk for personal topics that may reveal a vulnerable emotional state. Although Diana embraced the writing project, completed each piece of writing and focused very closely on autobiographical moments in her life, she still maintained some distance, providing herself with a safety net. Shelly and Diana expressed the risks inherent in writing (one's that Lensmire, 1994, also writes at length about). All writers expose something of themselves when they commit their thoughts to paper. Although for Diana, Ms Harris and I were deemed to be lower risk than peers, that may not be true for other writers such as Shelly and Kenton. Perhaps they choose to control their risk of exposure through distancing themselves from the writing in genres and subject matter, rather than through limiting their preference for audience. While, in general, the students in this research have generated a high level of trust in relation to their peers, there were still tensions and risks involved in sharing writing publicly. Peer and teacher audiences represent varying ranges of risk depending on each student's social positioning with others.

Although referring to middle elementary students, Lensmire (1994) argued that fictional narratives offered students several advantages over autobiographical or personal narratives. The fictional generated a certain distance between the self and the writer, thereby avoiding direct exposure of personal experiences, beliefs and values, while also providing control over material where some semblance of truth did not need to be represented. Fictional writing was not an option for these students in this project and therefore limited and directed the ways students could generate a comfortable distance from their text. Up until this point in the actual study, I had not considered autobiographical writing as socially risky, an issue I will take up in my conclusion.

### *Tension between freedom and constraints*

There is a tension between freedom and constraints in a classroom setting. As the researcher, part of my conceived fiction about the study included a very liberating and freeing writing experience. My intention was to create a space for freedom of all choices, with regard to subject matter, purpose, audience and form. While the experience was distinct from other school writing experiences, it was certainly not free. Requiring autobiographical writing was the first constraint and, as previously mentioned, this subject matter source made at least two students uncomfortable. By removing the purpose of 'for marks' (another intended liberation of a strong constraint), students initially felt lost. It seemed they wondered why anyone would write then? Casey and Hemenway (2001) focused on the need for balance between freedom and structure where many of the tensions such as personal preference, choice and constraint, and process and product would be addressed according to various students' needs.

Colleen, Adriana, Diana, and Karly did find a personal purpose. I believe that six of the students never found their own purpose, so their 'fabricated' purpose simply became writing to help me with my research study. My Ph.D. was important to me and so, by default, they were necessary to its success. I know Kenton, Avery, Aden and Shelly completed their writing in order to please me and perhaps Ms Harris. I am not sure if 'please' is the right word, but I and my study was their primary focal purpose. The idea of shaping a piece of writing for a particular audience was lost when my study became their purpose.

Form was the one area of freedom that seemed more realized by the students. Diana, Avery and Adriana shifted forms as a piece of work evolved. The freedom to switch forms was a relatively new experience for them. Colleen made a conscious choice to challenge herself to write poetry and Shelly always chose narrative, even though her stated preference was essay.

When I made initial decisions regarding this project, it was grounded in my very positive experience with open and personal writing within the boundaries of two university courses. Traditionally a setting where authorial voice is distant and detached, this experience provided a refreshing change for me. What I neglected to consider was that even though the experience was very free, my purpose of obtaining a grade or credits in a university doctoral course remained intact. Ms. Harris and I stripped this purpose of obtaining a grade from students in an effort to encourage risk-taking, but this may have resulted in simply too unfamiliar a situation to students, in too limited a time frame. Perhaps, and somewhat ironically, the low-stakes nature of the work did serve to encourage resistance.

I had hoped students would be engaged simply because they were the centre of their subjects. But here failure resulted for many students, a point Shelly captured nicely in the following exchange:

Ms Harris: Are you writing it for you? Does anyone think they're doing this for themselves?

Shelly: Well, no one does normally write things for themselves so, like, why would we start now?

Ms Harris: It's not something you're used to.

Karly: Yeah.

Tatum: I do write for myself, in my diary, so... (*laughing*).

Shelly: But, but like I want to just write like a really well-composed paragraph about something I care about just for myself, I just typically don't do that; it's just not right. (C2 S3, WG, p. 6)

Shelly felt she “can't just pull something out of thin air, and be, like, ‘I am going to write about this.’” (C2 S3, WG, p. 17). Her reaction seemed consistent with the conditioning students experience with regard to writing. Adriana also identified that demand is a powerful, external reason for writing, so the students were not writing for themselves, they were writing to satisfy a demand placed on them: this was the nature of schooling. Therefore, the more familiar and comfortable position for many students was to write with clearly defined constraints.

Kenton and Avery shared similar comments regarding the desire for and the role constraints played in their writing. Kenton piggybacked on another student's comment: "like when you get a topic, really, you have no creativity... when the topic's tough. What I like about writing in school is getting those narrow topics and making them creative" (C2 S3, WG, p. 20). Avery echoed, "When it's really open and there are no rules, it's not fun 'cause there are no rules to bend" (C2 S3, WG, p. 22). This was a frequent comment by these two students, where both of them embraced constraints as a challenge to see how far they could push their creativity and originality within the confines of an assignment. Bright (2003) suggests it is important to create writing situation where students are able to comply with the assignment, while at the same time developing greater autonomy and independence through resistance. For these two students, the assignment guidelines were seen as a necessary part of their creativity and without them they felt lost and unable to define their own parameters.

Some students did find the project liberating within its constraints of needing to write, writing autobiographically, writing with deadlines, and sharing thoughts and work in public settings. Diana, for instance, did not "like to be held into a space" (PC, p. 10). She went on to say:

I don't like to have boundaries at all. I like to be outside the box and do what I want when I'm given a topic. I hate having topics and rules, like I work with it but I'm, 'Oh, I have this awesome idea but, oh, it doesn't fit at all so...'  
(PC, p. 10)

She realized that complete freedom all the time would be impossible, but to provide students with the occasional "chance to write what they want" (PC, p. 10) would be an asset. Is there space in overburdened curricula for finding personal purpose in writing? The endeavor is risky in that, for many students, the experience may be deemed a failure.

### *Tensions between innate and learned abilities*

During a planning conversation, Natasha and I discussed the idea of a growth or a fixed mindset in the context of social psychologist Carol Dweck's work, when Shelly suggested that writing was a talent you are born with or not. Shelly was a strong writer, who although she did have a personal practice of journal writing, did not really see herself as a writer:

Ms Bowsfield: So what else do you think has helped you become a strong writer?

Shelly: I don't know, I just think I was kind of born with it.

Ms Bowsfield: Just a natural gift?

Shelly: I think it is.

Ms Bowsfield: So then how does somebody get better if it's just a natural gift?

Shelly: Well, I think, I think there's a limit to how much you can get better, and how much you just came into the world with it. I think you can just get better by learning the structure and improving your vocabulary and practicing. I don't think you can...I think it's kind of like athletic things, some people are just more athletic than the other person and no matter how hard the one person tries, they're never going to attain the same thing, but they will achieve their personal best, if they just practice. (PC, p. 15)

Shelly believed a personal best was attainable through practice, whereas significant growth in talent was not, because it is a gift like athletic ability. Dweck's (2006) research suggests that students who have a fixed mindset need to be perfect immediately. The ability to grow and learn is limited by the belief that change is outside of their control. At the time of the study, Shelly's writing skills were meeting her needs and expectations, as well as her teachers' expectations. Will she always meet the expectations? Her belief that writing ability is a natural talent prompted me to ask other students about their beliefs.

Tatum was not a strong writer. Like her conversations, her writing switched topics frequently. She avoided revision and her writing was frequently limited in detail, coherence and ideas. Tatum also figured most of writing was either 'you can do it or you can't.' I wonder if, for weaker

writers, this stance is used to control how they feel about their writing experience. If a person believes that improving writing is outside of their control, the desire to improve is stripped away from the realm of the possible:

Tatum: I agree with Shelly that you can start off with it or you can't start off with it, so basically with me, I couldn't do it. I'm just bad at writing and then as I've read stories, like, pieces of literature and I've seen how they put their stories together and how I put my stories together and I've tried to make that better and I have just a little bit, so...

Ms Bowsfield: So you think you can grow as a writer and change?

Tatum: I, I think I could a little bit but I don't know if I'll be able to be, like, up at, like, top level. (PC, p. 13)

Tatum positioned her writing alongside other people's writing and frequently saw her own work as inadequate. She seemed conflicted. She agreed with Shelly, but also hoped that by reading other authors and viewing them as models she could improve her own writing with some success. If writing improvement is mostly outside of her control, how will she be able to improve her writing in her three years of high school?

Karly saw both natural talent and hard work as elements. Hard work can lead to improvement, but very few people are willing to work with such determination:

I think anybody, if they work hard enough, can become better, but then there's those with natural talent who don't have to work as hard. And they normally turn out better anyways, then but then there's those people that I guess kind of start from the ground up and then they have to build, and build and build and build and that's a lot of determination right there, and dedication to have to do that and they might not even get higher than the naturally talented. (PC, p. 13)

Karly seemed to have a mixed belief. She hedged her bets by saying that if you work hard enough you can improve, but it may never be enough to surpass the naturally talented.

Diana claimed that everyone can be a writer with the right attitude, “but if they, all throughout their life, just hate writing, hate writing, hate writing, then I don’t think so” (PC, p. 17). She complicated the idea of improvement in writing ability with an individual’s attitude, recognizing that the act of hating something severely limited a person’s desire to improve or even to engage with the activity. Although Diana’s beliefs about writing reflected her desire to improve as a writer, and she appeared to have a growth mindset, her actions with regard to revision did not support her growth.

As the research process continued during the phase of writing research texts, I am coming to understand that students’ writing experiences are shaped by many factors that might be perceived as outside the traditional scope of composition research. Perhaps investigating Dweck’s (2006) research will provide strategies designed to broaden mindsets and therefore open students’ minds to their own growth potential and a broader definition of writer.

### **Are You a Writer?**

None of the students in this study saw themselves as writers, except for Diana. The following section, which begins with a found poem of transcript comments related to their definitions of writer and perceptions of themselves as writer, is playfully presented in a form more traditionally reserved for artistic rather than research works. By convention in the past, this genre, the dissertation has excluded alternative forms of data representation. In some ways, the choice to present data in an alternative form is an attempt to play with the very definition I asked students to open for negotiation. If all the forms, rules, and choices of writing are determined outside of the individual, then how does one come

to be an insider and come to see herself as a writer when the conditioned and traditional views exclude her definition and contribution?

The crafting of the poem directly resulted from transcripts. The most significant and consistent practice in its creation was excision of words, phrases and lines. Each stanza reflects a speaker within either a whole-group conversation at the end of cycle two or the private conversation between the student speaker and myself. The final stanza is a dialogue of my voice and a student's. The initial line of each stanza is a constructed statement positioning the stanza as a response to the question and is either drawn directly from the stanza, speaks to its essence or signals a broader response than that of a single voice. It is presented in two columns, for space sake, and while originally composed to be read left column to right column, it could also be read across.

The Real Test: Are you a writer?  
*A Found Poem in Multiple Voices*

*A Definition...*

I don't really know what you mean  
by that...  
someone who's good at writing  
someone who likes to write  
someone who does that in their  
spare time.

*An Answer...*

I don't really know if I am  
because, like,  
I'm good at it.  
It's kind of fun sometimes,  
I can't see myself taking a job just  
for that,  
so  
I don't know...

*A Reason...*

There needs to be a reason for me  
to write,  
I can't just go,  
'I'm writing just for fun.'

*For Marks...*

I don't think I am a writer.  
I don't like to write!  
I don't write for myself.  
I basically write because I have to,  
to get a good mark.  
If I could choose not to write,  
I wouldn't, but...

*The Standard Answer...*

Like an author  
publishing;  
to me that's basically the only real  
writing that you can do.

*A Real Answer...*

I really don't see myself writing  
for any other reason than school...  
or maybe later in my life, at jobs.

*Maybe...*

Everyone needs to know how to  
write  
'cause you do it anyways.  
I write songs  
so that is a form of writing,  
not like essays or stories.

*I'd Like To Be...*

I'm not sure  
what defines a writer,  
but if I was going from what I  
think is a writer,  
I think I am a writer  
I love to write  
I do write on my spare time.  
I don't have to have a certain  
topic  
or a certain criteria to write with,  
I sit in my room  
make something up.  
I'm kind of good at it,  
but  
not the best at it.

*Writer On Demand...*

I don't see myself being a writer;  
I'm a reader.  
If somebody asks me to write  
something, it's more on demand.  
We're going to give you  
something to write about,  
you're going to write about it.  
'Oh, I have to write this for work,'  
or  
'Oh, I'm writing this for so and  
so.'

*Old People Are Writers...*

Writers are not younger  
but kind of old  
they've had more experience  
more adventures  
they can write about...

*Every Kid's Answer...*

Someone who enjoys it.

*Not Real Writers...*

People write all the time,  
but they're not necessarily writers.  
The difference?  
Someone who writes because they  
have to.  
Someone who writes because they  
want to.  
They enjoy it.

*Published, But Not For Money...*

Somebody who loves writing, like a  
really good author is somebody  
who writes  
and they don't care if their book  
really gets published...  
write for the enjoyment of writing  
and pleasing others.

*What Stops Us From Being  
Writers...*

It comes down to  
the definition of a writer.  
Our only acceptable  
definition of writer  
has become:  
somebody who publishes novels or  
poems,  
or an editor.  
a very narrow definition of writing,  
yet you write in science,  
in social studies  
in English every day.  
Written a birthday card lately?

That's like cardboard.

Pardon?

It's like cardboard, though.

It's just, you know, its not  
actual writing.

*How Do We Get...*

quality instead of cardboard?

During cycle two, session three, the opportunity to ask students about their perceptions of themselves as writers presented itself when only four students in the class had polished drafts ready for the designated report-back session, and one of these students who was finished was not even participating in the study! Ms Harris and I took advantage of the incomplete work to try to understand why the project was not particularly successful at this point. We asked for real answers as to what contributed to their not completing a second piece of writing. Students presented a long list of activities: soccer, a divisional track meet, band, P.A.R.T.Y. Program (drug and alcohol education program), football practice, some confusion as to the due date (we were making trades and shifting dates to meet schedules) and, of course, homework that was for marks (Alberta has a series of province-wide exams at the end of grade nine and these students were also feeling the pressure of review and final year-end assignments).

As a starting point, we moved into asking them if they perceived themselves as writers. The prompting question was, “Are you a writer? Right, apply it to everyone in the room, are you a writer, do you see yourself as a writer?” (C2 S3, WG, p. 14). I asked them to take their time and think before they responded and allowed for at least thirty seconds of reflection.

The conversation moved through several phases. First, students wanted me to define what a writer is, because without a definition they were not prepared to answer. I refused to comment or provide a definition, because I wanted to know their perceptions of themselves in relation to writing, not their answer according to my definition.

Shelly first attempted to define what a writer was to her by supplying three elements in her operational definition of a writer. As the first speaker responding to the question, Shelly’s definition of a writer framed the twelve pages of conversation. She named three elements in her definition: someone who is good at writing, who enjoys writing and who

chooses to write in spare time. She believed she was a good writer who occasionally found it fun, but she would never choose it as an activity.

Tatum added that she wrote because school and good marks required it. When I followed up on this question during her private conversation, she added, “I don’t have any confidence in my writing...to be like an author or something...” (PC, p. 3). She did think the freedom to choose form and subject matter had helped her writing, but not enough for her to consider publishing, which “like to me that’s basically the only real writing that you can do” (PC, p. 4). Her own definition of writer excluded her participation in many ways, while at the same time set a standard that she perceived was impossible for her to meet, namely publication.

Kenton also did not see himself as a writer. He suggested that he was good at it, occasionally found it fun, but ultimately he needed a reason. Dan offered a definite ‘no’ on being a writer, because he did not get any ‘fun’ out of writing and could only envision writing for school or maybe work. Aden enjoyed playing around and stated that he liked writing but the activity was never for him.

Avery did not see writing as a profession in his future, but believed that “everyone needs to know how to write ‘cause you do it anyways” (C2 S3, WG, p. 15). Avery questioned his writing as valid when he said, “I do like to write ‘cause I write songs so that is a form of writing, but not like essays or stories or stuff like that” (C2 S3, WG, p. 18). He tentatively designated his desire to write songs as being a writer, but failed to consider the song genre to be as important as essays and stories, those traditional school genres.

Adriana introduced an interesting element when she identified herself as a reader but not a writer. In ELA programs, these strands are often seen as combined, with reading and writing being paired together as complements. She read for pleasure, but only wrote on demand, framing writing as something demanded by someone else in school or at work. The other students agreed that the external world assigns and demands writing,

a view summed up in Adriana's statement, "We're going to give you something to write about, you're going to write about it" (C2 S3, WG, p. 18). She captured what I see as a major concern in creating spaces for students to perceive themselves as writers. The writing students engage in is never *for themselves*; it is always for an audience external to them and demanded by others. All students included a sense of enjoyment in their personal definition, but few were willing to assert gaining enjoyment from writing. Diana dared to be different and took a risk in defining herself as a writer according to her sense of what a writer is. According to Shelly's definition of enjoyment and personal interest, Diana was a writer, but she felt she struggled with the quality of her work.

When Natasha and I took up this conversation in our debrief and planning session, she wondered if the students' reluctance to see themselves as writers "must be because 'writer' is a profession, that it messes us up, because I mean, we'd say I'm a reader... And reader isn't a profession" (C2 S3, SG, p.4). Why is the idea of being a writer so deeply conflated with publication, with the idea of professional? Even Natasha and I had resisted the notion of calling ourselves writers on similar grounds.

As well, reading is an often a silent activity with significantly less public risk. What you choose to read and think about while reading are generally a private activity with the exception of school reading, where students are asked to produce some account of what they have read by oral or written demonstrations. Natasha, referencing the speaker at a professional development session that both of us had attended, said, "Writing is thinking on paper." If this statement is true, then what we, or anyone, write is far more risky than what is read because it implicates our thought processes and exposes them for judgment by others.

I followed up with this question during the private conversations with students, looking for consistency and elaboration on some responses where the conversation was not as influenced by the multiple voices of a

classroom setting. Students were consistent in maintaining the need for enjoyment and started to identify and elaborate on the importance of intrinsic motivation.

In her private conversation, Adriana reiterated Shelly's definition of enjoyment as being very significant. She questioned her current ability, but intended to keep getting better. She also referred to the professional writer whose writing goes through a process of exposure to other writers. She connected herself to those who work on their writing rather than an initial piece of writing that is "right away and everybody's like, 'Oh, wow, that's amazing.'" (PC, p. 7). To her understanding of what a writer is she added the idea that "writers are not younger people, but kind of more older because they've gone through everything, well, not everything, but they've had more experience and more adventures and everything so then they can write about them" (PC, p. 8).

Avery's comments solidified a significant, common theme students presented in their personal definition of a writer: a writer must enjoy writing. The act of writing is not as significant as the personal satisfaction. He also believed that writers write because they have to and because they want to. This element of enjoyment was common to nine out of ten students' operational definitions of who is a writer. Aden suggested that a writer is guided by the enjoyment of writing, pleasing others and the craft of writing, all of which seem to invoke more intrinsic motivation than he found for writing during the study.

Dan made a similar comment to Aden's when he talked about writers who work for money versus those who do it out of love, the original distinction between 'professional' and 'amateur'. "People who do it for just money aren't really writers, 'cause they're getting something out of it, that's just material gain... but true writers are people that write just because they love doing it" (PC, p. 13). Intrinsic motivation was critical. For him, he would only ever write for material gain, not for enjoyment, which was commensurate with his definite response of not being a writer.

Although Karly deferred to the published author frequently in her conversations, she was reluctant to include it in her personal definition. This may be because she saw her mother as a writer with powerful voice and a sense of enjoyment and including published author in her definition would exclude both Karly and her mother. She did stipulate that a writer is, “someone with a gift, really” (PC, p. 5). According to these students, enjoyment was a critical element of their definition of a writer, so how, then, does a teacher develop situations that support intrinsic motivation and enjoyment for all students at the same time? Lipstein and Renninger (2007) address this issue by meeting students at their interest level, a topic I discuss further in Chapter 9.

When I proposed that we are all writers because our daily lives require it, Shelly disagreed with the statement, while Tatum supported it:

Ms Bowsfield: I think it comes down to what’s the definition of a writer, and I think our only sort of acceptable, definite definition of writer has become; somebody who publishes novels or poems, or maybe works as an editor or something along those lines, but, so we made this very narrow definition of writing, and yet you write in science every day, you write in social studies every day, you write in English class every day. Have you written a birthday card for somebody lately?

Shelly: That’s like cardboard.

Ms Bowsfield: Pardon?

Shelly: It’s like cardboard, though. It’s just, you know, its not actual writing.

Ms Bowsfield: But that’s what I’m trying to get at though, how do we get quality instead of cardboard?

Tatum: Like, basically everybody is like a writer because we all write, we were like so brainwashed, we always think the writer is the person, like an author, he or her get their books published and they’re like famous but I qualify Mrs. Harris and you as a writer because you guys write for a living, or you guys write...

Ms Bowsfield: Well, we write for work, but I think for me, the writing that’s been exciting, that’s made a difference to my life has been when I started to go, ‘Hey, I’m a writer and I’m kind of good at it.’ And I, and there are moments that I enjoy it, there’s moments that I hate it...so now when I’m more forgiving of

myself and I think, 'Hey, this is all part of cookin' some good idea up, right, it's burbling in the back of my mind.' Then it becomes good writing. But I, I had to physically make a shift from 'I'm not a writer' to 'I'm a writer.' (C2 S3, WG, p. 23)

Tatum's statement late in our conversation summarized what I see as one of the main barriers to individuals perceiving themselves as writers. We are brainwashed to see 'others' as writers. Perhaps Shelly was right in that when we copy notes and answer questions, we are not writing anything more than cardboard because there is no creative element. For me, when I started to see myself as a writer, I was more willing to accept and learn from my processes, which led to more writing and more desire to write, while simultaneously developing more skill. Does that same potential exist for student in secondary settings when a teacher attends to students' writing experiences?

### **Tensions to Reconsider**

The experiences were varied, the writers reluctant and the drama of research unfolded as it did. Not one student said this research would help them be a better writer. Most students did not perceive themselves as writers. Their stories are particular to the improvisation of that classroom, at that time, but in the nature of stories lay the potential. What can be learned by listening to these preferences and these tensions? What resonates? What surprises? I am left wondering how their stories of experiences and preferences contribute to the working drama of future classrooms, in particular my own, but also those who choose to read this classroom story. While the experience is concluded, the ripples continue.

The writing products students hand in become signposts of their experience, but what is the back-story? Conversations that include the back-story of writing provide insight into an individual's writing processes

that are not easily known, without the need for more writing. Maybe even without the need for students to fabricate a process in order to meet assignment obligations. The creation of an environment where individual's personal knowledge is valuable for both the self and others broadens and validates experiences. Students had opportunities to hear others articulate the rhetorical situation they envisioned responding to in their writing. With practice students' skills at establishing writing goals related to audience, purpose and form would develop through having more ideas available to them.

Writing process theory advocates and requires addressing the rhetorical situation, but it does not necessarily advocate making this knowledge part of the public conversation of a classroom. Applebee (1996) believes that as students learn to participate in the wider discourse community through collaborative activities and conversations, the context will assist them in moving toward independent accomplishments. He wrote, "False starts must be treated as beginnings not endings; misplaced goals must be reconstrued rather than rejected; partial knowledge must be challenged and extended" (p. 115).

The ELA curriculum of Alberta (Alberta Education, 2003) builds in several outcomes related to meta-cognition. The need for students to understand the context most conducive to learning has become an important element in creating lifelong learners. This desire for developing meta-cognition applies to both general learning and the writing process in particular and encourages an individual to identify, develop and assess the strategies he or she elects to employ. Students who enter conversations where their self-knowledge is critical to academic growth begin a process of using their knowledge of personal process to continue learning.

For the teacher, who listens to the particular writing stories of students, she might begin to hear many echoes of the familiar and whispers of the new and different. It is important to hear the individual in order to tailor writing process instruction to each rather than the many. I

believe that in a conversational environment all those present who engage in learning may also become teachers of their own processes. One key area in conversations surrounds how students represent the rhetorical problem in order to shape their writing. The majority of students in the study struggled to identify a personal purpose for writing. When it came to audience most of the students could not see their writing being interesting for other readers. This struggle to represent a complex vision of an audience compounds a lack of purpose in writing. While students were expected to work with the material of their lives, several students still described how they maintained a personal distance. These are areas that I can consciously shape in the stories I construct and share with students and in the questions I ask of my own and other stories.

All the students in the study included the need to enjoy writing in their personal definition of a writer and yet only one student believed herself a writer and expressed consistent enjoyment. Perhaps knowing students' preferences would be an asset in building a balance between freedom and constraints, since for one student a constraint may actually generate freedom. How can a teacher use students' experiences with writing as an instructional tool to bring more pleasure to the activity? While I concede that in no way was I able to use their stories to design leaning experiences that generate enjoyment, the stories did bring that pedagogical need to my attention. Preferences for location and writing implements pose a great challenge to the classroom teacher. The limited nature of resources such as time and computers limits curricular decisions. While each student's preferences contribute to a sense of enjoyment, engagement and are unique to the individual, awareness of these preferences is an important step in building enjoyable experiences.

This chapter has surveyed various tensions inherent in a collective group of students who have different needs, desires, understandings and relationships with writing. The students all have their stories and in the next three chapters I explore the individual student's story, at times in

relation to other students, at times only in relation to their writing, and at other times still in relation to their experiences as related through drawing.

# Chapter Seven

## Images of Meaning

The demonstrated ability of drawings to create a clear path to participants' feelings and emotions, and to lead to succinct presentations of their experiences, appeared to create the opportunity for more meaningful and honest verbal reports – arguably the methodology helped respondents reveal more than what may have been captured with only the unstructured verbal interviews. (Kearney and Hyle, 2004, p. 380)

My research using drawings supports Kearney and Hyle's conclusion that drawings can prove a significant supplementary source of data. Images often hold more meaning than the image may initially project, even to the creator. The drawings students created provided access to elusive aspects of their experiences with writing, both affective and cognitive. A drawing is able to present a whole episode or idea in a very compact form, enabling both the creator and the viewer to observe relationships between the whole and its parts. Images may juxtapose episodes or states-of-being, which provide insight into the difference between moments. Further, they are economical and layered with meaning through, for example, the use of analogy, metaphor and symbolism. They have the ability to surprise and transform and are accessible through many shared visual conventions. Hickman (2007) notes that the mundane, in this case the experience of writing, has the potential to be transformed into something new “by altering our perception of the ordinary” (p. 322).

Each participant was asked to create two drawings. The first drawing commenced the research project and the second drawing constituted the very last collective experience. The initial task was to select one of the following to respond to: 1) draw a picture of what writing means to you; 2) draw a timeline of significant writing experiences in your

life; or 3) draw two pictures: one of writing when you are inspired and one of writing when you are not inspired. The final drawing task asked student participants to “please draw your emotional response to writing in general or to this specific experience of writing.”

I have included all of the drawings created for the study in Appendix A. (The reader may care to look at them all now.) They are organized alphabetically there by the creator, with both the first and second drawing being positioned on the same page, where possible. The exceptions are Kenton and Shelly, who only produced one drawing each, with mine and Natasha’s positioned last. If a drawing contains text, the text is typed out for clarity sake in the appropriate chapter where the particular drawing is reproduced and discussed, but is not repeated in the Appendix. Over the next three chapters, each drawing is positioned at a relevant point in the student participant’s portrait. In this chapter, I focus on five students (Colleen, Aden, Tatum, Kenton and Karly), in order to paint mini-portraits developed primarily from the perspective of his or her drawing (in some ways, this reflects the autobiographical writing task of starting from a photograph). Themes, relationships and connections to the broader research project are then developed.

In Chapter 8, Dan, Avery, and Karly’s stories of resistance to the study are explored with student writing, conversations and drawings all participating in uneven mixes in the telling. Chapter 9 presents more fully developed chronological narratives of this writing experience for Diana, Adriana and Shelly, where the focus is directly on the student’s writing and revision during the research project, with the drawings at times supporting the story.

Kearney and Hyle (2004) conclude that, “the personal experience depicted by participant produced drawings could only be considered complete with additional interpretation of the drawing by the participant” (p. 376). In my study, each student had an opportunity to talk about their drawing both in an immediate public setting and a retrospective private

one. The initial drawing was discussed in each participant's small group; the final drawing was explained in the whole-group setting; then both drawings were revisited in each student's private conversation.

Surveying the drawings as a body of work led to several general questions that operated as starting points. Several examples follow: What are the literal aspects of the image? Is the individual represented or not and why? Whose point of view is portrayed? Is an emotional state depicted? Has the participant employed metaphor? Where does the artifact fit in the chronology of the study? How does the image relate to the participant's conversation and writing? Does the drawing depict the act of writing, the tools of writing or a writer? Is there text and how does text work within the image?

Whereas the individual portraits focus on single students, the following paragraphs here explore the overview questions in relation to the whole body of drawings. There are a total of twenty-one drawings, including both adult participants and Karly's self-sponsored planning drawing and cycle-three writing assignment (the 'hate letter') which includes significant visual material. However, I refer here to only eighteen of the drawings, having excluded mine and Ms Harris' (not discussed in detail) and Karly's 'hate letter', which is developed in detail later in this chapter.

The initial drawing prompt provided three options, but only Ms Harris and I chose to draw a timeline of significant writing experiences. Kenton and Shelly only provided one drawing and Karly did not retain her initial drawing (not being part of the research project at that point), but I have substituted her planning from cycle three into the collection (which again contains visual elements). Three students committed to illustrating their experience of inspired and uninspired moments in writing and this forced them to create juxtaposed images identifying contrasts between different states-of-being. Four students responded to the prompt "what writing means to you." While the second drawing did not require students

to juxtapose two images, nonetheless five students did create parallel images.

Aden created a single unified image for both drawings, which were respectively a piece of clay to sculpt and a person in front of a series of filing cabinets representing decisions in writing. Tatum's initial drawing was a single image, a mystery filled with questions marks, and her final drawing was juxtaposed images of her hating and loving writing. Shelly and Avery both created a two- or three-piece collection of images that worked together in their final drawings. For example, Shelly's drawing of a person lost in the world was positioned beside a blank picture frame and Avery's image had three separate 'characters': frustrated without ideas, writing an idea and the satisfaction of a good idea. Perhaps even drawing about writing is too complex to represent in single, unified image. However, only Dan and Adriana used the same style of dual states-of-being to frame both drawings.

How the act of writing was or was not depicted was also interesting in an image explicitly created to represent personal writing experience. Of all eighteen drawings, eight did not depict writing in any way, while seven drew an image of writing as in a character poised with an instrument and marks on paper or screen (such as Adriana's and Avery's), and three suggested writing through the character's positioning of holding a pencil or pen near a desk or at a desk with no implements or paper (for example Dan and Karly). The implements employed to create writing also varied. The most common, of course, were paper and pencil or pen, but other tools or resources were also depicted, such as crumpled paper in three drawings (Adriana, Aden and Avery), a computer in one (Kenton), books as references in two (Adriana and Dan) and a filing cabinet traditionally used to store text (Aden).

There were four drawings that had no person depicted: Aden's metaphor of writing as sculpting, Tatum's questions about writing, Kenton's representation of writing implements and Colleen's open door to

poetry all contained no person. Diana's final drawing included a partial stick drawing face shedding two tears. (I did not count this image as either representing a person or not representing a person.)

Thirteen of the drawings represented a person, whether writing or not. Assuming that the character in a drawing depicting inspired and uninspired writing in separate frames is intended to be the same person, then the act of writing was almost always shown as a solitary act, one where the writer was alone to produce text. Only Karly represented more than one person in a social setting, possibly involved in classroom writing, and she did so in both her drawings. Dan was the other exception, where in his first drawing he included a teacher (or perhaps a parent) with a whip.

The representation of emotion in the images was also interesting. Several students represented one person in two emotional states usually frustrated, quizzical or stumped positioned beside the same person inspired, happy or excited. Avery and Diana also represented a range of possible composition topics in their drawings; however, the characters' response to the sense of possibility in these two students' images seemed to differ, in that Avery's character appeared questioning while Diana's lacked a definitive emotion.

Where a character was represented, there were three dominant points of view within the images. Diana and Avery's drawings contained writers who were focused on the paper they were writing on and not the viewer; in six of the drawings, the writer's gaze faced the viewer directly, something that was the case with both of Adriana's drawings and Tatum's final drawing. The third position, which included Karly's and Colleen's drawings, was a character faced completely away from (back to) the viewer focused entirely on the task at hand.

An issue I will take up further with each portrait, but related to the image of a person in the drawing, is the relationship between the character drawn on the page and the participant who created the character. One brief

observation is that participants often, related to, appeared to adopt or claimed the role or identity of the person they had drawn, while at the same time distancing themselves through third-person pronouns when talking about the pictures. Each drawing activity specifically asked students to represent *their* experience; therefore, the image should in some way represent *them*. But the issue is far more complex, as can be seen in the case of Avery's character apologizing (see Chapter 8).

Another area I wish to highlight is the use of abstract or metaphorical representation. All the drawings used some form of visual convention to establish their intended meaning. Dan's and Kenton's final drawings revealed the least use of metaphorical technique; however, their use of two images juxtaposed for effect would qualify. Through the use of visual convention such as the smiling face, hands tearing out hair, thought balloons, background that reflected emotional states, etc., students established meaning for complex ideas in very compact visual ways. Further, students often employed familiar large-scale metaphors, such as the road to success, the comfort zone, the open door, a lump of clay or a picture frame. Five drawings also used symbols such as the question mark to denote confusion or, once, a light bulb to represent a good idea.

All the drawings (including Ms Harris and mine) also contained text. Some drawings like Karly's, Diana's and Shelly's relied heavily on text for their meaning, while three other drawings contained only a single word such as 'imagine', 'poems', or 'why'. In the instances of single words, the images, symbols and metaphors did significant work. Several of the drawings used the text as a framing device for establishing the focus or significant elements in a pairing of images, such as "inspired" and "uninspired", "One day" and "Another day" or Aden's "Sculpt your Fantasy" and Colleen's "POEMS".

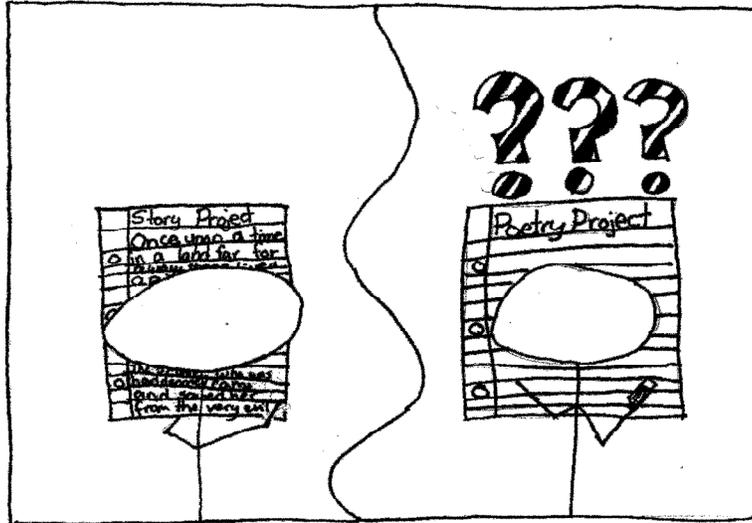
After attending to the literal elements of the drawings, I also posed questions on a more inferential level, such as how does the artifact support other data from the participant? Does it provide a new insight into the

participant? Does it reveal contradictions; if so, how? Do the first and second drawings work together in some way? These questions are taken up implicitly in each student's portrait in this and subsequent chapters. Each artifact engendered questions relevant only to the single image, the pair of images or the participant.

Weber and Mitchell (1996), Kendrick and McKay (2002), Kearney and Hyle (2004) and Hickman (2007) all believe that drawings have the potential to reveal emotions or experience in ways that conversation and other forms of data may not. The drawings these students generated became a powerful confirmation of elements of their conversations, but they also frequently drew attention to new elements that might not have been noticed without the visual representation. At times, participant interpretations were also necessary to understand individual artistic choices fully. For example, Tatum's depiction of question marks discussed in this chapter and Shelly's drawing of the broken compass explored in Chapter 9 required significant clarification in order for others (including me) to understand.

### **Colleen's Poems**

Colleen decided to challenge herself during this project to explore poetry, "because I'm terrible at poems" (ID, SG, p. 14). In effect, she created her own challenge of exploring her relationship to poetry when she wrote three poems, one in each cycle, and both her initial and final drawings related to poetry. Her initial drawing illustrated her questions and uncertainty surrounding the genre.



**Figure 1: Colleen D1**

Text: Story Project... Once upon a time in a land far far away there lived a p...who was handsome came and saved her from the very evil...Poetry Project

While Colleen's drawing was not cryptic and remained relatively straightforward, she did reveal in her interpretation that she felt others could write poetry, but she could not. She noted that at least with stories she was just better at it and that, when it came to poetry, "I just don't know what to do" (ID, SG, p. 2). While the story project is marked by the very generic opening deeply familiar to students of 'Once upon a time...', the poetry project has no such starter form that easily frames the writer's directions and decisions, or even indicates that there is a poem in the making. It all seemed a mystery, as signaled by the blank page and the question marks above "Poetry Project."

Colleen both claimed and distanced herself from the characters in her drawing. Initially, in her small group conversation, she used 'I' to refer to the figure, but later on created more distance by using the female pronoun 'she' in her statement "there is a pencil, she just finished writing the page, there's a pencil right there" (ID, SG, p. 9). Colleen, working from the prompt to illustrate herself as inspired and uninspired, noted that each of the characters had a pencil poised near the paper, but the difference lay in the character's state of completion. Where her story character was finished creating, the poetry character's page was blank,

revealing questions and uncertainty. Interestingly, each time her gaze was focused on the page with a blank head that is not transparent turned away from the viewer.

Narrative is highly privileged in classrooms and therefore becomes a comfortable form for students. Teachers, while less frequently writers, are often narrative readers; therefore, the less common genres such as poetry tend to receive less curricular time. Apol (2002) notes that many of the ELA teachers she works with hate poetry and therefore save it for the end of the year in the hope that they will run out of time. There were no genre requirements in the study and while others consciously avoided genres with which they were uncomfortable, Colleen adopted the stance that this was a good time to explore and practice. Perhaps no marks and freedom to choose were liberating for her. She only wrote poetry for each of the three cycles. Colleen's belief that she was better at stories was probably a result of her years of experience with both her own and professionally authored stories.

Colleen's first poem *The Hill* follows:

### **The Hill**

As I lay on the green, green grass of the hill,  
I think about life, staying very, very still  
I try to relieve stress and become care free,  
So I sing softly a little melody  
Freeing my mind and forgetting everything  
Becomes easier as I continue to sing  
I breathe in the fresh air as I watch children play  
My troubles have now been left for another day

In her reflection on *The Hill*, she repeatedly commented on the idea that for once she had written a good poem. For her, a good poem appeared to have to have end-rhyme, and her most interesting rhymes comes with “free” and “melody”. While she did not draw attention in discussion to her use of assonance such as the use of ‘ee’ in “green, softly, freeing, easier and breathe,” this contributed effectively to the rhythm. She

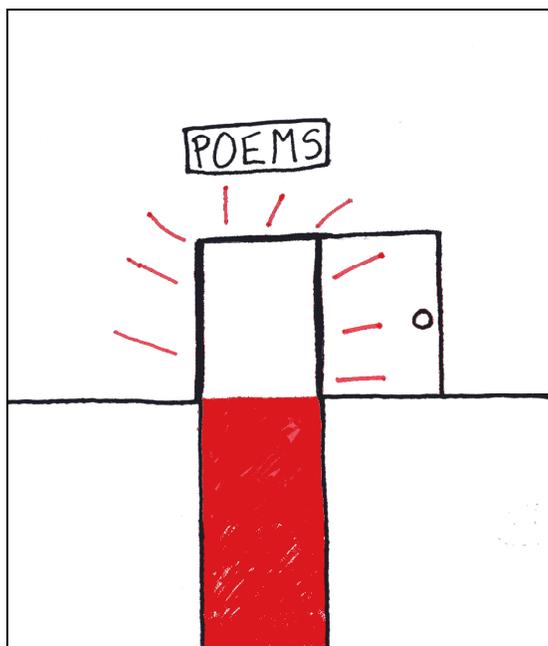
used her first draft to gather ideas and find rhyming words. She believed her poems were better when *she* decided to write them, as opposed to being forced.

Her second poem started with a photograph of her eleven-year-old autistic cousin kissing her. Although initially she thought about writing a story or descriptive paragraph focused on her cousin, she found herself drawn back to poetry. She used the picture as a springboard to write a poem advocating the acceptance of difference through the modelling of love personified through her cousin's relationships with others and her ability to learn from someone who, in her eyes, models perfection. She hoped that the poem could teach acceptance to other teens whom she saw as being judgmental and cruel to anyone who was different.

In this poem, *Model Perfection* (see Appendix B), she played with rhyme scheme, using an abcb, defe pattern. "So I was trying to get it to rhyme in only certain places, and make it work. I had to switch a lot of lines around" (C2 S2, SG, p. 22). She also revealed a conscious effort to control the rhythm of the lines. This manipulation of pattern revealed growing sophistication and confidence as she experimented. When she read her first draft to her small group, she was audibly choked up by the words she had written, both because of pride in her work and the tenderness she felt for the subject.

In cycle three, Colleen was stumped for an idea. After hearing Tatum's story about a grade one birthday party, one where most of her female classmates were in attendance, Colleen decided to write a poem about these enduring friendships on the brink of change as they enter high school. Her poem subject matter resulted directly from her conversations with group members. The time of year, early June, also factored into Colleen's choices as she had begun to reflect on the closeness of her class that had been together for nine years. Their entrance into high school courses and out of French Immersion would force changes that they may or may not be ready for.

Colleen was very proud of her poem, *Model Perfection*. She found her own motivation for writing the poem about her cousin. For her, the most important factor for writing was her motivation and she commented that students who do not know what to write are “probably not going to write very well” (PC, p. 7) or that their emotional state may impact their writing in unintended ways. While Colleen saw the need at times for both freedom and constraints in writing, she believed that if structure had been imposed, “I wouldn’t have been able to write the poem because that might not have been the assignment” (PC, p. 3). She differentiated between ‘growing’ as a writer because of experience, risks and time, and ‘getting better,’ which she defined as developing technical skills and refining them. She was a different writer in grade nine from the one she had been in grade six. Another attribute she felt was critical was confidence, which she thought had grown over the course of the project. She suggested that students who believed they could not write were likely to be unproductive, whether from a lack of effort, motivation, confidence or fear.



**Figure 2: Colleen D2**  
Text: POEMS

Colleen's greatest insight about her writing was illustrated in her final drawing of the door of poetry now opening for her with radiance and a red carpet leading the way into the experience. Perhaps her shift from the scale of an entire genre of poetry to poems made the writing seem possible.

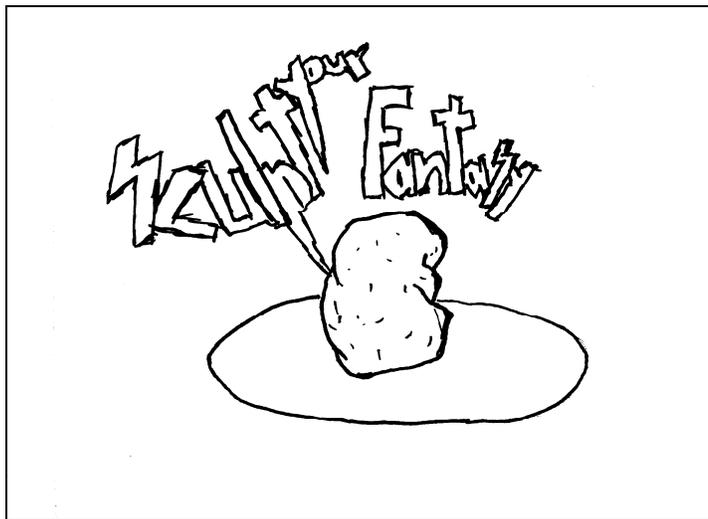
Colleen believed that "before this assignment, generally when given, like, a poem assignment or something, they were usually really awful but then, when I had the opportunity to pick it myself, I found that it turned out really well. So it opened a new door for me, I guess" (C3 S3, WG, p. 21). Colleen's new confidence with the genre of poetry enabled her to approach her final regular class work, a poetry project, without trepidation and she stopped avoiding poetry. For her, the freedom from constraints within this project allowed her writing to be more heartfelt, less directed.

For Ms Harris' final class project on poetry, students were given the choice to include one poem, if they had written one, from the research project and then they had a prescribed series of other choices to complete. Colleen felt "a little better about the ones that I wrote there" (PC, p. 2) as she had managed to write a decent one for the assignment.

How did the initial drawing activity reflect Colleen's participation? Colleen was the only student in the project to tackle a specific writing concern *she* had identified. She used the freedom within the project to reduce her fear of a genre, practice a skill and increase her confidence. While I doubt she intended consciously to focus only on poetry, the act of drawing her struggle seemed to direct her energy in a very productive way. Was she in effect using the project to research her own fears and perceived weaknesses? In the end, I believe Colleen was one of the few who used the project for her own purposes and I would like to believe gained from it, at least in the area of confidence. Perhaps, for Colleen, the drawing activity may have sparked her own intentions, her own purpose and, in effect, her own research agenda.

## Aden's Hidden Processes

Aden responded to the prompt “what writing means to you” with a visual metaphor of sculpting clay. In his initial drawing, entitled “Sculpt your Fantasy,” there was very little detail. The clay had no form, as yet, and had not become the potential statue (Aden’s choice of word). For Aden, the most important or best writing he did was connected to imaginative writing or fantasy. He preferred writing stories over essays because he perceived the latter as a less imaginative genre. In Aden’s perception, autobiographical writing was not imaginative; it was the stuff of truth not of fantasy. Perhaps this became part of the reason he never really found a purpose for his writing during the project.



**Figure 3: Aden D1**

Text: Sculpt your Fantasy

His idea was simple. “You have all the tools, which is the big lump of clay, and have to use those tools to make what you’re trying to say” (ID, SG, p. 2). He elected to elaborate very little on his metaphor and it remained significantly underdeveloped. He referred to the tools being the clay, but made no reference as to how the clay was a tool. Is it the raw idea, the words, the assignment? While Aden did not address this aspect of his drawing, it appears that the “p” in “Sculpt” may be a tool acting upon the clay. Upon reflection, Aden suggested that, “The assignment was kind

of a big hunk of clay that a teacher gave you or something like that...and you had to make your own picture out of it” (PC, p. 1). Just as a statue or a sculpture can carry multiple meanings, so too can a piece of writing.

What I find significant in this picture is what was absent. The writer (he) is not represented. There are no tools visible, outside of the possible ‘p’, no person to shape the clay or to craft the decisions of writing. In some ways, his drawing seemed to reflect his resistance to planning and drafting discussed in the previous chapter. Even in his artistic representation of writing, he held back how something was to be made into something else. The transformation of the clay would be done outside of the viewer’s knowledge and was not necessary in order to understand the writing or the image for what it was in its final state. His processes were private.

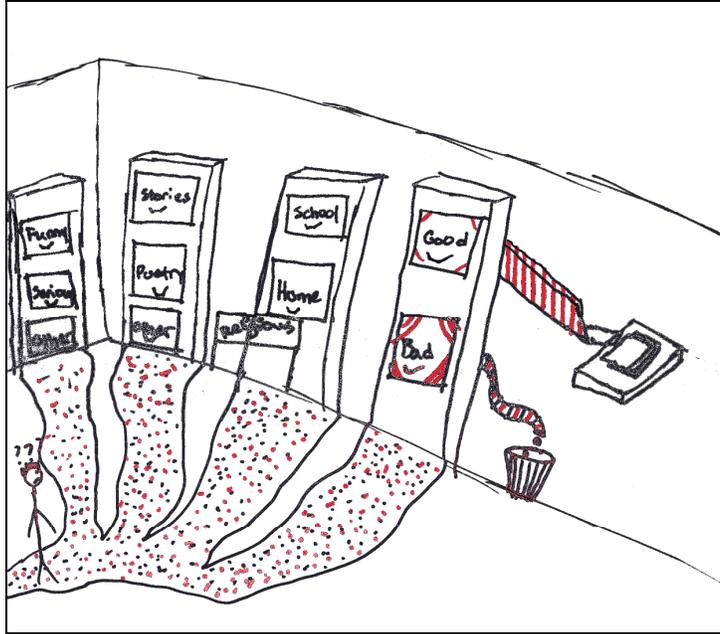
One of his hidden tools finally bore articulation and came to light in the last four minutes of our private conversation immediately following his mother’s knock at the door. I believe her unscheduled entrance prompted him to reveal an element of his process that he otherwise would not have thought to tell me. He had an elaborate system of family audiences, where each person’s particular strengths were used to develop his writing. He described how he used his mother’s creativity, his father’s organization and his little brother for clarity and perspective.

Mom always thinks of a different way of saying something. Whenever I come to her with an assignment, the first thing she says is, ‘what is one way you could do it that nobody else will do?’ That’s pretty much the way she thinks. Dad, of course, comes in after, he’s kind of like the organization person, so he says if it’s kind of wandering off a bit here or there or if Mom hasn’t caught it. Then my brother kind of looks at it from his point of view, ‘cause he’s younger. It’d be nice if I could get somebody his age to understand the writing and also somebody my mom’s age or my dad’s age to understand my writing, so... (PC, p. 15)

Aden’s comments reflected knowledge of the rhetorical situation, in particular of audience and organization. He believed it was desirable for

a range of audiences to find his writing accessible. However, most of the strategies he mentioned, often without elaboration, remained invisible to me during the course of the study, as well as invisible to Ms Harris over the course of the year (as evidenced by comments directed at Aden to complete the planning, take the notes or develop a draft that was being requested). I do not believe process theorists intended that all processes an individual employed need to be transparent; but without transparency, signposts of webbing, outlining, drafting and other manifestations of process, it becomes difficult for a teacher to intervene and assist a student whose strategies are not generating the quality of writing desired either by the teacher or the student.

Aden's statement that his mother encouraged him to find approaches or angles that others would not sheds insight into his strong preference to push an assignment's boundaries. He had internalized this influence and positioned originality and creativity at the heart of his personal decisions about writing. Aden, in everyday class assignments, wrote out of the box. He got the most satisfaction out of avoiding the box the assignment placed him in. While his initial drawing reflected a sense of freedom, potential and fantasy, his final drawing became a school answer to what the writing project required of him.



**Figure 4: Aden D2**

Text: Funny, Serious, Other...Stories, Poetry, Other...School, Home, Religious...Good, Bad

He moved from the sculpting fantasy (with him as an absent Michelangelo?) to a system of filing cabinets, perhaps a system he resisted or rejected as represented to ‘please the teacher,’ something he had been required to do in the past. The stick figure character in Aden’s drawing appeared confused by all his choices and the broadness of the assignment. In some ways, this drawing seems counterintuitive to the goals of pushing the boundaries and stretching the rules that Aden set for his writing. For him, the filing cabinets represented “the process of writing something” (C3 S3, WG, p. 21). While he saw the two drawings as related, I wonder.

Aden: This one, I guess, kind of relates to the clay one, really, it’s just looking at it in a different way. Like you gave us kind of a broad topic, so first off you have to decide what your tone is going to be, what your voice is, and what you’re going to look at it as, or write as. They’re not really in order here but just kind of what you want to write it as, like a story or a poem or another thing. Then pretty much you, if you write for yourself or you write for school. And then pretty much after all that you decide, if it’s good or bad and if it’s bad you throw it out of your mind really, and then if it’s good you keep it, stuff like that. So that’s pretty much what I was saying, and the guy right here is trying to decide.

Susan: Um hmm. Do you see writing as occurring in a specific order all the time, or...?

Aden: Ah, not really, I guess I have some type of criteria, some pattern that I use, but it's not really fixed in one certain spot, like I don't really just always decide at first what I'm going to write it as. I sometimes try to get the idea then I try to see if it's a funny idea or not, and then I decide what can I write it as, what would it be the best as or other times I just, we have an assignment and you say what would it be best as or easiest to write as, so I guess this is kind of the way I would think of, of it as I make a writing thing, assignment. But it's not so organized, it's not set in stone. (PC, p. 2)

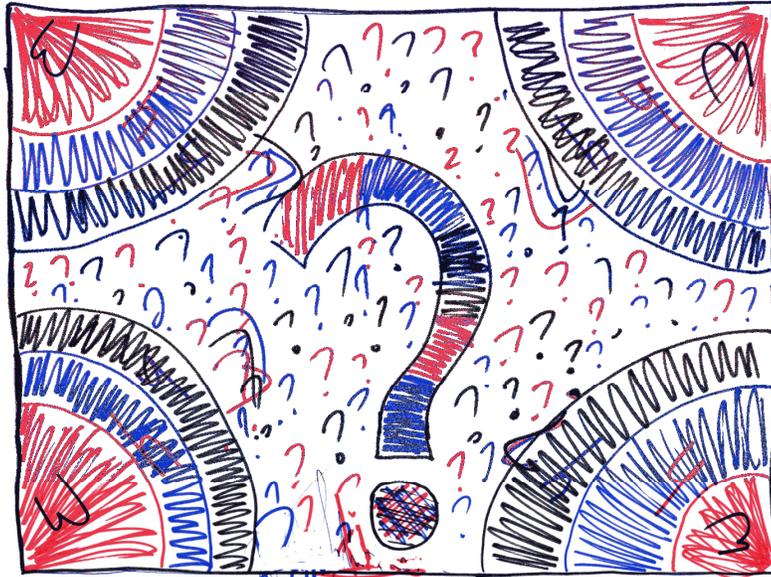
Aden's "Sculpt your Fantasy" has little to do with autobiographical writing; in fact, fantasy seems in opposition to autobiography and the truth. Perhaps if his first drawing is representative of his interests in writing then this project would have been too uninteresting, too mundane. When I look at the imagination of his first drawing versus the convention and order of his second drawing, I am left wondering if he generated the second in an effort to please the teacher/researcher. Further, as with Colleen, there is a tension between the represented character and Aden, where in the first paragraph of the preceding excerpt he created distance with the pronouns of 'you' and 'the guy,' while in the second turn he used the pronoun 'I' but explored several elements from his drawing in relation to his process. It seemed as though his drawing did not fit him very well. Was he trying to articulate his knowledge of writing in a form that would please me and provide insight into at least some of the decisions he faced when writing? He outlined tone, genre and audience as important considerations, but each filing cabinet drawer is closed and the processes of selection as well as the products are inside. Was he trying to invent the processes he believed I expected to see? The last pair of cabinets of good/bad reflects a different scheme of categorization: and they are the two drawers that have an output, either printing or the wastepaper basket.

He even appeared to feel trapped by the organization of the drawing, the linear steps of the filing cabinets in sequence and he resisted

being positioned into a linear approach or organization. In the end, did the project make him feel distant from his desire to use imagination, or to do things differently than everyone else? Did the project demand that he conform and therefore reveal his processes, even if in a minor way?

### **Writing a Mystery to Tatum**

In this section, Tatum's initial drawing appears to reveal significantly more about her writing process than her final drawing. At the outset, I did not really understand Tatum's first drawing and its relationship to her writing processes, but, as Kearney and Hyle (2004) suggest, it offered a 'succinct representation' of Tatum's experience that required her interpretation. As my understanding of Tatum's relationship with writing grew over the course of the project and the writing of the research, I came to realize the profound nature of the drawing in relation to how Tatum experienced writing in the classroom. Weber and Mitchell (1996) also make connections to elusive and ineffable meanings not easily explored through written or spoken words. Tatum's mystery was, at the beginning, an unclear, somewhat subconscious idea about her writing processes that as time, data, and repetition occurred, became clearer.



**Figure 5: Tatum D1**

Text: Why (placed in the four corners)

The picture is filled with colour: red, blue and black. It appears chaotic and yet reveals strong patterns and repetition. The question mark, the colours, the shapes and the organization are all repeated; so were her writing behaviours that appeared at first to make no sense. Interestingly, neither a writer nor the act of writing were depicted, a theme that eventually became apparent. As I looked deeper at her engrained patterns of behaviour, which frequently frustrated Ms Harris, I developed a far greater empathy for Tatum. Her use of the question mark and the repeated use of the word “why” hidden in the corner rings is implied in her immediate explanation to classmates of how writing made her feel.

What my picture is about, is, when I, like, when people tell me to start writing, I get all confused and, like, dizzy and I always think about, like, when do I have to finish this by? What am I gonna write about? Like, I don't have an idea, and I get all confused and, like, in my head, like, it just pops in that it, like, its blue, red and black just pop into my head. I just start, like, thinking and it gets all crazy when people ask me to write. And so I just kinda get dizzy and I don't really like to write. If they, like, tell me to just to do this and whatever, it takes time for me to think of what I want to do. Like, for when we did our graphic essay, I had such a hard time trying to pick my topic because I had something all planned out for heroism except for, she said,

don't pick heroism, so I kinda got, like, crazed and like...  
yeah. (ID, SG, p. 1)

Writing was a mystery to Tatum; it made her dizzy. She wrote like she talked. It was often disjointed, unclear and scattered, with very little detail or development. Her tendency to change topic with every draft rather than revise made everything into a first draft. She hated to write on the computer because, historically, she felt that the comments made by teachers indicated her rough draft was better. Her concerns were serious in that she believed that the ease of revision on the computer caused her to make poor choices. She saw this tool as the problem with her writing, not her own decisions regarding using that tool.

Tatum: I hate the computer when I write because I'll be trying to type and then I'll be, like, looking at my story and then I'll change it when I'm on the computer, so I need to just, like, have the paper and then just, like, do my revisions on it and then just, like, recopy it down... sometimes I'm, like, 'Mom, can you type this up for me?'" because I just, I feel like I'm gonna change the story if I'm on the computer so...

Ms Bowsfield: Why would that be bad?

Tatum: Well, 'cause usually when I change, I have, like, a really good story when I have it on paper but then when I go to the computer, I'm, like, oh well, this could be better and I start writing, start typing something else and then it'll just get worse and worse and worse 'cause we have to bring our rough copy and our good copy and Mrs. H, like, sometimes she leaves a comment on my good copy or my rough copy. She's like, 'This was really good... you should have kept to, like, this part and blah, blah, blah,' and then, like, that's where she's, like, 'Why would you bring, like, why'd you bring this mom in if she's not really important to the story?' and then she'll go, 'Why did you change this part from the first part and I think your rough copy's better than the other part,' and so...

Ms Bowsfield: Oh, that's interesting. So, so your revisions aren't doing what you want them to do? You're adding in details that are irrelevant, instead of staying focused on what you're...

Tatum: Yeah, 'cause then when I try adding in details, it's like bad details, bad. And then when I don't put in

details, it's, I already have enough in there and sometimes you just put too much icing on the cake, if I put too much details in there. (PC, p. 9-10)

For Tatum, the computer made changing one's ideas and writing too easy. The revision choices she made rarely improved her writing because she got distracted by, perhaps dizzy with, irrelevant details. She had taken to producing only one draft of a piece of writing, even though she believed she worked through a revision process. Frequently, she switched topics, if not completely, then significantly, between drafting and revision. This strategy limited her exposure to criticism, such as that an original draft might have been more focused. Over the course of the research, I never saw a piece of writing that underwent a revision process because her main strategy was to just change topics. Because her changes tended to yield negative comments, she did not see much value in revision or could not cope with it, only editing.

For example, in cycle one, Tatum's initial idea for her writing, during the peer revision session, focused on a rock in a fast running river near where her family took quadding vacations (using an All-Terrain Vehicle). She related an interesting story about the rock that was affectionately named "Tatum's Rock". After a hard day of riding, the crew would head to the river to bathe. She described holding onto the rock while diving under the water to let the current do its work of rinsing away the soap. The anecdote of a place that was important to her painted a clear picture of a place in harmony and a family in unison. This story, transmitted orally, was far more detailed than the story she committed to paper and read later during the session.

Tatum: It (The idea) just came from, like, just being there all the time, and just loving quadding. My map contributes to my writing a lot, because this is the main place that we always go and my writing is mostly just about my rock, called Tatum's Rock. (Giggle) 'Cause when we went after quadding like, we'd be, like, black from dirt so we'd go to the river and that's, like, our shower and bath. So we'd have to, um, since the current

was way too strong, you couldn't stand in it, you could, but it's really, really hard. So you'd have to grab onto a rock, or sit, like, put your bum...

Ms Bowsfield: ...with the water flowing?

Tatum: Yeah, like with the water flowing there, you'd like sit before to put your, like, feet on top of it, and lay back. Like, all of the girls, my mom, Mrs. C, but just, like, the parents, they would all sit on the rock, and just lean back and wash themselves, like a bath. And all the kids, all that we would do is just grab onto a rock and hold yourself there, like, put all the shampoo and then just dive under, and then you're done for the day because you didn't have to wash it out or anything because the current was too strong. And, like, I just remember there's all this, like, rapids there and you go um... rapid riding with...on a tube. And it didn't really go quite successful as I thought it would 'cause we went five kilometers down river, and then we fell off a waterfall. (C1 S2, SG, p. 11)

Tatum's telling wandered around the subjects of quadding, bathing and rapids. Even in the telling of the story, she struggled to develop connections between the details she presented. She needed explicit coaching to focus her ideas through vibrant and interesting detail that supported, directed and advanced her main theme of bathing at the rock.

Towards the end of our revision conversation, Tatum asked if she could switch stories because she was not happy with her rock story. She read her written version of her river story and outlined her second story, which was of her mom and herself hitting a stop sign with the quad. Both her written version of the river and her stop-sign story contained few details and no real focus or purpose. Neither story painted a picture of this favorite place she had previously described. Tatum never handed in either of the stories that she had shared with her classmates in planning.

Tatum: Okay. Um, every summer my family and I go to a place called Cadomin, um, we also go with a different family, um, the C's. Um, my favorite spot is McLeod River, and that's where I spend the most time. I would sit in the river in one spot, the rock. The spot was named after me, called Tatum's Rock, that's the place

where I would bathe. That's mostly all I can really say about it. (Reading her written text)

Ms Bowsfield: When you talked about jumping into the river after the day of quadding, to me those are all the details that are missing from this.

Tatum: Yeah. I have way more details with the stop sign, more than the... bath, about one thing.

Ms Bowsfield: Okay, so what, what's the story you'd like to tell about the stop sign?

Tatum: When we were quadding, we were just coming back home from a seven hour quad ride and um, we were riding with me and my mom and there's, everybody was waiting... 'cause we were always so slow... and a truck came up after we were coming around the corner and my mom made the mistake of pressing the front brakes instead of the back brakes, and we skidded and we ran into the ditch and hit a stop sign. My mom got pinned between the sign and the quad and I just, I jumped off the quad 'cause I'm smart like that. (C1 S2, SG, p. 14)

Tatum did not translate the oral telling of either story into any written substance. While her oral stories contained interesting details, her actual writing was severely limited in this regard. She felt her river story had too many ideas in it. Perhaps she was mistaking detail for ideas. She wanted to keep her story narrow and thought the stop-sign story better accomplished that goal. However, even her retelling of the event was pale in comparison with her rock story.

All too often a pattern of behaviour, by the very nature of a pattern, does not reveal itself in time to make a difference. Reflecting back, I could have helped Tatum see the potential unity of her original story as a place her family returned to frequently, as a place fondly named for her, and as a place of peace and rest after a day of noise and motion. All these details had the potential to coalesce into a family memory recognizable to any one of her friends and family who traveled with them on these trips. However, at the time, this was my first encounter with Tatum's writing and her pattern of avoiding both writing, to some degree, and revision completely was not noticeable to me, yet.

In cycle three, Ms Harris informed me, “Tatum was gonna quit” (C1 S2, D, p. 46). Ms Harris connected Tatum’s desire to three things: laziness, lack of ideas and immaturity. In a conversation prior to class, Tatum had suggested she wanted to be with the third group, the group she believed did not have to do anything. The following is Ms Harris’ interpretation of Tatum’s desires.

Natasha: She was still questioning it and I said; you know I can’t tell you what to do, I certainly can’t tell you that you can’t quit, but I think that it was just a notion, it was like an avoidance thing, really...I can’t get an idea so, I think I’ll just quit. And now I think she’s back in firmly because she loves what she wrote.

Susan: So writing is fickle too, right, you’re in, when it’s working...

Natasha: That’s right.

Susan: You’re lovin’, it and when it’s not, you’re hating it.  
(C1 S2, D, p. 47)

In the last cycle, Tatum generated a grade-one birthday party story that did, for the most part, remain unified and focused with significant details. She felt success and expressed it in the drawing. Even Tatum’s final drawing followed her pattern of shifting topics. She abandons the storyline that writing is difficult and dizzying for the new and improved love affair with writing with no boundaries.



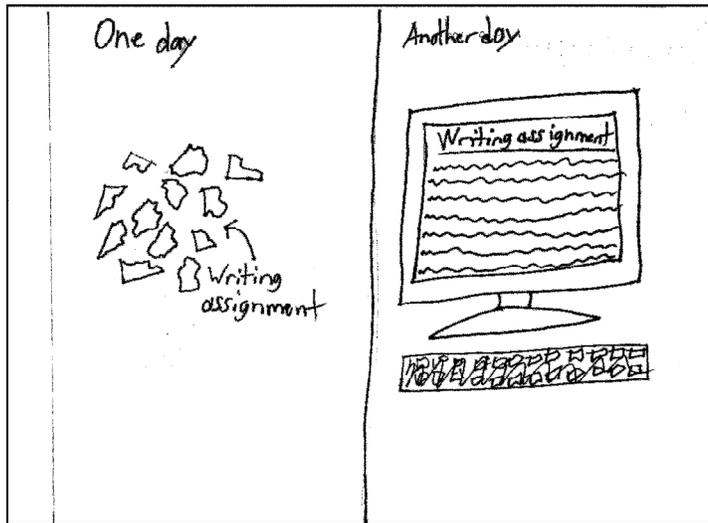
**Figure 6: Tatum D2**

Text: hate telling us what to write...love writing when there is no boundary's

This drawing is typical of Tatum's behaviour, she switches out the old story in order to write a new one that had never been seen before and therefore could not easily be critiqued. However, I am not convinced that writing was any less a mystery to Tatum at the end of the project. She will need more time to reframe her understanding of writing process and how it links to the computer and to successful texts. Perhaps if she continues to explore why writing is dizzying, she will find a footing.

I am left to wonder where in Tatum's experience she developed this connection between revision and the computer. Was it one incident or many? One teacher's comment or many? One year of instruction or several? Tatum's internalized writing processes are deeply entrenched. She has decided that the computer has ruined her stories. The tool she employed became her reason for limited success and for why writing remained a mystery. Students enter each classroom experience with a set of strategies, beliefs and processes already in place. They are not empty slates ready for each new writing experience. The past has affected them, shaped their writing process in ways that they may not even understand or know. The exploration of their stories of writing may reopen old patterns or beliefs that are not serving the student well. Taking the time to untangle Tatum's behaviour from her beliefs could serve two purposes. First, it generated empathy for me while Ms Harris had often only felt frustration in relation to Tatum's writing behaviour. Secondly, but not attempted during this study, it could create the space to untangle and reframe how Tatum views writing and the role of the computer in her process.

## Kenton's Environment



**Figure 7: Kenton D2**

Text: One day, writing assignment...Another day, writing assignment

Kenton had been absent for the first drawing, but when asked to draw his emotional response to writing in general, or this experience specifically, he adopted a framework from the initial drawing. While he directly claimed how the drawing represented him, he had not shown himself in the drawing. He wondered how mood affected his ability to write, but he had never explored which moods contributed to more successful writing experiences. Kenton enjoyed working in third person, liked when he was marked on voice and sought ways to inject humour into his work. Wanting the most help during idea generation, Kenton did not find subsequent feedback particularly useful. He had three key pieces of meta-cognitive knowledge about himself: first, he knew he needed deadlines and pressure to force his thinking out of his head and on to the page; second, he needed to be creative within the constraints of an assignment in order to be original; and third, the computer was a useful tool for revision.

In his drawing, he juxtaposed unsuccessful writing on paper alongside successful writing on the computer. Where the handwritten paper was crumpled and torn, the computer screen was filled with text.

I was just noticing how some days I can write easily and I can do well and other days I can't write anything. I have a total writer's block. And I find that on the computer, I work better on the computer. And a lot of it is the environment that I'm working in. (PC, p. 1)

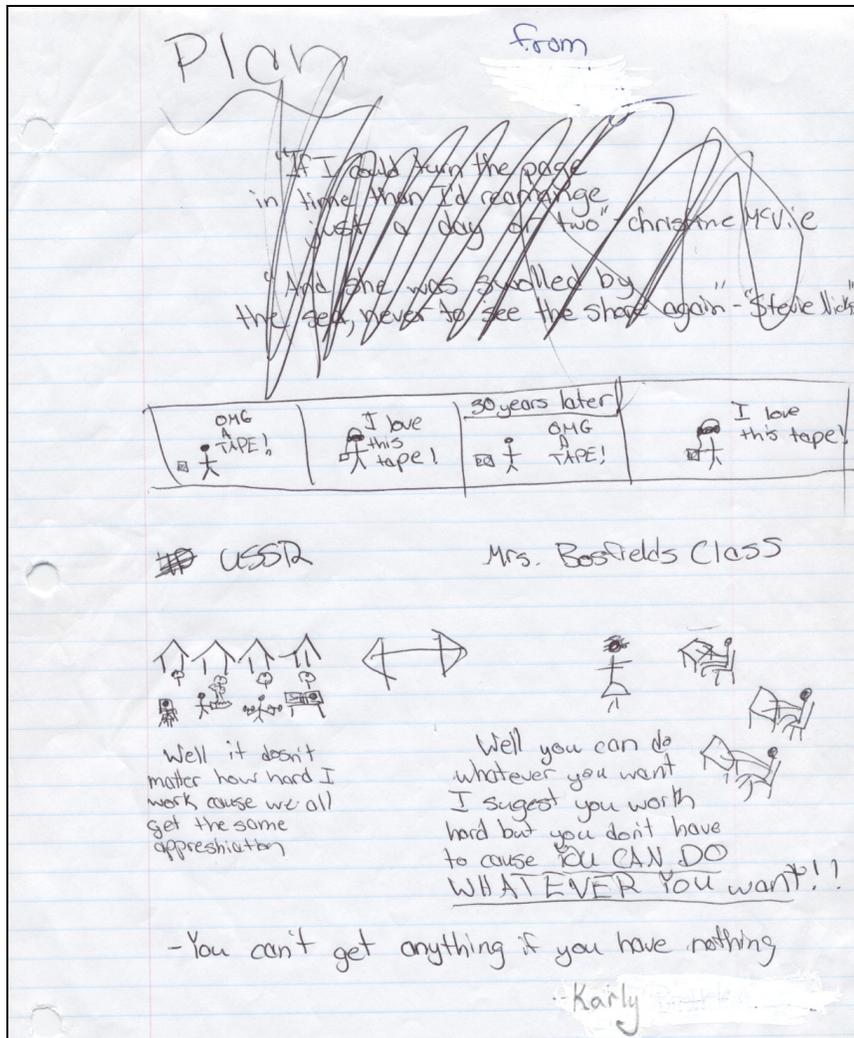
His observation that productivity was linked to environment could be useful knowledge to a writer in the future. However, at this point, the environment posed a problem for Kenton at Stabler school, since daily or even regular access to computers was impossible. He preferred writing on the computer and his preference then required that he work at home, where life tended to distract him. He was well known to his teachers for turning in late assignments. While he had embraced technology and was capable of using it to his advantage for composing and revising his writing, school had not made his preference available on a daily basis.

### **Karly's Road to Writing**

Although Ms Harris felt Karly would be a perfect fit for the study with her insight and creativity, Karly chose not to participate, until she got so angry at both the study and at me that she changed her mind. Her initial decision not to participate had two unintended consequences: the first, resentment and anger that the project was a waste of her time and the second, ironically, that her anger and resentment led to powerful and effective writing that served *her* purposes. After drafting her hate letter (for lack of a better term), Karly added herself into the study so her frustrations could be heard. This was the official start of her involvement. From there, I worked backward to collect data. In this section, I explore Karly's response to the project through her drawings, while in the next chapter, Karly's resistance to the study and what she later believed she learned about herself becomes the focus.

The first piece discussed here was self-sponsored and a part of Karly's cycle-three planning. When she created this artifact, she was not participating in the study and could have no expectation that I would see her work. Perhaps that created a sense of freedom truly to represent her frustration. Karly joined the study immediately after showing me how she invoked an insult (in her perception) to the research project by comparing it, in effectively a political cartoon, with the communist USSR. In her eyes, workers [students] had no motivation to do better and therefore did not need to improve, because there was no appreciation. I also include the 'hate letter' viewed as an artifact for its visual impact. It reappears in the found play in Chapter 8.

These two pages were all part of her cycle-three writing experience and were created together, as a unity expressing her emotion. The third artifact was the final drawing of the study which occurred two days after the initial set of artifacts. The three artifacts viewed individually contain insights, but they are even more informative when they are positioned together in sequence to reveal thematically how deeply engrained Karly's need for reward was in her motivation or lack of it. For that reason, I discuss elements of each artifact immediately, while drawing some inferences of the whole set early and then later briefly explore them as a collection through the patterns and themes developed across the three.



**Figure 8: Karly C3**

Self-sponsored drawing text: Plan...from Karly...

“If I could turn the page in time then I’d rearrange just a day or two” – Christine McVie... “And she was swolled by the sea, never to see the shore again” – “Stevie Nicks”...

OMG a TAPE!... I love this tape!... 30 years later... OMG a TAPE! I love this tape!...

USSR... MRS. Bosfield’s class... Well it doesn’t matter how hard I work ----- we all get the same appreshiation... Well you can do whatever you want I sugest you work hard but you don’t have to cause YOU CAN DO WHATEVER YOU want!!...

You can’t get anything if you have nothing – Karly

The first artifact contains song lyrics, two distinct drawings in series and extensive text. The first half of the page worked together and explored her interest in music, while the second half of the page exposed her frustration and was directed at the research project, specifically me. Previously I discussed how Karly combined colour, drawing and text in

planning and I believe these artifacts are representations of this style of planning.

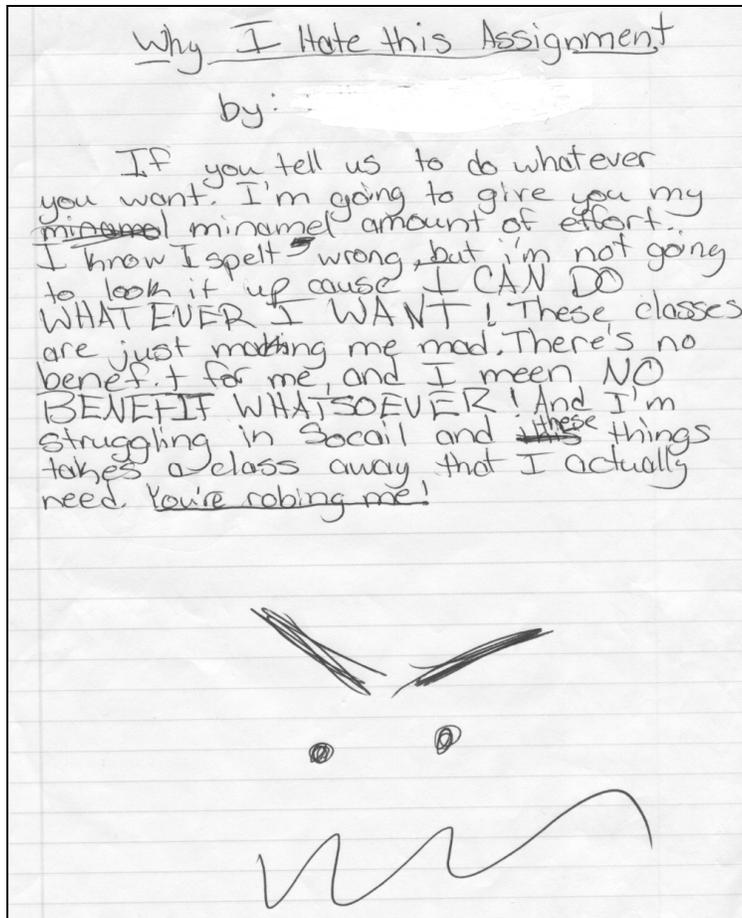
Beyond the salient cartoon, there is an intricate blend of popular culture, cartooning and intertextuality that cleverly could meet her assignment requirements. It appears she attempted to plan and record brief lyric quotations attributed to appropriate artists (and one to herself), but rejected them by crossing them out. In retrospect, coaching Karly on the use of quotations as thematic organizers for writing could have let her use her knowledge of music and music's relation to her life to frame autobiographical stories. If she had chosen to develop the song lyrics, which days in time would she rearrange and why might have become an interesting access point into her world.

She moved down the page to a series of four panels, where she generated a parallel experience over the course of thirty years to explore her (assuming that she is the "I" in the panels) relationship to a particular tape. The layers of intertextuality generated several questions for me in relation to the first half of her page. Are there parallels regarding the audio-taping for the research and a musical tape (assumed due to the above use of song lyrics and other song or artist references), to which is she referring? Is she wondering how the research could impact her in the future? Does she wonder how music will play out in her life?

At the time of the study, the class was studying the former Soviet Union and communism and, by drawing on her social studies knowledge, she was synthesizing and evaluating simultaneously. Her caricature divided the story in two and labeled each area. The USSR side had four houses with characters immediately in front, engaged in activities such as painting, sawing, weight-lifting and resting. The other side, titled "Mrs. Bosfields Class," represented three students and me, the same number in her conversation group of non-participants. Each side contained text, which carried overtones of bitterness. On the USSR side, she wrote, "Well it doesn't matter how hard I work we all get the same appreciation"

(errors original). Does she represent herself as the resting/sleeping character? On the classroom side she wrote, “Well you can do what ever you want I sugest you work hard but you don’t have to cause YOU CAN DO WHAT EVER YOU want!!” (errors original). However, when Karly signs off the page similar to the artists above, she assigns significance to her work, the very work she suggested needed no effort. She used and subverted phrases I had used over the course of the project such as “whatever form you want,” “whatever genre suits what you want to write” and “whatever you wanted to write about.” This creates intertextuality between the project and her interpretation of my role as the teacher within the class.

Initially, her drawing/planning page, which overlaid her writing assignment, did not receive much direct attention, due to the emotional impact of her writing that follows. Further, she was not participating in the study when she showed me her writing and so there were no recorded conversations of her explaining or interpreting these self-sponsored drawings of her work in her small group. As well, at the time of her final conversation with me, I focused on her cycle-three writing as writing and did not attend to how the visual planning she had done was actually a very strong expression of her writing experience during the study.



**Figure 9: Karly C3**

Writing assignment: If you tell us to do whatever you want. I'm going to give you my minamel amount of effort. I know I spelt wrong, but i'm not going to look it up cause I CAN DO WHATEVER I WANT! These classes are making me mad. There's no benefit for me, and I MEEN NO BENEFIT WHATSOEVER! And I'm struggling in social and these things takes a class away that I actually need. You're robing me.

What follows is the story of my receiving the writing in order to reveal the emotional impact her writing had on me.

I finished my cycle three-revision session with Kenton, Avery and Dan in another room, where much of the conversation had centered around their collective lack of engagement with the study. When I reentered Ms Harris' classroom to debrief for the day, she prompted Karly with the following question: "Are you going to show your writing to Ms Bowsfield?"

At the time, I was standing near Karly and she immediately handed me her two-page assignment. I scanned the first page of planning and, in my 'teacherly' speedy way, moved on to read the next page where the assignment proper started. I read it with a gathering knot in my throat, the kind that gives emotion away. The power of

this text surprised and hurt me. I read it slowly, absorbing the venom spewing from the page. I struggled to say anything as I stood there, being accused of robbing her of her curricular time for something of no value. Crushed, I spoke briefly. My voice threatened to break and I knew I only had a few words before giving away how hurt I really was. So I selected the cruelest words I could think of: “It’s a shame I can’t use it.” I trumped her anger and her resentment by simply turning it into a text, one I could not use for research, a text therefore without the power to hurt, a text where I could ignore the message calculated to produce an effect.

To my initial regret, she responded, “You can.” But, I didn’t want it, it was too painful, struck too many fears and made me question what I was doing.

I started with the story of receiving this writing in order to position the artifact with its power. Karly had felt marginalized because she had elected not to participate in the study, but still needed to complete the writing we were doing. She did not feel appreciated, so in her own way she committed to the study in order to gain the appreciation she needed. I did not see this until I was able sit with and view the whole body of texts Karly created.

At the time, I needed to turn her anger into an artifact, so I could process what she was telling me. She meant to hurt me and, later in a conversation with other students, refers to her text as, “the one where I was mean to Ms Bowsfield” (C3 S3, WG, p. 14). Karly’s drawing of her visceral emotional response was “a more specific or direct route” (Kearney and Hyle, 2004, p. 362) to her anger and frustration, which then allowed her to express the idea in writing. She, too, had turned her emotional response into a text: the assignment. By focusing on the text and not the message of the text, Karly and I were able to continue a strained but cordial relationship.

Elbow (2000) notes that while teachers often speak of wanting “our students to develop some authority of voice, yet many of our practices have the effect of making students more timid and hesitant in

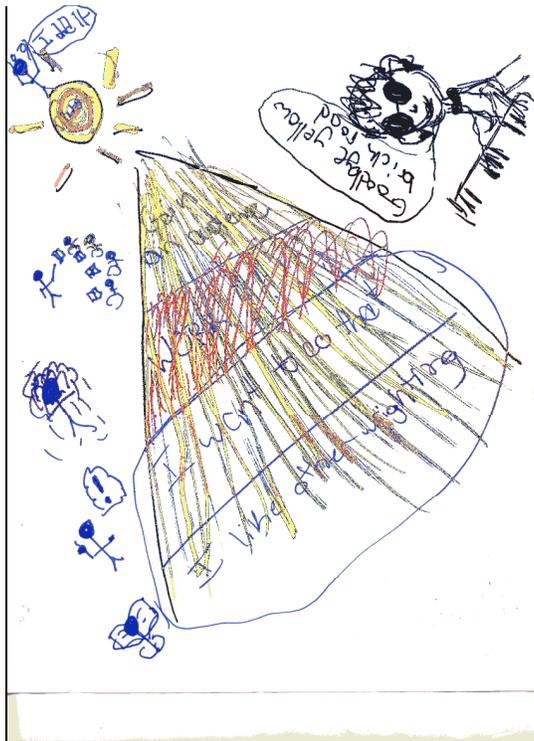
their writing” (p. 205). Karly found a voice to challenge authority and she did so with confidence and little hesitation. Perhaps that is a space I had unintentionally created. Karly directed her text at me through the first ‘you’ in the opening sentence. She identified an error that does not need correcting, because “I CAN DO WHATEVER I WANT!” Her use of all capitals within her two sentences created the effect of yelling. By repeating that she was not receiving benefit from these writing exercises, she pointedly attacked a hope I had expressed to the students that they would benefit from the project through both the experience and the meta-cognitive knowledge acquired about their writing processes. She then explained her frustration and provided insights into the social studies connections she had made by identifying that she was struggling in social studies.

Although Karly was not actually losing any social studies classes due to creative scheduling switches, the period this writing was generated in would normally have been her social studies class. Her final statement, underlined for emphasis, directly attacked me and, indirectly, the research. She punctuated her entire message with a drawing of an angry, frustrated character virtually the same size as her written text.

Over the course of the assignment she made two other spelling errors (meen and robing), attempted to correct a subject-verb agreement issue, and there was a capitalization error with i’m that she did not identify. While I am confident that she could have corrected the capitalization and the subject–verb agreement, I am less confident in her recognition of the other two spelling words. As I said earlier, the students’ French Immersion background often created spelling issues in English, which appear in handwritten work. However, the two words she misspelled were interesting in that they were both emphasized (all capitals and underlined) and were very significant words in her message. The word ‘mean,’ spelt correctly, could effectively serve two meanings. The first was the verb she had directed; the second, as an adjective to describe the

cruel intention behind the message. “Robbing” as an error takes on a humorous effect, when considered in her clincher statement, because it accidentally and ironically diffused some of the power behind her words. Perhaps considering the idea of robe, in the sense of dressing her, makes more sense in that this form and frame (the research) was not fitting her well.

Karly wrote with a purpose and she had her needs met by acquiring a place in the study, and she demanded to be heard. Her words stung, as she intended. They struck at my deepest fear that I was wasting students’ time. With hindsight, the research was not as valuable for the students as I had hoped. While some did clarify their personal understanding of writing process, or perhaps developed new understandings, this was not the norm and I was left with the question, “Was I robbing them?” This is an issue I will return to in Chapter 10.



**Figure 10: Karly D2**

Text (from bottom up as the road is traveled): I like other wrighting...I want to do that...WORK!!!!...Gain an audience...I did it...Goodbye yellow brick road

Karly's final drawing outlined the yellow brick road that writers must travel. The path a writer treads was a path Karly was unwilling to work too hard at, when she did not know what she was going to get out of the study or what her reward would be. Her representation of the yellow brick road to success contained five separate stages, the most important of which, to her, was reward.

By colouring the road to writing success in yellow, a colour not supplied for the drawing, she also indicated a more significant connection than her acknowledgement that she is really into Elton John right now. While Karly's invoking of Elton John's (1973) song *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* could simply follow her pre-established pattern of using songs and lyrics as a starting point for her work, I believe that Karly was calculated in the songs she selected and how they fit into her themes, whether or not I could see the full connection.

Karly had already demonstrated that she could accurately quote song lyrics, so I am making the assumption that she could here, too. While a line-by-line analysis of the song would not be overly productive, the haunting lines, "You know you can't hold me forever/ I didn't sign up with you/ I'm not a present for your friends to open/ This boy's too young to be singing the blues" (John, 1973) adds dimension to Karly's invoking of the song. She literally had not signed up with me for the research. Her knowledge and ideas were not presents for readers of this study and, in many ways, I was asking to hold onto her knowledge and ideas forever. She resisted being exposed, while at the same time craved acknowledgement and reward. The study was the only way for her to acquire that reward, for her voice and frustrations to be heard. Perhaps the reference to the song title "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road" was her way of saying goodbye to the project and the work of writing.

The road is Karly's metaphor for her process writing steps. She believed the first two steps on the road were easy enough and that they could be done in the mind. In those two steps, the writer reads other

authors and then has the epiphany that she would like to emulate them, an idea prevalent in Karly's beliefs about how a person learns to write. In the third stage, the writer must work hard and no one likes to work hard, hence the scribbled over red indicating a place many people, Karly in particular, get stopped. Once the hard work was completed, the author must seek an audience, then the reward follows. For Karly, the reward tended to be in the form of appreciation, acknowledgement and marks.

The character repeatedly depicted beside the road to writing began with reading and then had a great idea that she, too, may want to write. Karly was a strong and confident reader who frequently referenced authors and their effect on her; therefore, I believe she represented herself as the characters on the side. However, when she settled in to write, it became hard work. There was flurry and bluster, sweat and practice, "and nobody likes that step" (PC, p. 3). Emulation was an important step in that a writer would try to do what she saw others do. This was hard work: work to get started, find a fresh idea and work to judge its worthiness. The third step created internal conflict where the writer needed to determine if the writing was good and, once the writing was complete, the writer needed to acquire an audience. Finally, the reward was achieved. It could be inner satisfaction of "I did it!" or money, to win an award or to please an audience member. For every person the reward differed, but without the reward, people...she...would not complete the hard work. In retrospect, this was why Karly refused to participate in the study. She could see no personal reward. She saw my reward as a future Ph.D., but not hers.

Karly, of all the students, had the most complicated series of thematically linked artifacts. She used drawing with her planning to explore her anger. The act of linking the lack of appreciation she saw in communism to the lack of reward/appreciation for the writing she was being asked to create opened the space for her to explore her needs. The echoes between her planning page and writing are many: minimal amount of effort, references to social class and its content and the use of parallel

text. By the time she created her final drawing, she could fully articulate her need for reward and her inability to complete the hard work that it would have taken.

*Aside: Identification*

I wish to return briefly to the issue of identification of self within the drawings. As I said earlier, this was a complex element that was not straightforward in relation either to identification or to distancing. To that end, I created a chart of all students' oral interpretations and references to their drawings for analysis. However, here I present a brief three-person chart followed by a few interpretive observations and comments. My initial idea to include detailed transcript examples of all identification or distancing for each drawing was nine pages of text and did not seem efficient. Further, the complexity of the issue made the transcripts *wily*; within a turn of speaking, a student might make both identificatory and distancing statements or have significant information at both the beginning and the end that only made sense if the middle of the excerpt were maintained. Therefore, I elected to provide a condensed chart as an example of the process I worked through in order to make the claims I have in this and future chapters.

In general, surveying all personal comments and interpretations, Colleen, Dan, Diana, Kenton, and Tatum claimed their drawing depicted themselves. For me, this was the expected response, since each drawing activity explicitly asked a participant to draw their experience. However, Colleen, Kenton, and Tatum also claimed identification with images that did not represent a character or the act of writing. I did not position Diana's sad stick face in either the 'figure' or 'no figure' category. Both Karly and Aden used pronoun references to distance themselves from the drawing and the figure they drew. Finally, Avery, Adriana and Shelly both identified with and created distance between the characters in their drawings.

The following chart of three students, Avery, Aden, and Colleen, represents a range of identification that participants made with their drawings. I selected only a few statements and the quotations have been significantly excised for brevity with just the essential left to maintain the intent of the comment.

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Identify with human character or image in drawing</b>	<b>Distance from human character or image in drawing</b>
Colleen D1 Poetry and story project	I'm not very good at poetry and stuff like that. So, I just don't know what to do. And, when it's like a story, or like a paragraph... I don't know it just works better for me, for some reason. D1 WG	
D2 Open door to poetry (no person)	I found that it turned out really well so it kinda opened a new door for me I guess, so I like this assignment. D2 WG	
Aden D1 Sculpt (no person)		I said that writing is basically a big lump of clay...I was saying...you have all the tools, which is the big lump of clay. D1 SG
D2 File cabinets		I was trying to say that the wide topic you have a lot of choices to choose from...it can be a funny, serious or it can be something other...you have the genre to pick and then you know, for school or home and then ...you decide if it's good or bad or not, and... basically, just the process of writing something. D2 WG
Avery D1 Imagine	I just thought that writing is a way to express what's going on in your mind and lets you be creative with your thoughts. And so I just drew like a lot of fantasy kind of stuff. D1 PC	I just drew a guy laying down and he's thinking about what to write and a bunch of different stuff going on in his head 'cause that's what writing is...You think of a bunch of different stuff and then you pick one thing that you like to write about. D1 SG
D2 Writer's block	When there's no boundaries on writing it's really hard...that's when I get frustrated ...when I do get a good idea it flows really well and it's really easy to write D2 WG	

**Figure 11: Identification Table**

The students who identified with their drawings all tended to use “I” fairly consistently. Occasionally, a student who mostly identified with a drawing would switch to “you”. This tended to happen when students were explaining their drawing for the second time, to a second audience. For example, when Ms Harris arrived part way into a conversation, students would recap for her what had already been said. Aden uses both “I” and “you” but he does so in a different way from those who claim their drawings. When he refers to “I”, it is him as the drawer and what he was trying to represent; but when he refers to the character in his second drawing, he switches to “you”. The organization and pattern to writing he has implied through his drawing seems distant to him, perhaps even foreign. Avery’s act of distancing listed in the chart provides an example of the switch for a secondary audience. Shelly’s and Karly’s examples (provided later in their full portraits) created distance when they were being critical of the project. This allowed them, I feel, to soften the criticism and create deniability. The attributions students made seemed to be affected by the message in their interpretation, the audience they were speaking to and the difficulties their drawings may be addressing.

## **The Potential of Drawings**

The drawings students generated are part of their stories. Sometimes they extended the story, added detail and enriched it, as was the case with Colleen, while at others they shifted the story and redirected it into new areas, perhaps even those unnoticed by the illustrator, as in Karly’s and Aden’s cases. At times, the drawings worked together thematically to develop a student’s storyline (Colleen and Karly), while for others, like Aden and Tatum, one story was abandoned in favor of a new one. Student drawings had the potential to spotlight the individual’s preoccupation with writing in ways that his or her speech did not.

Colleen almost instantly focused on poetry. Her singular focus directed every writing event during the study, but I am not certain she planned to explore her relationship to poetry through the project. She never articulated a plan, but she never deviated from poetry, either. Aden, in conversation, could articulate his resistance to planning and drafting, and perhaps, by extension, to revealing his processes. His drawings both supported and extended this resistance by highlighting through omission the processes contained in his drawings. Tatum's relationship to writing was depicted as a mystery, and her writing behaviour often frustrated and confounded her desire to attain good marks. In ways, her initial drawing appeared, as Weber and Mitchell (1996) suggest, to capture, "the not-yet-thought-through, the subconscious" (p. 304) which was later illuminated through her patterns of behaviour. Kenton came to understand that environment and writing conditions are important for his success. Hickman's (2007) comment that drawing may "facilitate thinking, in the same way someone can talk themselves into understanding" (p. 316) connects to Karly's realization of her need for reward. Without drawing, Karly may not have made the direct connections between her emotions and her needs. The direct expression of anger in a less restricted medium made her anger in writing possible.

As a research methodology, arts-based research provided other modes of knowing: Eisner's (1993) use of 'representation' is useful here.

Representation, as I use the term, is not the mental representation discussed in cognitive science but, rather, the process of transforming the contents of consciousness into a public form so that they can be stabilized, inspected, edited, and shared with others. Representation is what confers a publicly social dimension to cognition. Since forms of representation differ, the kinds of experiences they make possible also differ. Different kinds of experience lead to different meanings, which, in turn, make different forms of understanding possible. (p. 6)

Early in school, students are asked to represent their cognition in writing, which develops one form of knowing. Here, students were asked

to represent their experience of writing (one form of knowing) in a different way and this made different forms of understanding about writing possible. In designing the study to include an arts-based research task, I had at least two intentions that I am now aware of. First, I wanted to provide students with a new experience in relation to writing that was not itself writing...one that might facilitate new understanding. This was a hopeful and 'teacherly' desire. It attempted to make space for them to story their understanding of themselves as writers in a potentially new way. The second, more directed toward research, was the desire to bring into focus how writing about writing is often the only means to understanding writing.

Earlier, I referenced Eisner's (2006) idea that an '*n* of 1' can be generalizable. Aden, Karly and Tatum became significantly more visible through their drawings. In the fast-paced improvisational world of teaching, the patterns and themes explored here cannot always be slowed down. Aden forced me to accept that, I think, many students do not value revealing their writing process and would prefer to keep them hidden. This becomes problematic when a student's writing fails to obtain the desired result. Tatum reminds me to look beyond the behaviour that does not make sense and try to figure out why a student repeats a pattern of behaviour that is not serving him or her well. Karly demanded to know how what I was trying to accomplish would benefit her, a right perhaps all students should demand, but are not always in a position to ask for.

While each student's story is particular, I hear echoes of former students in these conversations, I read familiar and distinct stories of people and place, family and home, and I see faint shadows of previous behaviour that has left me puzzled as a teacher wondering what else I might have missed, both then and now. It provides strategies for exploration in new situations. As a teacher and as a researcher, I need to listen for how stories of writing both reveal and conceal behaviour, conform to and reject certain processes, and both empower and dis-

empower the writer. To use drawing in the teaching and researching of writing alongside students' stories proved to be fruitful. As a teacher and a researcher, I will use representational drawings to extend future student's understanding of personal writing processes; as a researcher, I will use representational drawing to see beyond the canon of what counts as research.

# Chapter Eight

## Clutched in Reluctant Hands

The other person can resist only if *you* are pushing.  
(Clarke, 1988, p. 180; italics original)

Pens are clutched in reluctant hands ready to make marks on the page, but which and to what end? How do students experience writing in an ELA classroom? Frequently, they resist it. They resist passively in silence. They resist covertly through academic forgery. They resist directly (overtly) with anger and noise. They reject the title of writer and resist learning about themselves as writers. They resist perhaps because that is the more natural state of being.

Muldoon (2009) argues for a dialogical conversation around issues of revision by rejecting the myth of the “resistant student” and the “enlightened teacher,” the latter one who embraces and welcomes revision as natural and productive (p. 67). Perhaps by viewing resistance as a more natural state-of-being and extending the resistance students project beyond ‘mere’ revision to writing in general, dialogical conversations can then foster ownership, reduce instances of plagiarism and develop meta-cognitive skill. Through these conversations, stories of resistance can be related, examined and reconsidered. An individual’s acts of resistance can then be slowed or paused while one explores how those acts shape writing experiences, how they participate beneficially, indifferently or detrimentally within an individual’s process.

While this study was not designed to reveal resistance, it nonetheless did. The stories of the following three students – Dan, Avery and Karly – reveal deep but differing forms of resistance, which participated greatly in his or her writing experience. The roles these

students adopted in the classroom contributed to their ways of being. Dan avoided writing and quite successfully made himself textually invisible. Avery appeared to be powerful songwriter, while covertly making *his* plagiarized song public. Karly overtly declared there was no benefit for her in this writing, but as her anger subsided she was able to reposition herself, diminish her resistance, and see some of what she had learned.

The nature of this study uncovered stories of resistance (reported both in this and in previous chapters), but it did not, except in the case of Karly, create sufficient space for the students to tell and retell, consider and reconsider, story and re-story their resistance in an attempt to understand its role in their experience. Perhaps Karly was the only one ready to articulate and use the knowledge of what she had learned about herself. As Finely (2003) reports:

We may not always realize that we are learning and making meaning of experience until long after the fact and not until we have some need of the concept—I did not understand Donald’s dance until the memory of it became useful to me. (p. 292)

I find all too frequently the voice of secondary students absent in educational research. It is for that and the above reason that I end this chapter with a found play considering what Karly and I learned in the moment. I have learned much since, through the writing of this dissertation as described, in the previous and present chapters, but the play existed in the moment, in the place where stories unfold. As Eisner (2006) suggests, artful portrayals in literature can have the power to change perception and influence future behaviour. Karly is my hope. She is the hope that the stories I have told here can make a difference in the lives of students, a hope that the stories students hear about writing, about their needs as writers and about their lives can frame new possibilities for them as writers.

This chapter draws attention to behaviour that might otherwise go unnoticed, unconsciously, but it too is part of the story of writing

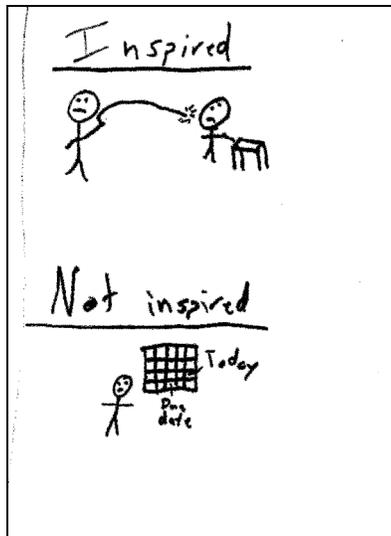
experiences. As Chaney (2004) suggests, there is a need to make space in order to explore the possibilities of teacher error or of misreading resistance; in this case, my error was not seeing resistance as that in the moment. A new part of my story, stories for the future that I will tell and retell, interpret and reinterpret, will be to look and listen for resistance.

### **Invisible Dan**

Dan's resistance to writing is so great that, without his drawings, he would have remained virtually invisible during the study. "Well, I don't like to write, it's just not something I do" (06/19, PC, p. 5) summarized Dan's lack of involvement with writing in general and this study in particular. His drawings were the only concrete pencil-to-paper component of text he generated. Dan's daily classroom actions had created a reputation for not handing in his work with all his junior high teachers and his classmates. The excuses varied, but the frequency of this direct form of resistance to writing did not and he was often assigned to the lunchtime homework room.

I have no idea what type of writer Dan was or is. He participated in small-group conversations, in a private conversation with me, and in the introductory and final drawing activity, but, I can now see, he only ever talked about hypothetical writing, about writing he *might* do.

Dan was a reluctant participant. When I spoke to his mother in order to provide clarification about the project, she expressed that the very writing I was asking Dan to complete caused tears and frustration at home and she was disinclined to have him participate in the study. I suggested that perhaps his frustration was the very reason his participation would be significant to the study. He was a representative of the student whose voice is often unheard because, for whatever reason, writing is so difficult that it caused paralysis, a point Dan made in his initial drawing.



**Figure 12: Dan D1**  
Text: Inspired...Not inspired...Today...Due date

Dan's initial drawing of inspired and uninspired writing succinctly displays his need for external pressure to the point of force, even violence. Dan consistently referred to his drawings in first person, therefore I believe he represented himself in his drawing, but even there the unhappy standing stick boy is not shown partaking in the act of writing.

Ms Harris: Are you saying the teacher has to crack the whip for you to be inspired?

Dan: Well, I really don't start, like, getting ideas and writing until I get pushed and ...

Ms Harris: Pushed, okay.

Dan: ... and it's like pressure.

Ms Harris: So, if you were never pushed, would you ever write?

Dan: Probably not. (ID, SG, p. 5)

Dan would probably never write if he were not *pushed*. Yet if Clarke's observation with which I opened the chapter is correct, then he is only able to resist *because* someone is pushing – otherwise there is nothing to resist. This statement seems accurate judged by Dan's actions during the study. Describing his message, "whenever I have some time there's no ideas or anything" (ID, SG, p. 3). In his frame entitled "Not inspired," the five-day week, due-date calendar was represented with a notation for the present and due date and Dan's stick man appeared happy

with the gap. Was his character happy that the due date was still so far (three work days) away? Was he happy not to have to write, yet? Was it that he felt no pressure?

In exploring Dan's experience with writing, several reasons for his dismal record of completion seemed to surface. He claimed the primary reason was his struggle with ideas. His first-cycle idea was to write about when the family tractor was stolen and driven off a steep incline in the bush, but he could provide very little detail. For this assignment, his excuse for not having the writing available, which I naively believed, was the computer printer was 'behaving funny.'

During cycle two, Dan had apparently considered writing about his sister, even appeared enthusiastic. He described how when he was five and they went somewhere new he would, "tell Ellen to make her face...And she'd always do this hooting sound, like she was a monkey. So she'd just go ooh, ooh." He thought he might like to describe the fun they had "just doing the face" (C2 S1, SG, p. 9). However, he even resisted elaborating the stories orally, because the previous statement is all the detail he provided. His enthusiasm seemed to wane when details got in the way. Dan focused in on seeking true memories and wanted his parents to supply incidents, stories or ideas, and when they did not, he abandoned the idea.

In the end, he blamed not writing on two separate things. First, like the majority of his classmates in cycle two, session three homework took precedence and "when I actually have time to write, it really didn't figure in" (C2 S3, WG, p. 8). Second, "my mom was always busy so she couldn't give me information about way back then. And my dad couldn't remember" (C2 S3, WG, p. 8). The autobiographical theme seemed to be interfering because it required details he could not remember.

Dan was under extreme pressure to produce his short paragraph for cycle three and he wrote it immediately prior to the class under Ms Harris' forced encouragement. The story was about the first day of school and meeting Kenton, who looked exactly like him. However, the four-sentence

start Dan committed to paper and read to his group was never handed in. I included a copy of what Dan read to his peer group in Appendix B. This was Dan's entire written contribution to the study and I only saw it as a piece of paper in his hands. Ms Harris had drawn him back to one of the first of the year's assignments "The Me Bag," where students were requested to share four or five items of personal significance and the stories behind them. Ms Harris was touched by Dan's emotional, soul-baring story and his obviously deep trust in his classmates, so she encouraged him to draw on those memories for the present assignment. This seemed to have been a common experience, with Ms Harris providing significant guidance during idea development. Dan noted that "my idea kind of came from Mrs. Harris about an hour ago" (C3 S2, SG, p. 12). A fact Ms Harris confirmed stating that she often talked about ideas with Dan.

Dan asserted he struggled when writing was open and preferred writing that was structured. He was idea-dependent and wanted others to define his subject and supply all the details. For him, often the "struggle was actually trying to come up with an idea at the last minute" (C3 S2, SG, p. 12). In our private conversation, Dan expanded on his problem with ideas, beyond memory to "I just get so many ideas of, like, how I could start it or how I can describe something and I'm a person that has a really hard time making choices, so I can never pick what to write down" (PC, p. 4). He believed the paralysis for writing began in his head. Compounding this problem was his belief that he was lazy and, unless it was really important, he never found a reason to complete assignments.

I can only wonder when and how Dan's struggle with ideas started. Why was Dan so dependent on others for ideas? Could he never trust his own ideas? Dan was so reluctant that he never provided enough information about his motivation or actions, without serious probing, and unfortunately many teachers had simply given up trying to figure Dan out.

Dan appeared to agonize over writing at the word and sentence level. He rarely referred to the scope of his writing or a message he might want to communicate. He repeatedly stated that he would like someone else to make the choices. When he focused on every decision at the word level, he was overwhelmed and paralyzed. He had also conflated quantity with quality and believed that his writing could not be good if it was short, as it was either, “short and bad or long and good” (PC, p. 3). When his writing was short, he found he was unable to ‘fiddle around’ with it and perhaps this was related to his need to find the right word.

Dan’s need for pressure...but not too much pressure...required a delicate balance. He needed time to find the right word and finish up, while also needing the pressure to take hold. If he was too far from the due date, he felt no motivation to complete the work.

In a conversation with Ms Harris about Dan, she noted that:

Dan, he’s got such substance...And has a lot to say. I just think he’s a case of a kid who needed time, needed time and he never got the time. You know, ‘now we’re on to the next thing, we’re on to the next thing, you got a zero, you got a zero.’ You know, at the beginning of the year, I told him, ‘I’m not giving you a zero...’ And I mean, I sat and talked to him a lot about ideas. The teaching of writing has not served that kid, for whatever reason. And I, I’d say school has not served that kid... (C3 S2, D, p. 37)

Her concern for Dan went far beyond just writing and involved his entire well-being. Dan’s pressures from home, with an ill father, a recently deceased grandmother and a poor school track record created a substance to his life that also overwhelmed him at times. In addition to the previous elements contributing to Dan’s poor success was the fact that he saw himself as a math and science person, so his interest was elsewhere. In general, school was not a priority. Dan’s final drawing reflected his growing understanding of a need for assignments that meant something to him when he said, “if it’s just schoolwork, well, I really don’t care about it ‘cause it doesn’t mean anything to me. And when it’s something, like, it

can actually mean something, I feel, like, I could really do it” (C3 S3, WG, p. 23).

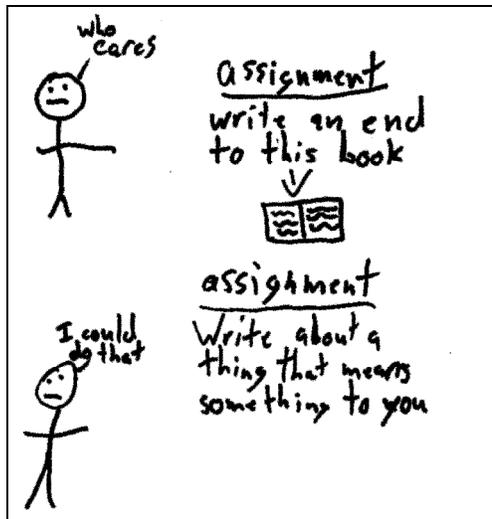


Figure 13: Dan D2

Text: “who care” ...assignment write an end to this book... “I could do that”...  
assignment Write about a thing that means something to you

Dan needed schoolwork to mean something to him. But even in his depiction the act of writing is not on record, only a book written by someone else. He even refers to the act of writing in the subjunctive noting ‘I could’ rather than ‘I will’ do that. By the end of the study, he claimed that he really liked “to write about personal stuff,” but he was unwilling to “show it ‘cause I feel the need to hold everything in” (PC, p. 6). However, I remain doubtful, in that he never wrote anything that I saw to discover this.

Marks were not Dan’s driving force as he had received many zeros for incomplete work. He needed another purpose. He would like to reveal himself through his writing, but felt conflicted. Speaking about showing himself in his writing, he said, “That’s what I want to write about, but I don’t want everyone else to know, so if you could find something, like in the middle that everyone else really wouldn’t care but is still kind of personal” (PC, p. 11). Even here, it is clearly not his job to find the middle ground of an assignment that would both personally engage him and not

be too personal at the same time. He considered his classmates trustworthy, but yet he was still uncomfortable with reading his writing to them. In conversation, he suggested he was comfortable with most teachers seeing his work. For Dan, the ideal assignment was a personal topic with limited choices that was only shown to the teacher.

Dan's was a difficult voice to hear in the classroom. He spoke rarely unless asked something directly. He wrote even less unless pestered and prodded. He moved through school in a silent, almost disconnected, way, but he felt passionate that his classmates were the reason he came to school everyday. He is at risk for leaving school and failing if his voice remains silent. Ms Harris struggled to 'hear' him textually, while occasionally she did hear him faintly in oral settings. However, she never gave up (as many other teachers had) on an 'incurable student destined to fail' because he was lazy. The subsequent year to that of the study, he did fail grade 10 ELA. Perhaps Ms Harris' assessment was correct, that the teaching of writing and school in general had, in fact, not served Dan.

The snippets Dan contributed through his drawn artifacts and his brief dialogue in response to questions only provided glimpses of Dan and had the effect of creating more questions than answers. What caused Dan's profound paralysis with writing in particular and school in general? Did Dan even know that he appeared paralyzed? Teachers, other students and himself have storied Dan as a lazy, unmotivated student for years. Is he capable of telling any other story? Would it be helpful for Dan to hear his own stories, search for patterns and untangle the processes he has internalized, as suggested by Perl (1994), in an effort to complete enough writing to pass? Or would this telling and retelling merely feed into his recognized story thereby institutionalizing it?

Hickman (2007) notes that drawing can facilitate thinking or a clearer sense of understanding. Did Dan gain anything from the study? Perhaps he was able to articulate his need for pressure and deadlines to himself. Perhaps he was able to recognize that schoolwork needed to mean

something to him and it did not. But perhaps deep and old patterns are impossible to change without significant time and effort. However, without Dan's drawings, I would have had little to no knowledge of Dan and he would have remained invisible.

### **Avery's Writer's Block, Plagiarism and Writing**

Avery's story needs to start at the end. His final drawing, in hindsight, acted almost as a confession to the real struggles Avery had faced. His final piece of writing was a plagiarized song from a popular band. Unfortunately, this was not his first act of plagiarism, a fact that this study drew attention to. When I suspected plagiarism, I simply selected a line from the song and entered it into a search engine. There were no formal stakes for this writing, as in no marks, but perhaps there were hidden stakes in play, such as displeasing Ms Harris by not meeting obligations, failing me by not producing any high-quality writing over the course of the study or wanting to appear as the good student/songwriter to his peers or avoid failing in his own eyes. I offer his own words, "I was going to say that I can write without a good topic, but it'll never be good writing and I hate to hand in stuff that's not good" (C3 S3, WG, p. 25). Then, perhaps, there was a secret thrill to present a published and popular song as *his* own, knowing that others in the class might have known it was plagiarized. But in truth I can never know why Avery made the decisions he did.

Now, like a contemporary film, I rewind the story to build the plotline. He came from a marks-oriented family whose expectations were very high. Ms Harris told me that his mother was a professional researcher within the health field who had often discussed, with her children, the ethical implications of plagiarism as it related to her work. However, Avery was not overly serious, liked to goof around and tended not to focus

on his work, as can be seen during the small-group exchanges included with Diana's portrait (in the next chapter). Avery like Aden drew on the elements of fantasy in his initial drawing perhaps the least tainted moment of the study. His first drawing, while initially seen as highly imaginative, in hindsight can be reinterpreted as embodying a lot of pressure to produce something grand and fanciful.



**Figure 14: Avery D1**  
Text: Imagine

My initial impression of Avery's drawing concentrated very heavily on the artistry of the image, perhaps to the detriment of the subtext. For Avery, writing was an elaborate fiction filled with possibility, where the single word 'Imagine' occupied the heart of the drawing and perhaps the heart of writing for him. While he claimed self-depiction and identification with the drawing, he frequently used the pronoun 'you' when talking about the act of writing, which had the effect of creating distance. For example, "I just thought that writing is a way to express what's going on in your mind and let's you be creative with your thoughts. I just drew like a lot of fantasy kind of stuff" (PC, p. 2). However, while referring to the same drawing, he switched to third person and distanced himself from the 'guy,' "I just drew a guy laying down and he's thinking

about what to write and a bunch of different stuff going on in his head ‘cause that’s what writing is, you know” (ID, SG, p.3).

He even arguably represented the writer in the artifact as a pencil or pen, so the writer and his instruments merge in the act of creation. The thought balloon expanded to fit an amazing array of conventional fantasy elements: a spider and its web, the castle attacked by the fire-breathing dragon and a knight with a sword, a rose, a fairy, a race car, a rainbow and a pot of gold. However, if Avery is the character in his drawing, the question marks over his head indicated the first sign that ideas, although plentiful, might become an issue. I am left to wonder if the constraint of autobiographical writing limited Avery’s possibilities? If this is ‘what writing means to him,’ then writing involves a lot of pressure to produce.

Avery disported himself as the small-group clown. Each writing assignment was done at the last minute and appeared as a list of things he liked, things he did, with topics like his backyard, food he liked, a volleyball game and a piece about completely pointless writing that came to a strong conclusion. He was never very invested in the project, yet he was the first to express concern that he and his classmates never seemed to have a purpose. In his busy life, his priority remained on homework for marks. His relationship to the project was best summarized in the following statement, “Honestly, it works better when you’re writing for something, like to get a mark or in a specific topic ‘cause when it’s really open it is way harder to come up with an idea” (C3 S2, SG, p. 5). He, like Kenton and Aden, wanted constraints placed on his writing, because “when it’s really open and there are no rules, it’s not fun ‘cause there are no rules to bend” (C3 S2, SG, p. 9). He wrote to get it done. The way he talked about his writing was to get a laugh or to show how little effort he put into it. And yet he was uncomfortable contributing each piece he spent five minutes on, because he knew they were not of the typical quality he would write for Ms Harris. The longest piece he wrote was 162 words, the second longest was 73 and the third longest was 52 words, until he

produced the plagiarized song, which was over 380 words when you include his original lines, the reflection notes and commentary. Avery did not want to disappoint in the end, so he turned to a strategy he had (unbeknownst to Ms Harris or me at the time) used previously in the semester.

Avery wrote songs. So when he came to class with a song instead of the poem about friends that he had planned, it seemed a logical new direction. In the following dialogue, he publicly entered the Hedley (2007) song “Old School” as *his* own.

Ms Bowsfield: Avery, did you change yours into a poem?

Avery: Well, I was going to do a poem, but I wasn't really feeling the poem vibe, so I did something else.

Ms Bowsfield: So do you have a piece that you want to share other than cycle three, or are you sharing your cycle three?

Avery: Well, my cycle three one was my favourite, but I don't really want to share it out loud.

Ms Bowsfield: Okay, that's fair, that's fair. So you don't have a piece that you want to share?

Avery: Um, well, I wouldn't mind if, like, people read it, but I don't really want to read it out loud.

Ms Bowsfield: Would you be comfortable with somebody else reading it?

Avery: Sure.

Aden: I'll read it!

Avery: It's this one.

Aden: That right there?

Avery: It's actually, I wasn't feeling the poem thing so I wrote song instead.

Aden: So not this one.....

Avery: That one.

Ms Bowsfield: So how do you perceive songs...? To be different than poems?

Avery: It's easier to write them I, 'cause I think the rhythm in my head first, and then its easier to write to .....

Ms Bowsfield: Oh, .....

Avery: Okay. Its actually a rap or beat box.

Aden: It's a rap, is it?

Ms Bowsfield: What if he doesn't hear it in his head?

Aden: You don't want to hear me rap.

Avery: My bad.

Aden: Okay. Don't believe everything happiness says,  
nothing feels better than hiding these days...(continues  
reading song) cavalier we used to be

Shelly: Cavalier.

Aden: The beautiful, yeah, them, that beautiful insanity,  
the apathy surrounding me...(continues reading song)  
we are all just liars 'cause we say that we won't miss  
this, guys, how in the hell did we get here?

Avery: Oh, that, that wasn't supposed to be there, sorry.

Aden: Oooh! .... Ooooh! So why don't you meet me down  
behind our old school... (continues reading song)

Oooh! That was good. (C3 S3, WG, p. 5-7)

Avery avoided reading *his work* publicly. Perhaps the act of plagiarism felt stronger coming directly in his own voice, from his own mouth. In this exchange, he made several claims including: this was his favorite piece; songs are easier than poems because of the musical rhythm in his head; the song was a beat box; he did not want to read it but was okay with someone else reading it. He even made an after-the-fact apology for the word 'hell'. Aden's volunteering to read the work seemed a logical solution. Impressed by this sudden show of exceptional writing when compared with what Avery had previously produced, the accolades flowed.

Ms Harris: Wow!

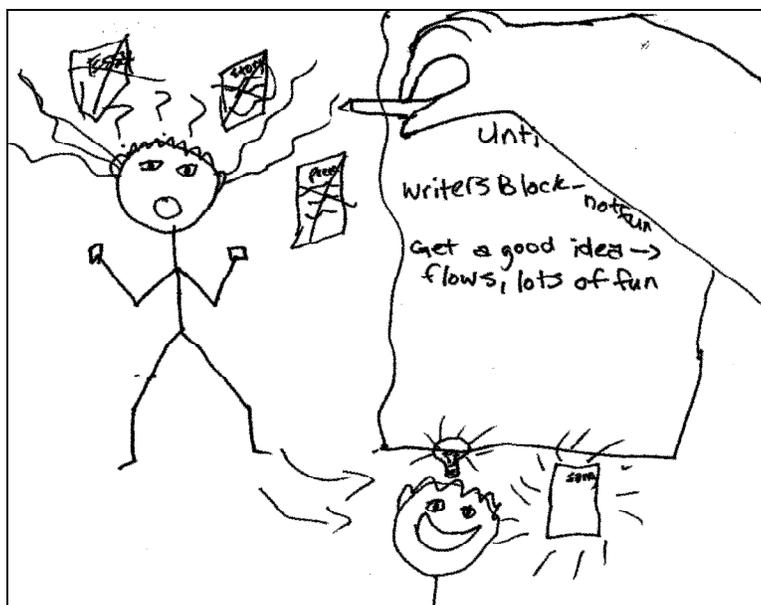
Ms Bowsfield: Very well done!

(Series of well dones)

Ms Bowsfield: So what made this writing cycle?

Avery: Well, I was going to write a poem about friends, so  
I was thinking of stuff that describes, my ..... world and  
..... The only thing I could think of was, like, screwing  
around, and wrestling and stuff so I decided to write a  
song instead, yeah. (C3 S3, WG, p. 7)

Immediately following within this session, the final task of the study was for students to draw their emotional response to this writing experience. Avery drew this picture.



**Figure 15: Avery D2**

Text: Essay, story, poem...unit... Writers Block - not fun...Get a good idea – flows, lots of fun... sorry

Avery’s speech clearly claims the content of the drawing as *his* own experience; although he does not directly claim to be either or both of the characters in the image, he implies and references stages of his experience. Publicly in class he said, “This is my picture, when there’s no boundaries on writing it’s really hard to come up with an idea and it takes me a long time at first and that’s when I get frustrated the most, but then when I do get a good idea it flows really well and it’s really easy to write” (C3 S3, WG, p. 19).

In this next excerpt, he references his writer’s block, “I spent like days with writer’s block, and then I just tried to change my idea and when I got a good idea it really flowed and I got a good product” (C3 S3, WG, p. 25). At the time when he made this claim, Avery did not know I would soon discover his plagiarism. In fact, he followed the script of the story he had invented right through our final conversation.

I believe Avery represented himself three times in his drawing, first as frustrated, then metaphorically as the writer whose right hand is all we see and finally with a good idea conveyed through the conventional light-bulb image. When he was frustrated, he was surrounded by crumpled

and crossed-out paper representing the genres of essay, story and poem. Steam or smoke comes from his ears, perhaps a scream from his circular mouth and his fists are clenched. The question marks from the initial drawing reappear above his head. In an interesting rhetorical move, the unassigned hand appeared to write the page of text expressing Avery's concerns with writer's block being not fun and was also positioned beside one of the streams of smoke indicating again the link between writer and instrument. Perhaps the pencil in the hand writes the character's frustration. Does he draw his own writer's block? I still wonder to whom is he apologizing?

When he gets a good idea, his face was transformed and the stereotypical light bulb was in the 'on' position to signify "getting a good idea" where writing "flows, lots of fun." On the page, which appeared to radiate (lines surrounding; like light coming from the sun), he wrote a single word "sorry." Was he sorry for not producing high-quality writing in the study? Sorry for plagiarizing? Sorry for revealing the song in public? Or just sorry he struggled to write?

His rendering of his writing experience was perhaps the most honest moment that he produced during the research study. He had struggled repeatedly to develop ideas. Repeatedly they failed. While he had voiced his concerns regarding writer's block over the course of the study, the picture illuminated so much more than I initially understood.

Viewing this drawing through the filter of the explicit act of plagiarism he had just committed and then made public, by allowing the piece to be read, added a new dimension. Is the drawing a veiled confession? Is it simply a restatement of a critical theme Avery had stressed? With no stakes, as far as a mark, *why* would he choose to plagiarize over simply not completing the assignment? Avery's artistic and imaginative response to the initial drawing prompt 'what writing means to him' had perhaps set him up to create something magical, and when he could not secure an idea of that calibre, his reputation as a good

student and a good writer was at risk. What was driving the need to appear to produce an excellent writing product worthy of peer and teacher praise?

The timeline of events that followed his handing in of this assignment was as follows: I had suspicions about originality and investigated by Googling lines in the song. I struggled with the ethics of the situation. The work had been publicly read in front of Ms Harris and she was currently in the process of accepting final poetry assignments from the class.

Ainley (1999) discusses the conflicting and complementary roles of teacher and researcher. Throughout the project there was an inherent tension between me as teacher and me as researcher (and I struggled to shed my more native skin as teacher), a tension particularly salient with Avery's story. In the end, the collaborative nature of our working relationship led me to mention the incident to Ms Harris. Effectively, my ever-present role as teacher won the debate over the researcher, at least here. Ms Harris did not appear surprised, suggesting that she had had her own suspicions. She elected to investigate on her own. She reviewed his previous work for her and discovered that the idea and plot for a children's story had been plagiarized from a popular children's book. Avery had made name changes to the characters and places, making it more difficult to trace, but after an hour of searching the Internet the storyline revealed itself and Ms Harris had specific evidence that he had cheated during coursework she had assigned. Further, she decided to adopt a 'wait and see' attitude with her final poetry assignment. Unfortunately perhaps, Avery elected to submit a Shakespearian sonnet as an original poem. Ms Harris and I conducted separate investigations, as teacher and as researcher respectively, into Avery's behaviour and we each spoke to Avery independently.

Chronologically, I spoke to Avery first on Friday, June 20 (a story I will continue with after completing Ms Harris' story). She needed to deal with the academic repercussions of Avery's actions and asked for a

meeting with his parents on the following Monday. I did not attend this meeting. However, a few days following the meeting, unsolicited, I received what I believe to be an original poem from Avery.

The majority of the story has now been framed and I wish to delve deeper into two specific areas. The first is the interrelationship of process writing and the extensive measures Avery adopted and needed to adopt to hide his deception. The second relates to the ethical issues these events raised.

Process writing as it is frequently enacted in the classroom requires students to ‘write,’ ‘create,’ or ‘fabricate’ elaborate back-stories of process in order to plagiarize without suspicion. Returning to my own investigation, Avery had prepared *his* song carefully. The covert activity was elaborate. I have included a complete set of pages Avery produced as artifacts in Appendix D. The package he handed in included his original writing *Pointless* that he had decided against, two separate reflection sheets (one I had provided and one in a style similar to what Ms Harris required), the perfunctory handwritten rough draft with scratch outs of ‘*his* original words or lines’ replaced by the actual lyrics of the song and *his* own interpretation of what the song meant to him and *his* huge struggle with writer’s block. Ironically, he wrote more in creating the lie than he did over the rest of the study. Further, the story embedded in covering his actions was effectively autobiographical and revealed a great deal about him.

Avery had overtly resisted writing at every opportunity until this point. Now his resistance became covert. Avery’s scrapped his original piece. He had prepared me for a subject switch by suggesting he might write a poem (something Ms Harris confirmed he did at home with friends) and I do not know if this was a genuine intention that he failed to meet because of writer’s block or simply a misdirecting statement. Although the creation of the back-story may not have been linear, I have

elected to discuss each page individually and group them according to themes in a sequence for the sake of clarity.

He selected a song and hand-copied the lyrics, labeling it ‘rough song idea.’ On the page, he made five changes to *his* text in order for it to appear revised. They included a title change, two single-word substitutions and a line substitution. The words in italics are Avery’s original words and the words in brackets are the official song words Avery pretended to substitute for his original writing. For example, in the first verse, he made two single-word changes to “Don’t believe everything *media* (happiness) says/ Nothing feels better than *lying* (hiding) these days...” (C3 S3). The word change I find most significant is *lying* for “hiding.” Did he really feel “nothing feels better than lying these days?” Are there more lies in Avery’s life that he is hiding? When I consider his final drawing and the word “sorry” written on his ‘good idea’ page, I wonder if he was trying to reveal his secret? Or was he simply flirting with the danger of being caught? What was driving him to lie?

The title change was interesting in that it might have become an unintended mistake in his final copy. He crossed out the original and real title of the song “Old School” and substituted a line he drew attention to in his annotated interpretation of his song. The line from the song is “The apathy’s surrounding me” and for *his* title he used, “Apathy surrounds me”. In his annotation, he commented that that song line “really describes my friends.” However, in his final copy, he did not carry out the change and left the original Hedley title, *Old School* in place. Was it a mistake that he forgot to make the title change?

Of the five hard-copy versions of lyrics I examined from the Internet, the line “down behind the old school” always included “the”. However, in Avery’s version, he recorded the line the way the band sings it on several live YouTube videos, with the line reading “down behind ‘our’ old school”. He also wrote the lyrics with the contractions sung by the band. These two changes, I suggest, indicate a deep familiarity with

both the lyrics and the performance of the lyrics, rather than a simple find, copy and paste from the Internet.

Late in the song, Avery included several original or partially original lines through deleting seven lines. He did this for what I believe were two reasons. First, *his* new lines, in italics, suited school content more appropriately. Secondly, the lines more clearly reflected his constructed sense of purpose expressed throughout his personal reflections. He began to use the song in a less transgressive way and moved towards complex intertextuality or a remixing of old and new when the song failed to meet his conveyed intentions.

**Hedley's (2007) verse**

Nothings as real as our old reckless ways  
When we drink by the fires  
The burning car tires (deleted)  
Bad girls and good liars (deleted)  
The dreams we'd conspire (deleted)  
The days we went crazy (deleted)  
The nights wild and hazy (deleted)  
Man how in the hell did we get here?

So why don't you meet me, down behind the old school  
We'll waste away the weekend, with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
The apathy's surrounding me (deleted)  
Don't close your eyes or we'll fade away (deleted)

**Avery's version**

Nothings as real as our *friendship these days*  
When we drink by the fires  
*We are all just liars cuz*  
*We say we won't miss this*  
*Guys* how in the hell'd we get here

So why don't you meet me, down behind *our* old school  
We'll waste away the weekend, with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
*This moment surrounding me*  
*Why can't we all just stay here*

I believe the deleted lines were an attempt by Avery to remove content that might have been suspect in *his* song. Further, his replacement lines contributed to his stated intended meaning and were used to provide credibility for both his interpretation and his reflections. Within his reflection notes using a format designed by me (see Appendix E), Avery made four key claims: he intended to write a poem about first family, then friends, and that ultimately “I wasn’t feeling the poem vibe”; “I really feel like my writing says what I mean and it lets you know what my group of friends are really like”; “I’m happy with it”; it is “my favorite I have written all year”. In his self-sponsored reflection, he repeated his claims with more explanation; for example, in connection with the claim of the poem ‘vibe’ not working he wrote, “It’s always easier for me if writing has a rhythm or a musical beat to it, so I wrote a song about my friends and myself.” However, on this sheet, he also defined two key words from the song, with ‘cavalier’ as “arrogance; ladies’ man” and ‘apathy’ as “lack of emotion.” This move, I believe, was designed effectively to pre-empt a common strategy that I might have used, as a classroom teacher, to identify a writer plagiarizing, where I would ask students to define an unusual word they have used. In a final move, he dedicated the song to his friends who have “stuck with me through it all,” a list of six boys, four of whom were in his class. Avery’s reflection notes are *his story* of writing, his version of the truth in the song he presented as his own. How does his story construct him as an autobiographical writer? The claim, “I am proud of it” begs the question what is he proud of? *His song, his back-story or the writing he really had completed* which expressed his fears about growing up and losing touch with his friends.

Chandrasoma, Thompson and Pennycook (2004) caution the academy against perceiving plagiarism as a simple story of detection and prevention. Avery’s plagiarism was not a simple transgressive act. It was complex, intertextual and at times non-transgressive. His decisions in relation to the Hedley (2007) song relate to his autobiographical self, his

discoursal self and his authorial self (p. 177). In the past, he had used these strategies with success and therefore they were part of his autobiographical self. He had represented himself to his class as a songwriter and discursively had much to live up to. Finally, the autobiographical nature of the assignment required an authorial presence that required him to adapt the song to suit his constructed meaning. He exhibited moments of complementary intertextuality when he began to adapt the song's lyrics maintaining the form. He displayed meta-linguistic knowledge of songs in general and rhythm in particular, in order to continue the established patterns. In some ways, this is a novice's entry point, the burgeoning of a complex skill necessary for original song writing.

Avery had written. He had tried to use another's song to express an unsettled emotional state and discovered it did not say what he wanted to say, so he modified it to suit his story, where "nothing is as real as our friendships these days." The story is of a grade-nine boy about to leave behind the familiar in a few weeks' time, with his friends feigning apathy for the impending loss, but him knowing all too well that they are liars, when "we say that we won't miss this." His reinterpretation of *his* song positioned it not as a retrospective wistful wish to return to lost youth where anything was possible but, rather, as a look forward at what will soon be lost as they grow up and grow apart. When I include his original attempt *Pointless*, which was a critical comment on the study's writing, Avery completed a lot of autobiographical writing. Ironically, he revealed a very cavalier (seen as careless) attitude toward the writing I had asked him to engage with and yet not. Although a part of him presents the apathetic teenager personality, he really has a lack of apathy (seen as a lack of interest and indifference) for life and change if *his original* lines are allowed to take precedence and represent his real emotions.

Ethically, I acknowledge I ambushed Avery in our final private conversation to confront the plagiarism in a manner not unlike what I have

done in the past with other students *as their teacher*. My evidence was collected; I reviewed his previous pieces; I had examined his reflective notes; I had an Internet download of the song; I had his staged handwritten draft work. I had a series of questions which had thematically evolved over the course of the study, which I posed to all student participants, as well as a series of individual questions related to themes and pattern discerned from individual observations of students. I wanted Avery's responses to all of these questions.

Our private conversation was tenser than the others simply because I knew about the impending confrontation. I knew where my questions were leading. I explicitly reminded Avery that he had the right to remove data and conversations from the study at any time. The conversation proceeded in a pattern similar to other students. In the end, and probably unknowingly, Avery led the way into the issue through his claim that his cycle-three writing was the only piece he found purpose in and liked.

Ms Bowsfield: Where you said, 'I've noticed none of us really have a purpose for writing,' and I'm wondering if you could talk about that?

Avery: Well, well, what I was thinking about was that it was really open and that we didn't really have to do it but then I kind of realized that the purpose was you know, for you, so...

Ms Bowsfield: Yeah.

Avery: And, then I kind of tried to make it more important.

Ms Bowsfield: But it never really became that for you?

Avery: Well it kind of did; the last product I really liked because I wrote from, like, personal experience and everything so it kind of was for me, too. So that helped because it was still good, and it was for you, but I could get something out of it, too.

Ms Bowsfield: Um, that brings me to your last piece of writing. Um and I need you talk about this and this (*showing him a copy of his song and the Internet download of the song*), 'cause they're identical. Right the, the words for their lyrics.

Avery: I guess maybe I heard it before.

Ms Bowsfield: What, but it's perfect!

Avery: Okay.

Ms Bowsfield: Is this original work?

Avery: No, then...

Ms Bowsfield: And yet, I guess I, (*10 second pause*) I just want to talk about why you chose to turn in something that wasn't yours. Right, there was nothing at stake, you weren't going to lose marks or anything?

Avery: I don't know.

Ms Bowsfield: I think this could be really important, 'cause I don't think it's uncommon, can you tell me why you chose to?

Avery: Well I didn't actually think about it, I, (*20 second pause*) I don't really know why.

Ms Bowsfield: In class, both Ms Harris and I made many comments about praise for how strong a piece of writing it was. How did that feel? (*7 second pause*)

Avery: I don't know.

Ms Bowsfield: Do you want me to turn off the tape recorder for a sec?

Avery: Sure. (PC, p. 3-7)

'I don't really know why,' was the best and only answer that Avery had in these circumstances. Our conversation continued without the tape recorder for another three or so minutes, but his responses never really developed into answers. He acknowledged that plagiarism was very prevalent in school, but did not elaborate. I asked how it felt to receive so much praise for something he had not written. He had no answer. During this conversation, I wondered but never asked if Aden had known that the song he read aloud for Avery was plagiarized? Was Aden in on the ruse? Did he intentionally involve his friend or did Aden unknowingly offer to help a friend? How many other students in the class knew where the song originated? These questions will forever remain unanswered.

Within this conversation, Avery claimed that he had never done this before, a fact I already knew to be false, but I did not feel it was my place to suggest he was lying. I let him know that I had informed Ms Harris of what I knew, but I did not inform him that she now had her own questions. I believe she was hoping he would come to her on his own after my discovery, but he did not.

Unsolicited he offered to compose a new piece to replace it. To which I had responded that it was not necessary as that was not the purpose of the research. After his meeting with Ms Harris and his parents, his original poem was provided to me through Ms Harris. I believe that writing something original is a part of the culture of and standard response expected often by parents, teachers or both from students in order to ‘fix’ the transgressive act, in order to display competence. Does anyone ask why the student chose a particular course of action? Does an original piece of writing ‘fix it’? What does the student learn about academic integrity?

I have so many questions that remain unanswered and position me so very differently in the classroom as a teacher and as a researcher. Some questions relate to the particular situation Avery presented, others connect to the larger sense of writing in the classroom, while others still involve larger questions of ethics and research.

His plan was very elaborate. He knew what he was doing and he showed some skill and experience. How many other assignments of his were not original and were missed over the course of the year? How long had he been employing this strategy to meet product output of a high level? How did he learn to create convincing replicas of the writing processes teachers expected to see? Why was it easier to plagiarize than to write? How severe was his writer’s block before he resorted to this strategy? Why, in a low-stakes setting, where his mark was not in any jeopardy, did he plan to deceive? Why would he risk letting the piece be read publicly, where his contemporaries could hear it and recognize it more easily than perhaps a not-so-current teacher? Why did he continue to lie even after a private confrontation?

Many questions remain unanswered, either because of Avery’s lack of comfort or lack of insight at the time. Or, perhaps he tacitly invoked a right to silence, resisting the questions by deflecting with political answers that, while they respected the premise of the questions, became non-responsive resistance. His plagiarism surfacing did have

consequences in his regular classroom experience, such as losing his honours status, a strained home relationship and a favourite teacher who now viewed him through a lens that was not flattering. Because of that, I felt I could not press Avery for further insight. Due to his parents' careers, he moved on to a different city for his next year of school and I wonder if he will take the opportunity to start over and act with greater integrity or if the old behaviour of cheating out of desperation when he has writer's block will return, since no one 'knows'.

As for considerations beyond Avery and into the realm of writing and teaching writing in an ELA setting, how prevalent is such cheating in general? How sophisticated are the plagiarism strategies students are constructing and what do they indirectly reveal about students knowledge of writing process? In my experience, the students who get caught plagiarizing are often not very good at it. Effectively, they are not smart about it. Avery was; he had perhaps gone a whole year without being caught. Those who get caught do not create the elaborate sequences of drafts, reflections and editing as cover stories the way he did. However, uncovering an academic student's plagiarism brings other students' behaviour into play.

As a check on students' original work, I compared their conversations from class with their writing. I also reviewed the layers of drafts and pre-writing, but, as already seen, that can be crafted to appear authentic. I searched for and investigated incongruities in performance. Am I doing enough? As a teacher? As a researcher? Do I want to perceive the students in my world as generally honest with exceptions or operate from a more pessimistic and untrusting position? Perhaps the answer is different for the researcher than the teacher. Certainly, tensions between researcher and teacher exist in this story. For me in my teacher role, I need to believe in the honest and hopeful nature of humanity, while the researcher perhaps simply needs to observe with a more dispassionate eye

and with a greater interest in the phenomenon itself (and its connections to text hybridity and intertextuality). Are the two roles incongruent?

When and why do students choose to plagiarize? For Avery, it seemed to be a struggle with ideas. For the next, it might be a lack of time. For another student, it might be simple apathy. For some, perhaps, the pressure to perform, to please or to meet the class standard drives them to plagiarism. However complex and intricate could writing be that plagiarism is still seen as easier than writing? And, if that is the case, how do we help students experience writing in a more positive light?

In relation to the research, the questions are different again. What would a whole study on students and plagiarism reveal, if students were guaranteed no repercussions? How does one act of overt plagiarism contribute to and shape the data in this study? I believe that the tradition of narrative inquiry makes the telling of this particular story possible, whereas within another methodology focused on generalizations and theory building, the actions would generate too many questions regarding the ‘validity’ of the data.

Here, my intent was to explore how students experienced writing in the classroom. This was a story of Avery’s experience of Avery’s writing, a story that engenders many more questions than it resolves. It draws attention to difficult subjects and academic concerns. I return to Bruner’s (1990) words:

I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present, but for directing it into the future. (p. 36)

If he is correct, then the stories Avery told and tells, the intricate fictions he created in the name of writing process, participate in structuring his experience of writing, both then and in the future. Avery developed a series of stories which contributed to his perception of

himself as a songwriter and capable student; they contributed to his standing as a 'good' student in the eyes of his classmates and teachers and as an honour student in the school. But he also knew they were cover stories. And I wonder what effect the unraveling of his story's external 'truth' may have had on him?

Ethically, did I act appropriately? In effect, Ms Harris was being duped, perhaps played for the fool. I had approached the project with her as a collaborator. How would I expect a collaborator, a colleague, to act in a similar situation? Further, this classroom study was not a private space. Ms Harris saw, heard, read and collected student participants' writing. She was integral to the study. She engaged students, as I did, in multiple conversations regarding their writing. She listened to Avery's song read by Aden. When I told her that the song was plagiarized, she was not surprised by the possibility.

The meeting Ms Harris had with his parents was focused solely on his assignments in relation to her. Would she have discovered his cheating on her own? I would like to believe she would have noticed the Shakespearean poem turned in after the song without prompting, but would she have? When I asked her, she believed the sheer complexity would have tipped her off. She also informed me that she had a general practice with poetry to grab a line or two and Internet-search them anyway (which would certainly have yielded results). What can be said or thought of cheating when knowing an experienced teacher did this research on her students' 'original' poetry as a matter of practice? Did my study cause Avery or Ms Harris emotional distress?

Why did I confront Avery regarding his plagiarism? The researcher role would say it was to hear his side of and thus be able to offer a more fully developed story instead of just the textual revealing I have presented? A story with his insights, responses and rebuttals where he had more voice, more say in how he was represented in the retelling? The teacher role believed that unchecked plagiarism would be detrimental

to Avery's academic career, caught or uncaught, a dangerous practice of taking the 'easy' way out (though not so easy by my account), which could eventually in a situation with more at stake have very serious repercussions. In the end, both and more reasons contributed to my decision to discuss this with Avery and my decision to tell Ms Harris. The roles of researcher and teacher trapped in tension.

Avery's drawing revealed his deep struggle with ideas, a story he recounts in many ways and forms. It revealed the power of writer's block to cripple a writer. It revealed a very succinct representation of a much greater problem. I am left to wonder how conscious Avery was of his writer's block in connection to plagiarism or if the coupling of the experiences created a link. How will this experience and any future retelling of this experience structure his stories of him as a writer? Will his stories of writer's block continue to overwhelm him as a writer?

Avery resisted writing. He resisted being the 'good' student by not writing, but in the end struggled to appear as though he could not produce high-quality writing. He was pushed and resisted, but he had to write something. Both Dan and Avery acted in ways that preserved the public image of themselves as students and in particular writers.

*Aside: Resisting my role*

The tensions I felt throughout the entire study between researcher and teacher were intensified through Avery's story. Here again, Ainley (1999) draws attention to the multiple roles researchers carry into the classroom research site. I was a researcher, a teacher and a writer (the three simple roses of Chapter 1). At times, my roles were complementary; at other times, they were conflicted. As a teacher, plagiarism needed to be dealt with; as a researcher, how plagiarism was contributing to Avery's writing experience was more important. Had I been researching plagiarism, I would have designed a very different study, where a teacher's role would be to perhaps report on and tell stories of wrongly accusing a student or suspecting and identifying plagiarism, but it would

not relate to current students. Student roles might have been to share stories about acts of plagiarism, reveal the writing processes they enact to avoid detection, but they would not be making their actions public in the classroom at my request. I would also have selected several more research sites (different classrooms, grades, schools etc.) to facilitate distance and multiple stories instead of a case of one.

However, I was not looking for plagiarism, I was searching out writing experiences and students' self-knowledge regarding writing – and, like resistance more generally, plagiarism was what I encountered. I resisted the role of researcher with Avery and slipped heavily into teacher. The role of teacher was and is far more natural, familiar and comfortable for me, a role of trying to make an immediate difference. The role of more detached but interested researcher was new and, at times, awkward and strange. This role was more distant, more observant and more questioning. In fact, at the same time that many of the students in the study were resisting autobiographical writing, I was resisting my new role.

Stafford (1978) has some trenchant observations to make about writer's block. In passing, this seems a much simpler solution.

I believe that the so-called "writing block" is a product of some kind of disproportion between your standards and your performance. I can imagine a person beginning to feel that he's not able to write up to the standard he feels the world has set for him. But to me that's surrealistic [...] The cure for writer's block? Lower your standards! (p. 116-7)

## **Karly's Investment**

The following is a found play. It was created from some of the final moments of the case study, but it was found during the writing of the research. It grapples with a student's resistance. The frustrated student lashes out against what she perceived as wasting time only to uncover

some interesting insights into herself, while prompting my own perspective shifts and insights.

The dialogue is derived directly from the *research* transcripts of the last two research sessions and Karly's private conversation, with significant excisions for the purpose of highlighting the significant themes I see, while preserving fidelity to the original conversations. At times, the order of comments within these actual events was occasionally adjusted to unify theme and condense ideas.

Karly's resistance to the study and writing were discussed in detail in Chapter 7. Her present understanding was crafted out of her previous experiences leading up to our final private conversation. Here, the artifacts are represented as the catalyst for learning. They are not the focus of this plot-line; they are the initial incident and the antecedent action that focused and shaped the conversations.

In this play, Karly is searching for a reason to write. I invoke here what Genishi and Dyson (1990) see as the reason stories are important.

In short, then, why do we need our stories? Stories help us construct our selves, who used to be one way and are now another; stories help to make sense of, evaluate, and integrate the tensions inherent in experience: the past with the present, the fictional with the "real," the official with the unofficial, the personal with the professional, the canonical with the different or unexpected. Stories help us transform the present and shape the future for our students and ourselves so that it will be richer or better than the past. (pp. 242-3)

If students are ever to perceive of themselves as writers, they must first have experiences as writers and then they must tell and retell those stories as they construct and reconstruct themselves as learners and writers.

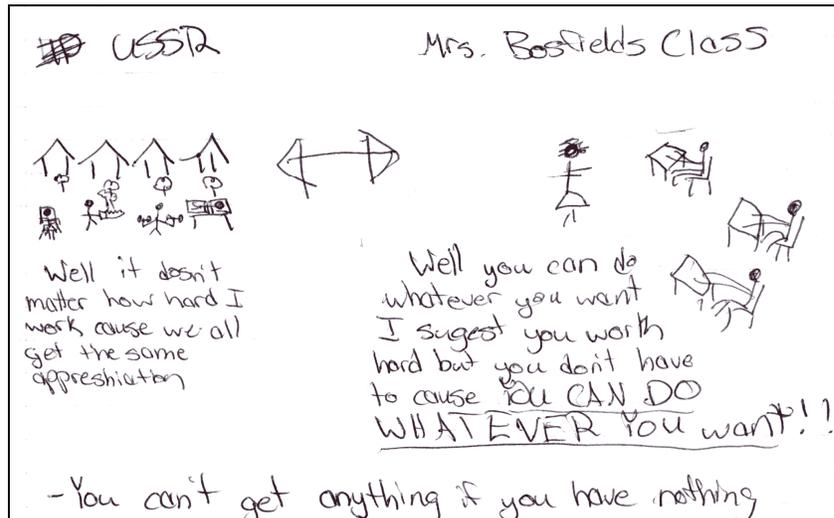
Chronologically, the plot begins *in medias res* with the two main characters faced off in a conflict that has built over a period of time. The visual projected is an excised version of the original selected for dramatic impact. Scene two's private conversation reveals a bewildered teacher devastated by a student's critical comments regarding her intentions. It

generates fears, doubts and questions. The third scene attempts to salvage the experience in the public eye and begins to explore the subtext of the teacher's actions. Finally, both characters alone with each other explore the paradoxes of learning and language.

### What do I get???

A classroom drama in four scenes.

Scene 1: Karly and Ms Bowsfield standing at a desk. Ms Bowsfield reads silently. In a voiceover, Karly reads her assignment. The image and assignment are projected for the audience to read. The tone of what follows is a bitter conversation.



Why I hate this assignment

by: Karly

If you tell us to do whatever you want. I'm going to give you my minamel amount of effort. I know I spelt wrong, but i'm not going to look it up cause I CAN DO WHATEVER I WANT! These classes are making me mad. There's no benefit for me, and I MEEN NO BENEFIT WHATSOEVER! And I'm struggling in social and these things takes a class away that I actually need. You're robing me.

Ms Bowsfield: It's a shame I can't use it. (A short clipped sentence as the teacher tries to hide her hurt.).

Karly: You can.

Ms Bowsfield: (Voice over) I don't want to use it! It is mean and hurtful and cruel.  
Blackout.

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Scene 2: This is a private and sustaining conversation after students have left and immediately following the reading of Karly's texts. Ms Harris wears on her face a sense of responsibility having set the previous events in motion. As Ms Bowsfield grapples with hurt feelings, Ms Harris encourages her to see possibilities.

Ms Bowsfield: I'm worried about forcing everybody into what I think is a good thing. That's part of my emotional reaction to Karly's piece. To be told I robbed her!

Natasha: Well, I didn't like the ending. Social is not being robbed from them. It's just shifting...

Ms Bowsfield: It's bitter. It got my attention. When I read it, I was so close to tears.

Natasha: (*Hesitantly*) Oh, okay. I would have loved to have seen what your reaction did to her. It would have been very interesting. Does she see the power of her words?

Susan: That's an interesting question.

Natasha: I don't think she does. She's not good at non-verbal, so she may have seen that you didn't laugh, she may have noticed.

Susan: The only comment that I could make without choking up was, 'It's a shame I can't use it.'

Natasha: 'I want you to use it,' that's what she said, right?

Susan: Yeah. Then she's invested and I'm thinking, 'I don't want this.'

Natasha: No, no.

Susan: Mentally, I don't need that.

Natasha: Yes, yes. But I think that once you get some distance, you're going to see how valuable that is.

Susan: Maybe... I'm not there yet.

Natasha: No, no, I don't blame you, 'cause if the tables were turned, I'd be exactly where you are.

Susan: Yeah.

Natasha: I'd be exactly there. You've got a ton invested in this, hours and energy and enthusiasm 'cause it's your belief. And you're right, I can see how you don't want to feel like you're...

Susan: Wasting people's time.

Natasha: Yeah. I'm not sure, whether they can articulate what they got out of it.

Susan: Um hmm.

Natasha: Or whether they're even going to see what they got out of it for a while. Do you know what I mean?  
(C3 S2, D, p. 44-46)

Blackout.

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Scene 3: Two days later, in a classroom with other students, this is a public conversation exploring frustration, apology and learning.

Tatum: Was it the one that you were mean to Ms Bowsfield?

Karly: Yeah! I was very unmotivated. It kind of made me frustrated 'cause I've always needed motivation to do something well.

Avery: Yeah, you're a Russian.

Karly: (*Joking.*) I'm in comparison with Russians. I almost feel selfish doing this because this is for her... Ph.D., and I didn't put a lot of effort into the project. 'Cause there's just nothing I could get out of it, I kind of apologize for that but...

Ms Bowsfield: Well thank you, 'cause I have to say it was very hurtful.

Karly: Yeah.

Ms Bowsfield: But I also think that there's a lot I can learn from it. The irony for me is; what I wanted you to do is find your own reasons for writing.

Karly: Um hmm.

Ms Bowsfield: You found a reason for writing... When you were telling the story of Karly's frustration. That's your best piece of writing. It wasn't until you found your own reasons for writing that you even tried. If you don't have reasons for writing that are your own, do you ever really get better at it? Can you ever really get better at it, until you want it?

Karly: Well, I can write, but I don't think I'm really good.

Ms Bowsfield: Do you want to get better?

Karly: I don't know. I'd have to find some reason why I'd really want to. Then take my first step forward because I needed motivation and I really didn't have it.

Ms Bowsfield: Investment. Things like this; you only can get what you put in. I can't make you want to be a writer; I can't make you interested in writing; I can't make you

love writing, that's all up to you. I see it as I provide space, and see what happens. I'm just hoping that for students I can help that switch to writer happen earlier than for me. (C3 S3, WG, p 14-16)

Blackout.

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Scene 4: I learn something about myself. This is a private conversation between Karly and Ms Bowsfield.

Ms Bowsfield: Do you still feel like I robbed you?

Karly: Well, no, 'cause I learned something about myself. I really like small classes. You can talk more about writing, like you can talk with the whole class not just your close people.

Ms Bowsfield: Right, so you think talking about writing is important? Can you give me example of learning through conversation?

Karly: You get a better understanding and then a whole bunch of different viewpoints.

Ms Bowsfield: If you added two more people into this conversation, each would hear and incorporate their own experiences into this conversation.

Karly: You take what you get out of it. People contribute and then you take more, and then you contribute and everyone can take more. You learn better through other people. I would always think my way if I never had a class.

Ms Bowsfield: How can these conversations that influence us, help our writing?

Karly: Well, if you learn from other people, then you have to mold it into your own identity. If you take it all in, then you can write better than you would by yourself.

Ms Bowsfield: What could help you become a better writer?

Karly: Just try different things I guess.

Ms Bowsfield: Irony! I tried something different and you hated it.

Karly: I hated it. But now, that could be a good thing 'cause now I kind of know what I can learn.

Ms Bowsfield: Let's talk about that final piece of writing. You wrote for you to express your anger...

Karly: Passionate.

Ms Bowsfield: It was passionate, it was critical... So what did you hate?

Karly: You said 'it can be whatever you want,' so I didn't have to put effort in this writing. Then that frustrated me because... by doing the simple thing, the comic strip, because if I just put some effort in, I know I could write better but I didn't have to, so why should I?

Ms Bowsfield: Where does the responsibility for learning lie?

Karly: You have to have a goal, I guess? Well, marks is a good way to bribe.

Ms Bowsfield: But what if you get something out of it for yourself, what if the desire to write becomes intrinsic?

Karly: That would be helpful.

Ms Bowsfield: I think that's what I was trying to push for, that power to voice something, be it a letter to the editor because you're mad about a bylaw, be it to your boss because you have this great new idea, so you have that ability to find your own reason.

Karly: Yeah but that's hard. You have to really like it.

Ms Bowsfield: What do you think teachers could do to help students with their writing?

Karly: You have to figure out how they think and how they learn. Which is a hard thing because, I only know a bit of how I learn. There's so much I don't even understand. How would the teacher know?

Ms Bowsfield: Can you articulate why you didn't want to get involved?

Karly: I didn't really realize how I could really benefit out of this.'

Ms Bowsfield: Yeah. I'm definitely getting something out of this.

Karly: She's getting something out of it, and I don't know what I would learn. Back then, how would I know what I would get out of it?

Ms Bowsfield: I really didn't know exactly what you would get out of it.

Karly: Yeah.

Ms Bowsfield: But when you decided...

Karly: When I decided...

Ms Bowsfield: I was going to do this... Everything changed.

Karly: Yes.

Ms Bowsfield: When you decide; I want this, I can make this happen, that's the switch. What I want to know is how, as a teacher, I can help you find that want and desire, I can't give it to you?

Karly: I don't know if a teacher can really give the want and desire part?

Ms Bowsfield: No but...opportunities to create want and desire.

Karly: I still have to take those first steps. I want to write better... I mean you have to start from yourself. (PC, p. 10-31)

Blackout.

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### **What do I Get?      A Review by Natasha Harris**

This short four-scene play “What Do I Get?” by Susan Bowsfield delves into questions around student motivation, teacher choices, and paradoxes of learning. It is the story of a journey, both on the part of the student and the researcher. For the student, the journey is an unexpected one, beginning with an expression of anger shared with an unlikely source and ending with a realization of self. For the researcher, the journey is more emotional, bringing to the forefront many of the researcher’s fears. By the end of the journey, the researcher has found inspiration in this most unlikely of events. In both cases, the journeys are largely based in reflection, creating a potential difficulty for the director and actors.

Scene one begins with a short and simple exchange in a grade nine classroom. Events are set in motion near the end of a class period, surrounded by a sea of activity. Students mill around and chat, sun shines in the west-facing windows, just like any of many similar times this year. Contrasting this is something happening at the front of the classroom, something that has never happened before this year, something that will change the course of a research study and will also change both players. There, frozen in the moment, Ms Bowsfield, the researcher, holds a sheet of notepaper while Karly, a grade nine student, waits and watches. Ms Bowsfield reads for a long time, longer than Karly expects. A moment of awkwardness passes over both of them, unnoticed by any of the others. Finally, Ms Bowsfield simply, quietly, and in a voice most distinctly rarely used by teachers in the classroom says, “It’s a shame I can’t use it.”

Karly's quick and perhaps completely instinctual answer, "You can" is shadowed by the bell ringing and the quick exit of all of the students, including Karly. Susan is left alone. She quickly busies herself with the tasks at hand, picking up materials, moving desks, anything to buy herself a few minutes to compose herself. In this scene we are reminded of the humanity of the teacher, that this person who at once seems to hold all the answers is real, vulnerable, able to be hurt. Why doesn't she cry, why doesn't she allow her honest tears to flow? Or is she too angry for tears? Perhaps this is the result of years of training; any teacher who allows her students to come close enough to hurt her will invariably be hurt. And yet, at that moment, it is the rare teacher who allows students to see the effect of their actions. Why? To protect the student, the teacher, or both? This scene, ordinary and yet extraordinary, sets the stage for a journey of exploration by both researcher and student.

Scene two opens a few minutes later, as the hallway noises diminish and the two teachers sit down to chat. It is a moment any teacher can connect to: that moment when students leave for the day. With their exit comes a silence, and there is finally a moment to breathe, to centre oneself. And that is exactly what Susan does. Susan and Natasha sit down to discuss their perceptions of that period in Susan's study. Their conversation moves immediately to the incident with Karly. Susan is upset, and Natasha feels a responsibility for this. It was her suggestion that Karly even share the hate letter with Susan. Prior to this moment, Karly was not even part of the study. Susan need not see this letter. Natasha is second-guessing her choice, especially in view of Susan's reaction, which is completely realistic and should have been better anticipated. Natasha believes Susan will come to value, in time, what Karly has done, but Karly's words have cut Susan to the core. This scene is less familiar to educators than the first. Susan's agonizing is both rarely shared with colleagues and rarely shared when the wounds are so fresh. Rarely do

colleagues engage on this deep of a level; even more rarely are they both present when an incident of this magnitude occurs.

Scene three captures a small group conversation a few days later. In this exchange, one of Karly's classmates, Tatum, expresses an understanding of the letter as one in which Karly was "mean". Clearly the letter has been mentioned outside class. Tatum's summary of the letter as "mean" frames it as an attack rather than an honest response to a heartfelt situation. The word "mean" situates the letter as bullying, as uncaring, as deliberately hurtful, perhaps none of which Karly actually intended. Karly tries to explain, but does not question the meanness of her act.

In scene four, the final scene, the audience is treated to the first scene between the two major players, Ms Bowsfield and Karly, as they discuss the letter a few days after the first encounter. Bowsfield opens with a dangerous question, "Do you still feel like I robbed you?"

The issues in this play are explored clearly. The audience has little work to do in terms of inference. The conflict itself appears in the opening moments, sustained through a variety of scenes before a final intimate scene.

This play will not appeal to a wide audience. Essentially, Bowsfield is speaking to teachers here, those who work day in and day out with students, who will recognize the challenges in the classroom inherent in these scenes: maintaining composure in the face of a startling attack, sharing concerns with a colleague, dealing with an incident and its fallout, conversing one-on-one with students, and seeking to understand how to become better at our craft. Teachers of students of all ages and subject areas can benefit from this play, but English teachers in particular will find much to consider.

Bowsfield challenges current conceptions of teaching writing. These students have been asked to find a purpose to write, a purpose beyond the transactional writing format of many classes. When faced with this test, Karly floundered. Without a clear purpose and marking rubric,

she was akin to the survivor of a shipwreck stranded on a lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific: she found it pointless to even try to find a purpose, to do something when there was nothing in it for her.

*Aside: Researcher teacher tension*

The final tension between researcher and teacher is personified in the found play. Was I teacher or researcher in creating it? The play is a writer's form, a teacher's form and not so much a researcher's form. Because this is research with the writer and the teacher at heart, I froze this moment in time and let the form frame epiphanies and speak the participant's voices. The form of the play allowed for the moment to live undisturbed, uninterrupted; in short, I felt it was the best way to convey the story, in order to highlight the immediacy of moment; its fleeting and hopeful nature. It happens. It is gone and the participants move on with their lives; teachers move on with their classes. As a teacher, it was more than enough, enough to keep going, to remain optimistic. However, as research it fails to comment, to speak over, to say so what, so I do that here.

For me, Karly articulated everything I was trying to do both as a researcher and as a teacher. Karly lived in irony. She resisted writing; she resisted change. She chose to avoid the project and, yet, she of all could most clearly articulate what she learned. First, she wrote to satisfy her needs. She refused the premise of an assignment and in her refusal found a real reason, her anger, to write. She challenged the authority of the room and was heard. Second, she resisted the project because, after all, what can you learn from talking? She learned to see others' perspectives. In her words, "People contribute and then you take more, and then you contribute and everyone can take more." She had encapsulated the social turn in constructivist learning and this from a fifteen-year old. She also found conversation to be useful in extending her personal realm of knowledge about writing when she observed that, "If you take it all in [meaning ideas that you make suit your identity], then you can write better

than you would by yourself.” On a personal front, she highlighted her craving for external motivation, which could be important knowledge for her future.

While perhaps not seeing as much irony as I did, she suggested teachers need to “try different things” to help students, even if they are uncomfortable with the ambiguity. She stumbled upon the critical paradox that plays out in process writing. She said “You [the teacher] need to figure out how they think and how they learn. Which is a hard thing because I only know a bit of how I learn. There’s so much I don’t even understand. How would the teacher know?”

When a teacher establishes assignments with stages, multiple drafts, reflective commentary and other guidelines, it is all geared toward seeing an invisible process in order to provide instruction; however, the assignment parameters are unfortunately, at times, perceived by students as busy work or useless teacher requirements. An unintended effect is that students resist the very thing that could provide insight into a messy complex process that they struggle to use to their advantage. My statement back to her perhaps should have been, ‘You need to tell me what you do know about how you learn, how you write, so that I can work with you to help you see what you do not know.’ Perhaps one failing of the process movement lies in not successfully explaining why understanding process is important to students, in not taking the time to explore what they have to gain as writer by understanding themselves better. Perhaps the process teachers establish has become the point rather than the writing.

## **Productive Resistance**

Elbow (2000) believes that both resistance and compliance play a role in learning. Resistance and reluctance have the paradoxical ability both to hinder and to expand leaning. Teachers face the conflicting goals

of “helping students find ways to comply, yet still maintain their independence and autonomy; and ways to resist, yet still be productive” (p. 22). Perhaps a simple shift in stance, which then frames resistance as productive and natural (Mudoon, 2009), and potentially even necessary, alters the possibilities of an experience. While students will still resist in various ways, they can be invited into conversations that help them understand how their resistance shapes their writing experiences.

I believe conversations of these sorts serve both the teacher and the student. For the teacher, it expands understanding of student behaviour. It brings the student’s surrounding meaning into play, where it can be probed, affirmed, challenged and recognized as part of a student’s autobiography of writing experiences. For students, the conversations are opportunities for self-reflection. Moments to pause and ask, why do I do it this way? What frustrates me, excites me, limits me or liberates me? As teachers’ recognition of and experiences with resistance grow, so do the stories they have available to offer students as ways into, through and beyond resistance.

For Dan, resistance was so deeply embedded in his narrative that it damaged his academic standing. If his resistance remains unattended to and uninterrupted, Dan’s relationship with school is in jeopardy. He needs space for his autobiographical writing self to be storied, perhaps only orally as a starting place (no point in creating more resistance), so that he can consciously decide how resistance will shape his experience. The classroom realities have not served Dan well and many of his teachers have stopped pushing. In fact, they have stopped engaging him in conversations about why he does not write and have instead let him invoke his ‘right to fail,’ perhaps the greatest form of resistance and the least productive.

Within Avery’s resistance, the issues of intertextuality, academic literacy, writer’s block, and his authorial self need to be explored. When he felt pushed, he blocked. His resistance has drafted a story that I feel

confident he would like to rewrite, but in order to do that he too needs to challenge, probe and attend to his decisions. However, the very academically dangerous nature of the story makes it less likely to be revealed publicly, making it difficult to find conversation partners willing to risk revealing the practices that academic institutions deem transgressive, unacceptable or inappropriate. I fear this story will simply go underground without reflection.

Karly's experience with resistance is the most hopeful and productive of the three. In conversation, she moved beyond resistance to explore how her actions and decisions constructed her as a learner and a writer. She has now considered the idea that one cannot always know what one will get out of an experience in advance. Perhaps she will still resist, but now there is at least one story in her autobiography that can make a case for not resisting. She remained open to reconsidering her experience to reinterpreting her autobiography. Now she knows that she needs reward, that conversations can expand ideas, and that she has some agency, some power to write her story. What does having that knowledge make possible for her?

Finally, as a researcher and as a teacher, I must explore my own resistance. Opportunities are missed in research. What I often did not hear in the moment was due to my own resistance. Dan's story is familiar as the student who never writes or writes just enough to survive. As a teacher, I resist accepting any responsibility for attempting to find out why he does not write and, yet, all too frequently, I fail to inquire. I am also quick to claim success if the reluctant student does write, a belief equally problematic. I instantly framed Avery's plagiarism from the academic institution's position, not from his. I could have created more space for hearing him rather than confronting him. I realize now I could also have viewed his actions in the light of musical phenomenon of remixing, by focusing in on the intertextuality. By treating Karly's story as a textual object of study (at the time, my only perceived emotional option), I

resisted hearing Karly's story ... I brushed off her anger. I rushed past her resistance, because of my own resistance to really seeing how the project had affected her. In retrospect, more time exploring those themes could have provided more understanding for both of us. In our dialogue, there was hope that conversations and stories about writing can and will make a difference to students' lives as writers.

I did not expect resistance; I resisted the notion that students would be resistant to understanding themselves better through autobiographical writing. But many were. I must resist glossing over mismatches between intention and perception. I learned that resistance can be incredibly productive when it becomes part of the conversation. In the end, I learned that my role as a teacher and as a researcher is to set up the experience, expect and accept resistance, adopt a listening stance and keep pushing for new possibilities, new stories. The only stance I can control in relation to resistance is my own. And now I have new ideas to reflect on embedded in my stories of writing.

# Chapter Nine

## Rough and Polished

That teachers may first need to identify which characteristic components of each student's process facilitate writing and which inhibit it before further teaching takes place. If they do not, teachers of unskilled writers may continue to place themselves in a defeating position: imposing another method of writing instruction upon the students' already internalized processes without first helping students to extricate themselves from the knots and tangles of those processes. (Perl, 1994, p. 58)

Perl's study of the unskilled college writer encourages the perception of students as already hosting a complex set of processes that may need untangling. The stories that follow begin to identify which processes facilitate and inhibit writing for these students in relation to revision. The particular writers presented here are both rough and polished. Like stone shaped for a monument, these writers are engaged in a process of creating their writing. Stone can be intentionally crafted into something new, such as a headstone, a carving or a decorative necklace piece. The experiences and intentions of the artist participate in the project with which she engages. In writing, too, rough becomes more polished with time, with vision and revision, with honing and crafting.

I have selected Diana, Adriana and Shelly to write about the phenomenon of revision for several reasons. These young women represent a range of ability as writers within the class. They provided the most comprehensive set of field texts and were frequent participators in conversations. The writing they engaged in contributed in a greater way to my sense of them than their drawings. They are all female participants because, as can be seen from previous chapters, the male participants did not engage with the project in the same way or with the same quality of

writing, whereas these three produced writing that was somewhat comparable to what they might have written for Ms Harris (in her opinion). Their data set also provided more opportunities than other students to trace revision processes. Finally, they are here because the story of their experience was best told through a chronological narrative of their writing during the project.

This chapter draws on the tradition of narrative inquiry, student writing and, when occasionally salient, their drawings. The focus of each narrative is on tracing the landscape surrounding the writing created by the students for this study. Did they revise? Could they articulate their process? How did their social positioning within the class shape their writing? Did they resist or embrace the experience? I have tried to paint a picture of the continuum of past endeavors with glimpses of possible futures.

I have intentionally woven many of the participants' voices into these portraits with less direct referencing of transcripts, in order to create a flowing narrative. Where transcript references seemed necessary, they are included; each section provides a portrait of a writer read through her voice, her writing and my interpretation. The written texts produced by the students are in italics.

One of the challenges that became apparent when my analysis began was that the research was not designed to study student revision strategies in extreme detail. However, I had requested that students keep any (mostly two) drafts of writing and I had multiple conversations recorded regarding their writing. Nevertheless, I did not directly observe students' composing or revision processes. Rather than trace revision processes, this chapter explores the theme of revision as it played out in three students' lives and writing in a more general way.

Myhill and Jones (2007) called for revision to move beyond a deferred post-drafting process to a more inclusive process that additionally includes both pretext revision (revision completed in planning prior to

drafting) and online revision (revision strategies employed during composing). Further, they suggested that instructional practices need to place more attention on explicit meta-cognitive understanding of the writing processes students employ, which can be described as the meta-language of writing or a vocabulary of revision that would allow students to be explicit and specific in describing their purpose and goals for a piece of writing. Dix (2006a) draws attention to the diverse ways students learn to write and employ composing and revision processes, all of which contribute to the challenges a teacher faces. McClay (2004), although referring to avid writers (those who engage in and enjoy a writing practice outside of school), observes that through a research process students “see themselves as writers by having an adult take them seriously as writers, and they recognize the hallmark moments of their writing in terms of their lives” (p. 99).

Shelly, Diana and Adriana, although grounded in the particular, often generate echoes of past, present and potentially future students for me. Each portrait presents one snapshot of them as writers, a version even they may have outgrown as they progress into high school and move into the general grade ten population of more than 120 students, no longer insulated in a small closed classroom, always with the same close friends.

Their beliefs about writing contributed to framing their writing experience. Here are three stories of different writers, each with their own needs, challenges, writing styles and home conditions, all residing in the same class. Issues of revision became the unifying theme drawing these writers together. Shelly resisted revision. She simply writes, it appears, without attention to the process. Diana’s revision was unavailable for viewing. Her vision of her own writing is far cloudier than her vision of that of others. Adriana carefully took up the task of working at her writing; it is part of who she is. Muldoon (2009) pointed out that even academics resist rather than embrace another’s attempt to reshape their ideas. Why, then, would students be different?

## **Shelly: the Stone just Is (no need for revision)**

Shelly was the strongest of the three writers portrayed here and she disliked the research project and perhaps, in general, rejected the framework classroom directed revision often adopts in an effort to reveal process. She claimed writing was “really easy for me and I don’t have to do many drafts, like it just happens as I go” (PC, p. 14). McClay’s (2004) avid writers also “resisted teacher-required revision of their work, calling it boring and pointless” (p. 97). Although I would not consider Shelly an avid writer, in McClay’s terms she is quite competent without appearing to need significant revision and she does see teacher-directed revision as pointless and unnecessary. She rarely produced more than two drafts and her writing appeared to flow smoothly. Perhaps, as Sommers (1994) suggested, she therefore felt revision was unnecessary. She disliked personal subjects and preferred a sense of distance about her topic. For this reason, she gravitated to essays. Although she claimed to prefer non-fiction to narrative, she did not seem to understand that autobiography would be non-fiction, confusing genre with subject matter. Further, she had a very limited understanding of the essay as the ‘five-paragraph theme’ used frequently for short or timed writing.

Shelly fell prey to the myth of natural talent and that the ability to write well was somewhat innate (Bright, 2003), when she said “I think I was just kinda born with it.” (PC, p. 15) For her, “there’s a limit to how much you can get better and how much you just came into the world with it” (PC, p. 15). While a ‘personal best’ is attainable through hard work and practice, natural talent just existed and those with it often easily exceeded those who work hard.

She liked some noise to write against, but struggled to concentrate at home with three younger brothers. Her preference was to write at school where no interesting options for other activities existed. She never struggled to get an idea, as long as she was provided structure. The

computer was her medium of choice for both speed and neatness of revision. She used the tools of spell check and the thesaurus efficiently. Her vocabulary was extensive and she used it to create voice in her writing.

Shelly clearly articulated her definition of a writer in three parts. A writer is someone who enjoys writing, is good at it, and does it as a pastime. While she believed she was good at it, she would never do it just for fun. She took a stand that writing notes or answering questions for school, birthday cards for her mom or writing for English class is “cardboard writing” or “not actual writing” (C2 S3, WG, p. 23).

Her sole purpose for writing was because others wanted it. Without that demand, she would never write and wondered why anyone would. Ironically, she kept a journal to record her day. “I just put my day and my thoughts and kind of feelings and then I go back, like, six months later and see what’s changed” (PC, p. 14). Regarding the journal she had maintained since kindergarten, she said, “I wouldn’t write anything else other than that just for myself because I have no purpose. I have no motivation.” (PC, p. 4). She did not see this practice as helpful in any way to her strength as a writer.

Her understanding of narrative structures seemed more developed than other students, when judged in comparison with narratives written by other participants in this study. Shelly did not feel confident that she could develop a strong plot-line, and yet both her stories, *The Toast Code* and *The New Toy* exhibited a controlled beginning, middle and end with humour structured for effect. She established unity in *The Toast Code* by providing each character a toast code name that delineated the individual’s social position and role in the day home. In *The New Toy*, she used a climactic plot to structure the anecdote, which was controlled effectively for reader surprise.

Shelly appeared to be quite critical of others. She criticized one participant’s choice of pseudonym as weird and suggested that Diana’s

writing did not meet the criterion of being about a place. She told Avery to shut up when he was actively disrupting a conversation with nonsense. At first, Shelly was amused by Avery's comments, but she soon became frustrated to the point of yelling at him and trying to embarrass him. She started with Avery in making fun of Diana's writing, but quickly tired of the game, when he did not know when to quit. She criticized Avery's list of what he liked without any suggestions for improvement and only made socially disparaging comments to Diana or about Diana's work, such as "between the ears," "Well, your feelings make sense, but I understand it 'cause I know you" and "It's very Diana" (C1 S2, SG, p. 14). Ironically, as a writer, Shelly would have been more capable of handling Diana's place piece about belonging (discussed later in this chapter), but she felt it was a senseless endeavour and, therefore, would never try to write about such an abstract idea.

Shelly was an honour student who was described by Ms Harris as someone who *needed* to complete all her work on time. However, during the study, her record for completing all her work became tarnished. She misplaced her initial drawing. She completed only two of the three pieces. The data set from her first piece only included one draft, but it did include her pre-writing work and reflection sheet. Her cycle two piece remained incomplete until cycle three. Shelly's comment, "I mean, it's not like we're writing because we feel like it" (C1 S2, SG, p. 12), may have revealed an unexpressed or even unconscious resistance to the entire project that was reflected in her uncharacteristic failure to meet deadlines. Perhaps Shelly's reputation as a diligent honour student did not allow her to reject the workload imposed by the research study, so she found more subtle ways of resisting.

The revision session of cycle one was unproductive for Shelly, because she claimed she had forgotten to write her draft. However, Shelly arrived at cycle one session three confidently ready to share her story, *The Toast Code*. Because she only handed in one version, there was no way to

examine any changes to the story. Forced to write about her life, she felt narrative was the only possible form. She opened her commentary by qualifying her subject matter in relation to the pre-writing of generating a childhood map and brainstorming emotions, people, and events associated with that place. She noted that the attraction was not the place itself, but rather the people and relationships that existed because of the place. She wrote a story of friendship and personality, personified through the characters' preferences for toast.

The Toast Code In Relation to Some Very Tiny Children  
Attending a Babysitting Service

*I don't even remember showing up. It was simply accepted that we were there, no questions asked. After all, we had been only infants the day our parents had first plopped us down on our squishy diapered bottoms, in someone else's house, in someone else's playpen. Naturally, our showing up was beyond our recollection. Our early years, were spent drooling happily all over each other, an indistinguishable mass of dirty diapers, flailing limbs and sickening cuteness. Through the years there were other children of different ages, but the essential characters in our tiny lives were us, each other.*

*At our babysitter's house, there was an unspoken "toast code". Every day we would have peanut butter toast for lunch; it was peanut butter and honey if we had been especially good. Somehow, this system had a way of applying to each of us in a very individual way. In any group of friends there is, of course, the jokester. That was Doug's role. He was always causing mischief, always making us laugh and sometimes getting us into trouble.*

*Putting all his best efforts into being down right hilarious, Doug would request Cheez Whiz toast, and it was soon understood that this meant that you were "funny". Although the rubbery orange substance is a completely revolting topping, I have had an unusual fondness for it ever since. Then there was Doug's best friend in the whole wide world, Tyler. His greatest aspiration was to be a Navy Seal, and he greatly advertised this fact, with his constant attire of army paraphernalia and a small, shaky moustache carefully drawn above his upper lip in brown magic marker. Unspoken but understood by all of us was the fact that he was the leader. The consistent and dependable*

*peanut butter toast. Although Doug always did everything first, from walking on top of the rocks, surrounding the unused outdoor fire pit, to sneaking out of our naptimes, it was Tyler who actually decided whether we should attempt these feats in the first place. And where was I in all of this? I was the honey toast, the lone baby girl, the one who incessantly oozed sweetness. Anxious about getting into trouble, and adamant about my girl-hood, I draped my tiny body in all that was pink, frilly and in all respects, utterly nauseating. The boys didn't mind though. Because I was the girl and also the youngest of the trio, they made sure that in all of our games I was the princess, and was given maximum protection by the chief warrior, played of course by Tyler.*

*We, the inseparable troupe of diapered bottoms crawling, toddling and falling around the babysitter's property, finally stopped going to our babysitter's house, as she eventually retired. Even though those days are over, we will always remember that house as the place where we made our first friends, ate truckloads of Wonderbread, and, in discovering our own unique personalities, caught our very first glimpse of who we were someday going to be in the world. (C1 S3, Shelly)*

Shelly's story, the longest of all the submitted writing, was controlled and unified through symbolic representations of the characters of her toddler years. She even recognized and noted that these two young boys were characters in her life and part of her construction as a person. Her narrative was reflective and revealed an understanding that our roles as children can be mirrored into our young adult life. The *Toast Code* revealed the emerging personalities of a clown, a leader and a princess. Autobiographically, Shelly reveals much about herself while maintaining distance through her age.

In cycle two, Shelly started to draft her *Hot Tub* story when she produced a picture of her characters and herself in a hot tub. Here, again, she and Avery bantered rather unproductively during the planning and drafting session. When it was Shelly's turn to share her stories behind the picture, she was distracted by comments about how cute they were when they were little and how little they have changed. She reminisced about

wanting to marry one of the boys and kissing him under the picnic table. Eventually, she started in on the story she planned to develop, which was the “really funny memory” of when “Linden pooped in the hot tub” (C2 S2, SG, p. 18). The real humour lay in the fact that all the characters of the story thought the floating poop was just another toy and picked it up, only to have it squish through their fingers like mashed potatoes. There is nothing better than a poop story in junior high for social capital!

In the revision session, Shelly answered all the questions on the protocol sheet in quick succession with no elaboration: the idea never changed from her original; her purpose was to write something; she had no idea who her audience would be; the picture reminded her of the incident. She chose narrative, “because you can’t really write about a picture and it not be a story that I can really think of, other than a poem” (C2 S2, SG, p. 12). She sought help with strengthening her beginning and ending. The following excerpt comprises the two middle paragraphs.

Tyler, Linden and I were playing in the hot tub: racing boats, splashing in the fountain, spitting water at each other, just doing what we normally did. It was a blissful autumn day, and Tyler and Linden’s older brother Zach was watching us from the grass outside the hot tub. Tyler and I were side by side amidst a plethora of floating toys that littered the tub. Suddenly, Tyler spotted a new toy floating with the others. Gazing at it quizzically, he grasped his pudgy hand around it, and ignoring a small gnawing sense of foreboding, I followed suit.

“What is it?” Tyler asked as he squeezed it. Distinctly I remember the way the object oozed through my fingers as I squished the mysterious brown object. Its warm sticky pastiness caught me off guard. As my mind tried to work out what this thing that was coating my palm could possibly be, a panicked yell from Tyler’s end of the hot tub, “It’s poo!” (Cycle 2, draft 1)

Shelly built suspense and foreshadowed the climax of the anecdote through her description of the floating toy. She used her large vocabulary to impress her audience. Her subject of bodily humour appealed to her

junior-high classmates. Her risk in telling the story was limited to her handling the poop, which was understandable when considering the age of the characters. Diana tried to make suggestions for the ending, but had no specific ideas that were not clichés (e.g. “I hope it never happens again”).

Shelly chose to take advantage of deadline confusion for draft two of cycle two. When several other students were not done, she simply let her story slide and then used it in cycle three. The cycle three pre-writing activity did nothing to spark ideas for Shelly, so when she was absent for the revision session of cycle three, it became even easier to simply polish her started piece of writing from cycle two and then submit it.

Because Shelly handed in two drafts completed over two cycles and participated in a revision conversation, there was an opportunity to examine the specific changes she made to her story. Her revisions were surface-level micro-structure additions, substitutions, and deletions that preserved meaning (Dix, 2006b). “*Growing up*” was added to the opening line, “*the O’s hot tub was always a special treat for me.*” Her first significant change was to delete the details about the brother watching as irrelevant to her story, something she had noted during her reading to her small group. She changed “plethora” to “*variety*” of toys a more suitable word choice for her characters. She changed the sentence, “Suddenly, Tyler spotted a new toy floating with the other ones,” to “*Suddenly, Tyler spotted a new toy drifting among the others.*” Vocabulary additions or deletions were the extent of her other changes. Her ending changed from “By the next day he had recovered from his mortification, but after that day, I was always reminded of that day every time I went in that hot tub” to “*By the next day he had recovered from his mortification, but after that day, I have never been able to enter a hot tub without a small smile for that one memorable day*” (C3 S3). The changes to her final sentence made the statement more universal and applicable to all future hot-tub experiences and removed some of the clichéd nature of “I was always reminded of.”

Shelly was extremely critical of the research project in her final drawing which represented her emotional response. She drew a lost person with a broken compass, where “The compass doesn’t belong to the person. It was given to them broken.”

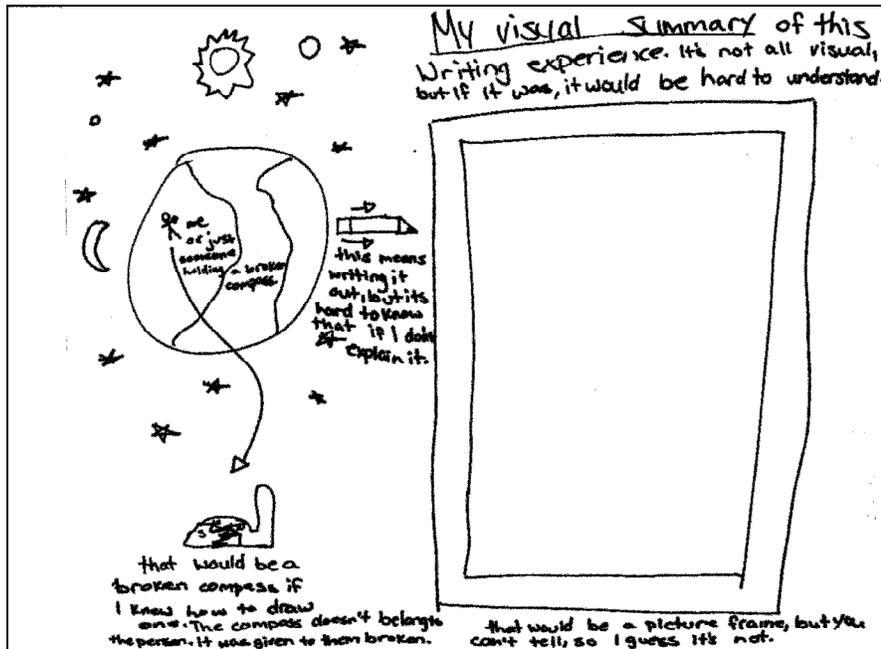


Figure 16: Shelly D2

Text: My visual summary of this writing experience. It’s not all visual, but if it was, it would be hard to understand...me or just someone holding a broken compass...this means writing it out, but it is hard to know that if I don’t explain it...that would be a broken compass if I knew how to draw one. The compass doesn’t belong to the person. It was given to them broken... that would be a picture frame, but you can’t tell so I guess it’s not.

Her character was standing on the earth surrounded by sun, moon and stars, with all the world to write about, but no direction. The other half of the drawing was a blank picture frame with a pencil pointing to the frame, but producing nothing. The following was her immediate public classroom explanation of her drawing.

Shelly: I drew this; it’s called my visual summary of this writing experience. It’s not all visual but if it was it would be hard to understand ‘cause then it’d have writing in it. Okay, so there’s, like, the earth and the sun and it’s basically like everything and I guess it’s supposed to symbolize, like, a broad topic because, like, this whole thing was, I was given kind of a really broad topic, you could write pretty much anything about a subject but it was really broad. And there’s a person on

there, that's, like, me or just someone holding a broken compass on the earth. Yeah, the compass apparently doesn't belong to the person; it was given to them broken because they don't really know where to go with that. And then there's an empty picture frame with nothing in it because they don't know what to make of this broad topic because they don't know where to go with it. (C3 S3, WG, p. 23)

The attribution of the person in Shelly's drawing is challenging. She both claims and distances herself through her use of pronouns, both in the drawing and in her explanation. She is at times "me, or just someone," "I was given a broad topic" or "it was given to them broken," and "They don't know what to make of this broad topic." Coupling the prompt's criteria with Shelly's response to the project, I believe she did represent herself. Shelly was the lost person; the project had made her feel lost from the beginning. By moving away from "I" and "me" toward "you," "person," "someone," "they," and "them," she created deniability. Perhaps she found the critical nature of her drawing required some distancing in order to soften her comments, in a setting which normally does not invite criticism. Further, I believe it is very difficult for students, outside of an angry and emotional situation, to be critical of adults to their face in a school setting and I, of course, was right there.

I had given her a broken compass or perhaps the study did. Finally, in her drawing, Shelly had overtly directed her resistance toward the study into the public domain. She even rejected that anything can be learned from drawing about writing through how she used words to strip her images of significant interpretation, with words like "hard to understand," "I guess it's not," and "if I don't explain it." For her, words were clear whereas visuals were hard to understand and could not clearly convey meaning. And yet it was her use of visual imagery and metaphor with the lost person, the broken compass and the whole world not fitting into her need for a frame that helped her to articulate what she hated about the project.

Shelly needed a picture frame for writing in, not unlike working from the photograph. Once her framework was in place she was able to generate high-quality work. In reality, she was capable of generating the high quality she had come to expect of herself without a rigid picture frame, but she was uncomfortable. Here again, she revealed tension between claiming her criticism and distancing herself with, “I didn’t really like, I needed a very narrow subject or someone to tell me exactly what I had to do” (PC, p. 2). Having the whole world available to write about was so overwhelming, that “they [the person in her drawing] don’t know what to do with it” (PC, p. 2). Perhaps feeling exposed by the need to frame and develop her own ideas, Shelly simply adopted a safe route through the challenge. Lost, she elected to work consistently in the narrative genre, which was a space that had been familiar since grade two, even if it was not her preferred space.

Her confidence grew with prescriptive expectations such as a rubric, a genre and the subject matter. Ideally, she would have liked to know how many sentence openers she should use (Wiebe, 1998). The more concrete and detailed the prescription, the more comfortable she was. Although she trusted her classmates, because they had been together since she was five, she avoided personal exposure and the judgment of others by including herself as a very young character and remaining emotionally and verbally distant from the project. For her, writing was a product demanded by someone else, not a personal activity.

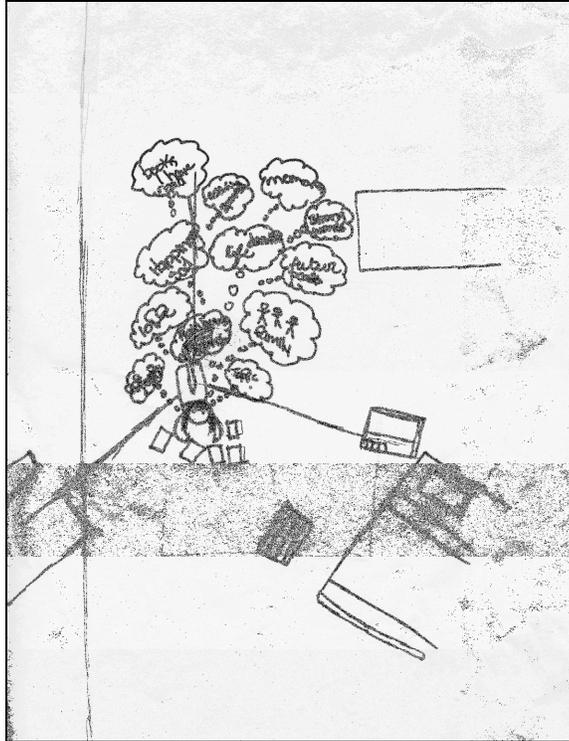
Ironically, when Shelly responded to the question, “What could teachers do to help you with the craft of writing?”, her clearest suggestion was to provide more experience with broad topics and more writing assignments like the ones I requested, the very thing she hated. However, in order to gain comfort with the broad topic, she wanted exemplars. Again ironically, she requested the very thing her peers, Ms Harris and I had generated throughout the project. She was a rare student who sought to do more of the thing that frustrated her. I wonder whether her request

was not a desire for more certainty, in that the models she viewed would become her new framework to support the broad topics where she could simply insert her words into another model.

According to Lipstein and Renninger's (2007) four-fold classification of students' interest in writing, Shelly appears to be at phase two (maintained situational interest). She approached writing "as something to be 'done right,'" (p. 81) according to the teacher's specifications. The writing she completed was always for someone else and it was, in fact, "cardboard writing." She seemed to revise out of expectation and incorporate observations and feedback when they were provided; however, her use of peer sessions was more working *beside* than working *with* to improve her writing. Shelly's revisions tended toward surface changes that responded to accuracy and maintained meaning through additions, deletions and substitutions (Dix, 2006b). Essentially, Shelly resisted my insistence that meta-cognitive understanding of writing processes would be an asset to her.

### **Diana: The Delete Key Hammer**

Diana engaged with the autobiographical writing project immediately, but perhaps not productively, in improving her writing. She loved to write in her bedroom with music in the background. Her mind wandered over personal topics, twisting and untwisting truth and fiction. She was confident with autobiographical writing, because there were so many stories available to her. Writing on demand frustrated her. She preferred to have no plan, just to start a paragraph and see where it might lead. Her writing reflected this. Voice was her strongest attribute in writing and she believed it was like personality. When other students resisted and rejected the freedom, she embraced it.



**Figure 17: Diana D1**

Text working from bottom to top: (uncertain either friends or forever)...topic... rainbows & dreams...love...family...happiness & sad...life death...futur & past...books I have read...activity & sports...future and past, books I have read, activity and sports...memories... strong words

Diana's initial drawing reflected her desire to write in the comfort of her home, with no rules, on a wide range of personal topics. Her thought balloons revealed many traditional autobiographical topics for writing. Her position on the floor backed in the corner alluded to a need for protecting herself from exposure. As Diana's story progressed, this theme, subtly revealed but unarticulated in her personal explanation of her drawing, became apparent in both her writing and her social interactions.

Diana clearly and consistently identified with the girl in her drawing. This is *her* writing in *her* bedroom, embodying the metaphor of 'back to the wall.' "I find it really comforting to be in my own room" (PC, p. 1) is one example of several 'I' statements. There are parallels in the way Diana positions herself in her room and the sense of social isolation she expressed in her first piece of writing.

Diana's cycle one writing reflected her social positioning in the class. Her family moved to Wheaton when she was in grade five, making her the newest student to enter the social mix and, therefore, somewhat of an outsider. With only one French Immersion class per grade, these students moved through grades as a cohort. New faces sometimes struggled to fit in. Diana captured this situation nicely in her 'place' piece, when she shifted from writing about a specific place to a more emotional, mental place of belonging.

*Everyone has a place, whether its [sic] popularity or being a nerd. Me, I don't have a place, I don't have a group of friends that are like me. I am a large group of one. Although that is my choice, I could be part of the girls who think every single moment is the funniest moment ever. Or I could hang out with the people who study encyclopedias. I'm not saying these are bad people, I just don't like drama and I am not very smart. And don't get me wrong; I have many friends that I hang out with and have many laughs with, but I don't have a place, crowd, group. Then sometimes I would like some comfort. I see groups that have all that, but I'm happy with where I don't fit in. (Cycle 1 Draft 2)*

Diana's story of creation surrounding this piece involved intertextuality, as her inspiration came from a song she heard on the radio. She started to write a poem about her thinking place, her rooftop, which was supported by her planning sheet completed in class. However, she reported shifting abruptly to a metaphorical place in terms of belonging in an effort to be original. Her revision of this piece was at the surface level and focused on accuracy such as spelling, punctuation and meaning-preserving additions, deletions and reordering (Dix, 2006b). In Diana's reflection about this piece of writing, she explained how she struggled to come up with a good idea. She wanted to work with a less-obvious sense of place than a physical location, which was what everyone else had suggested as topics. Perhaps she took this opportunity to express her encountered separation and difference from her classmates to those

classmates. Her writing hedged her isolation by culminating with the idea that she is happy with not fitting in – but is she?

Lensmire (1994) identifies some of the social risks of peer audiences and the subtlety students can sometimes employ to mitigate social risks in the shaping of their texts for peers and in the sharing of writing with others. One key strategy is to select and involve friends when sharing texts is required, but Diana did not have that level of control since Ms Harris and I had determined her working revision group.

The examination of her drafts against the transcripts from her small group revealed that very little changed as a result of peer suggestions. The changes Diana elected to make were, by nature, editorial such as spelling corrections, contraction removal, additional auxiliary verbs and one sentence about some comfort received from belonging to a group. She did remove a single sentence about friends who would take midnight walks together. Her small group's (Aden, Avery and Shelly) judgment of that statement may have been a determining factor in the deletion of it. Avery told her the idea was weird and his group of friends would not do that, then Shelly suggested that if Avery and his friends did go for midnight walks, it would be "kinda homosexual" (C1 S2, SG, p. 10). This jab, although aimed at Avery, seemed to subtly criticize Diana also. This type of social criticism reflects both what she suggested in her writing about not having a place in the crowd, and my observation of her, through the transcripts, as somewhat of an outsider marked as other. Her only significant revision was not necessarily about writing as much as it was a response to social sanctioning regarding homophobia and perhaps indicates one way in which she guarded herself.

During cycle one, the other participants in her group were frequently unhelpful, at times rude, and very distracting. They offered no significant suggestions for improving her piece, in either content or organization. For example, here is a page of single-line turns about her choice of "mental place" not fitting the criteria of the assigned writing, but

they are actually just criticizing and fooling around. Diana tried unsuccessfully to defend her choice, but was overridden by unfocused rudeness.

Shelly: It makes sense but it doesn't fit the criteria really. Like what they're asking for...

Diana: Yeah it does...

Shelly: They're asking for...

Diana: She told me to write about a place.

Avery: The place she's writing about is in her own little place.

Shelly: Between your ears.

Ms Harris: Okay!

Aden: No, actually it's more kinda like this, but then kinda up a bit.

Diana: Thanks, Aden.

Aden: Ears, that'd be right there, be like your nose, inward.

Diana: Thanks, Aden.

Avery: Cool.

Aden: If your nose was like inward.

Ms Harris: So, so what you, you wanted...

Aden: You could smell your brain.

Ms Harris: You guys need to be focused on what you are doing.

Aden: Sorry. (C1 S2, SG, p. 20)

The dialogue in this exchange was fairly typical and provoked Ms Harris' intervention. Shelly's challenge that Diana's work did not meet the criteria of "place" is a criticism of her subject matter and, perhaps, because of the personal nature of the subject matter, a subtle criticism of Diana herself. It is possible that Diana invited criticism through her barb about not being friends with people who read encyclopedias, because I suspect that Shelley might be one of the people intended. Further, Aden and Kenton challenged and made fun of her metaphorical place, which eventually devolved into insults regarding intelligence. While Diana frequently tried to draw her small group's attention back to the task they were supposed to be engaged in, she had no allies there.

Diana asked for help with clarity, because she frequently "took a whole bunch of ideas and feelings and wrote them down. I don't know if it

does make sense, or not” (C1 S2, SG, p. 21). Ms Harris responded that she had seen this type of writing before from Diana, implying a weakness in organization, “where you just sort of throw ideas down” (C1 S2, SG, p. 21). Again, Ms Harris tried to elicit suggestions from Diana’s peers, with very little success. Ms Harris then identified specific contradictions in the first two lines where Diana suggested that everyone had a place, but she did not have a place in the social positioning of junior high. For me, the contradictions are an important paradox of the social situation she attempted to articulate in writing, but because they were severely underdeveloped ideas about the complex nature of belonging in junior high, they failed to have the desired effect. Although Ms Harris tried to draw Diana’s attention to some concerns around organization and contradictory ideas, her queries and suggestions were not reflected in Diana’s subsequent drafts.

Even though in cycle one, Diana did not experience support from her small group, she repeatedly tried to engage her fellow participants in a revision process similar to the one modelled by Ms Harris and myself. However, she was met with resistance and, at times, hostility. Avery, particularly in the first cycle, appeared to sabotage the conversations with distracting comments. His first piece was limited, completed minutes before class; it was effectively a list of what he liked doing in his backyard. Diana tried to engage Avery in a conversation about developing his backyard piece. She also tried to draw students like him back on task by referring to the protocol sheet, a move Shelly had used against her. Her suggestions were concrete and observant, and included adding specific stories connected to his backyard experiences: perhaps a family time, a time with friends or a funny incident. She was confident enough in her revision suggestions to provide input to both Ms Harris and myself, which I will comment on later.

Diana’s application of revision to herself was not productive in re-visioning her work. Sommers’ (1994) conclusions regarding student

writers echo through Diana's revision selections and suggestions. In reviewing Sommers' study, I saw that Diana was very much a student writer according to her behaviour. Her revision tended to explore lexical but not semantic changes. As Flower and Hayes (1994) suggest, she was trapped in the metaphor of discovery, where she believed that, because her writing flowed rather smoothly, there was no need for revision.

Diana's first piece of writing was socially risky because she acknowledged a feeling of not belonging in it (Lensmire, 1994). She described her piece as a definition of herself. She expressed a conflict between a desire to have a "place, a crowd, a group," and being happy with "where I don't fit in." Diana also criticized other students who "think every single moment is the funniest moment ever" and those who "read encyclopedias," but it was hard to know if her comments were specific or not. She attempted to soften the criticism by rejecting the drama of junior high school and proclaiming herself not 'smart' enough. Diana tended to hang with the boys of the class and although it is impossible to be certain about all of Diana's friendships and groups, her classmates were centrally located in her life and time-intensive, so I suspect that some of the criticism was directed at specific students in her class. While she was required to share with her peer revision group, she opted not to read her final version of her 'place' piece to the entire class.

In cycle two, Diana produced a brief narrative about her mother sewing a wedding dress as a third birthday present. The wedding dress prompted the pretend wedding of Diana to a stuffed Mickey Mouse character. When Diana was asked to tell why she brought the picture that showed herself as a three-year old bride at a toy cash register purchasing food for her wedding, she off-handedly commented that it was the first one she came across. There was a sense of pride, though, in the gift her mother had taken the time to sew and she honoured her mother by relating the story. However, the picture distracted her group mates when it was observed that her dad had hair at that time and the focus on her story was

lost. Diana's social position within her group seemed to inhibit her and she preferred an adult audience, where response was focused on a piece of writing rather than judgments about the writer.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, Diana took risks to engage Ms Harris and myself in revision suggestions. She initiated the thesaurus search to improve diction in my poem. When Ms Harris read her monster story, Diana made two important observations: one on the placement and use of names for clarity and the other on sense-making for the audience regarding who was actually waking the youngest son. Diana was confident in both her observations about others' writing and her suggestions for improvement. This could be difficult in the public forum of critiquing the teacher's writing in front of the class, but she maintained most of her confidence in her smaller group, even though her audience was less focused, less receptive and less mature.

When Diana read her work aloud to her classmates, she stumbled frequently with issues of awkwardness and clarity. She specifically asked for assistance with the ending, as she felt it was abrupt. I drew attention to content and organizational issues regarding the making of the dress and a connection to her younger twin sisters. Although concerns of clarity were brought forward, no action was taken on that issue. Her story began by talking about her mother sewing the wedding dress, while on bed-rest during her pregnancy with Diana's twin sisters. This had two negative effects on the story: first, it made the story sound like it was about her mother and not the wedding, and second, the role of the pregnancy and the details surrounding the sewing of the dress did not appear purposeful to the story.

I believe Diana was trying to express that she knew how much thought and work went into the hand-made present, at a time when her mother was preoccupied with looming twins. Unfortunately, her acknowledgment of her mother's hard work was lost in the lack of organization. While she recognized that she was using the strategy of

reading her writing aloud to reveal awkwardness, and she identified several sentences in her first draft that needed revision, she did not act on that knowledge and her final version was simply a reprinted copy.

Cycle two's final sharing of polished drafts was a complete disaster. While Diana was ready, it was because she had sacrificed revision. McClay's (2004) perceptive observation that writers resist revision when writing is either irrelevant or too relevant seems interesting here. Perhaps Diana was too close to this piece and simply needed defensively to preserve it.

Diana's final poem started as a three-page story about the bracelet her boyfriend had given her. "[I] realized I cannot write a story about something personal ... I have to either write it from, like, a different perspective or a different genre" (C3 C3, WG, p. 14). During session three, she stated that because "this happened to me or if it's, like, too close to me then I can't write a story about it" (C3 C3, WG, p. 14). She deleted her three pages and wrote a poem instead. I expressed my distress at the loss of data, as it was one way to see how writing evolved across genres and through false starts. Through an anecdote, told to the entire class, I explained some of what I have learned by keeping such examples.

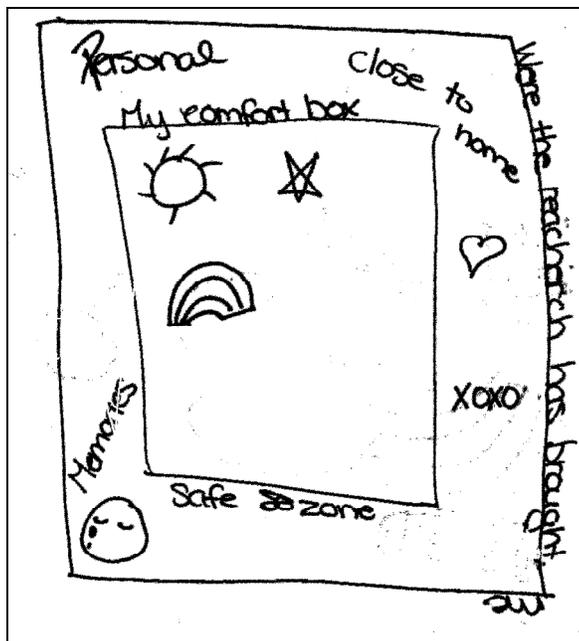
I wish you had it because the three-page story needed to be written to get to that, right? That's one of the things that I've learned is that all of that writing that I'm doing, that doesn't make any sense, isn't working, that I'm frustrated by, that's when the form, the poem pours out, right, so I wish you hadn't deleted it. Never delete anything! You never know what it can turn into later. (C3 S3, WG, p. 3)

However, Diana stated she believed the previous story was 'garbage,' had no bearing on her present poem and that, "I was wasting my time" (C3 S3, WG, p. 4). Diana's poem as handed in,

*Given: a heart, for the absence of words  
An hour, for the darkened minutes  
An "O" for the lack of "x's"  
A memory for the days forgotten  
A smile to replace tears*

*A bracelet for the kilometres in-between*  
*Received: beads in the form of a wrist*  
*Fragments of sky with no clouds*  
*Discovered: a bracelet means more than that*  
*It's there to replace the forgotten the missed and the absent*

While I was retyping Diana's poem, I could not help wondering if, like my story of not knowing the rules of poetry punctuation, she, too, did not know where and how to punctuate other than a use of colons to create pattern and a prepositional phrase. Her subject matter was deeply personal yet accessible to her peers. She was careful to protect herself, either through editing ideas even before they came to the page or by creating distance between herself as the writer and the narrator of her work. She always left some space for deniability in that perhaps she was not the receiver of the bracelet or not the one who does not belong. In her final drawing, she felt she had extended her "comfort box", but she still positioned herself in the corner this time as a sad character (a potential reflection of tensions at home).



**Figure 18: Diana D2**

Text: Personal...close to home...my comfort box...safe zone...memories...ware the research has brought me

Her safe zone was expanded, “my box has just grown” (PC, p. 22). For her, the experience seemed to create possibility: “I have more risks that I can take without being afraid of it.” (PC, p. 22), but her unhappy character seems to remind the viewer that making use of the possibility is not without the risks of exposure and judgement.

Hugs and kisses, symbolized through the conventional visual of X and O’s, appear in both her final poem and her final drawing, which were completed within a day of each other. Also the theme of comfort runs through much of Diana’s work. Does she write for comfort? Does she seek comfort from solitude or through solitude? It first appeared in her initial drawing where she said. “I find it really comforting to be in my own room” (ID, SG, p. 3) a place of privacy and retreat. Then again she seeks comfort in her place piece where it appears comfort would come from having friends like her. In her final drawing, comfort is the box, the frame of the risks she is willing to take, and it has expanded. What draws Diana to this theme? Does she recognize it as a theme in her work?

Diana appears to fit into Lipstein and Renninger’s (2007) phase three as an emerging individual interest in writing (p. 79), She considers herself a writer and spends time on writing for both school and pleasure and she struggles to apply feedback in constructive ways. Diana displayed a serious disjuncture between her oral observations about writing and her textual actions. While she had sophisticated knowledge of revision (Myhill & Jones, 2007; Dix, 2006b), and she was capable of recognizing strengths and weaknesses in others’ writing, during this study she failed to use her own observations and skills to improve her writing through the traditional show-your-drafts process, making it difficult to assist her.

Diana reported macro-level revision twice during the study, once when in cycle one she switched topics and once in cycle three when she deleted the three-page story and wrote a poem. I suspect that Diana’s revision process is very tangled up with the delete key on her computer. These were acts of revision; but they are not generally observable, an

interesting challenge for classroom teachers. Further, I do not believe Diana understood her pretext or online revision *as* revision (Myhill & Jones, 2007) and, therefore, she placed no value in how it might be able to help her improve. The teacher and researcher in me were both frustrated, because without access to the process I was prevented from first helping her improve and second understanding what her revision behaviour really was.

Diana believed her desire for more writing without boundaries was somewhat impractical, but she did think that the freedom provided in the study would be an asset to students. She defined herself as a writer, because she enjoyed it and did not need extrinsic motivation to choose to write. While Diana professed, “I love to write and I do write on my spare time” (C2 S3, WG, p. 15), her actions were incongruent with the desire to improve her writing, in that she resisted revising in any accessible way.

### **Adriana: The Hammer, Chisel, Rasp and Sandpaper**

Adriana also enjoyed the project. She was comfortable with or without constraints in the autobiographical and personal writing. Although a self-professed reader, she did not see herself as a writer. Her purpose for writing was traditionally only ‘on demand’. She wrote when she was told to, how she was told to and also believed why she was told to.

She sought out solitude and quiet for her writing and often chose to remove herself from noisy settings such as the kitchen table. She needed to plan and gained confidence through her planning. Her planning was methodical, feeling that if she tried to ‘just write,’ it would be very confusing. She believed she wrote from a position of *needing* to work on her writing and not as much from inspiration. She liked to be prepared with books and research and when she was “not prepared, it’s hectic and

crazy” (ID, SG, p. 2). For her, inspiration came when she was supplied with everything she needed.

Adriana was a quiet student, one who did not speak frequently in the larger group setting, but participated in her small group. Her first-cycle writing began as a map of childhood place and focused on the family cabin at the lake. Her sketch, although not to scale, had great detail. The drawing evoked many childhood stories that I would say focused on the everyday pleasant events the cabin generated. For example:

We had made a sand pit, with red sand, so that whenever you played in it your feet and everything would turn red. It was really cool. I remember the swings because you’d basically pull the board right off, and just sit on the rope, and get rope burn. Yeah, that always hurt... then the strawberry patch, you only got... they were about this big, so not very big. (C1 S2, SG, p.9)

However, truth and memory got in her way. She recounted, “I was actually going to do like a memory that I have of it, like the day that we packed when we were moving. But, then I couldn’t remember most of it, so I had to write about days where we went to it” (C1 S1, SG, p.8). In her mind, the absence of details and memories meant it could not be a truthful telling. She needed autobiographical unity. Unlike Murray’s (1994) vision of autobiographical writing, Adriana’s vision meant no fudging or manipulating. Instead, she switched to the happy memories of playtime there with cousins.

Her initial draft was one and a half pages in length, double-spaced. The oral stories prompted by discussing her map were far more detailed than those she had included in her written text. Effectively, the draft was a list of a few places she had included on her map, but contained none of the stories she had revealed orally. When making suggestions for her writing, I focused on returning her to the details she had just elaborated to her group mates. This encouraged her to return to the specific story. I also suggested two organizational strategies: one, where the day would be divided into a typical morning, afternoon and evening activity; two,

simply some of the pleasant events she remembered. Adriana chose to organize around events. I believe that her choice was connected to truthfulness. If she could not remember one day, then a composite of a typical day did not appeal to her sense of necessary truth.

Adriana read her story to the whole group during the third session. Its length had grown considerably and three specific, short anecdotes had been added. She appeared proud of her lake piece, but wondered who would want to read it. Eventually, she proposed that it might be for anyone who had been there.

Once her reading was complete, I commented positively on her additions and then moved on to Shelly's story. In all qualitative studies, I imagine there are missed opportunities. One of mine is the failure to engage Adriana in a discussion regarding her decisions and changes. As her reading was given to the whole group, it was a missed opportunity for the entire class to experience a modelled discussion of a peer's more polished writing. Adriana was one of the only students to engage in a process of revision evolving from peer and teacher feedback that moved significantly beyond the lexical revision that Sommers (1994) noted. Her additions and changes were a direct result of her small-group conversation, specifically using many of my comments. The whole class could have benefited from exploring Adriana's writing and process.

Her second cycle of writing evolved from a narrative (if you could call it that) about her lack of grandparents to a narrative poem. Adriana's first draft moved through her identifying her jealousy of other teens with grandparents, because only one grandparent was still alive during her lifetime, on to her pseudo-grandparents, to a list of her grandparents' years of birth and death, and then to a wish to know them and finally to an admonition to other teens to cherish their time with grandparents instead of resenting it. These significant shifts were limited in development, with each paragraph or idea being assigned only five sentences, at most. The stories or details were virtually non-existent. For example, she briefly

noted that one grandparent was in and out of the hospital when she was a small child, making it impossible to get to know her.

***When they're gone they are really gone***

*When I hear how people complain  
About spending time with their grandparents, I cringe with irritation  
From cute pet names they're labeled or even how their grandparents treat  
them*

*I envy it all  
There is still a feeling that will never disappear  
Of never truly knowing my grandparents  
Personalities I will never meet  
Questions that never will get answered*

*With no grandparents to call my own  
I adopted some  
They may not be blood-relatives but they do their part  
At every family reunion to birthdays*

*So when your grandmother calls you up  
Or your grandfather wants to take you fishing  
Please say yes or answer that phone  
It could be the last time  
Before they really go*

*Because once they're really gone  
They're really gone  
That is when you miss them the most (Cycle 2, Final Draft)*

Adriana made the conscious decision to switch from prose to poetry between her first and second draft. Her poem worked significantly better than her first draft, but could have benefited from more revision. The central idea and core details remained the same across genres, but the genre shift seemed to liberate her from listing facts and dates into expressing her emotional connection to the subject matter.

Adriana's first stanza followed closely her original first paragraph. Her third stanza focus also remained close to ideas in her original draft. The second and fourth stanza responded to ideas in her prose, but in new ways for example her second stanza centers on loss, the loss of emotional

connection, the loss of knowledge and the simple loss of knowing. In her original draft, she told the reader “*I never had a the chance to know what they would have thought of me. Since I was only five at the time. I barely have any recollection of what my living grandma was like, or have any memories of my own*” (Initial Draft C2). The final stanza was the slightly less didactic admonition for teenagers to cherish their time with grandparents. Her draft of this poem illustrated revision that involved re-seeing her work. During both cycle one and two, her revision choices reflected significant organizational changes, genre shifts to suit new ideas and semantic changes. In her reflection on her final poem, she was proud to have tried writing a poem, which was a genre in which she did not have confidence writing. She also noted that she felt she was still working on style, including line breaks and punctuation.

Cycle three produced an entertaining set of apology letters between Adriana and her sister. In session one, as an initiating activity to cycle three, the class had been asked to bring in an object of significance and tell a story about the object in third person. A writing partner then reflected the story back to the original teller in first person. Adriana had brought a tube of toothpaste to represent an argument between Adriana and her sister, Sasha, over using Adriana’s tube of toothpaste.

This piece of writing, although light, became Adriana’s most purposeful piece of writing. Her audience was her sister, currently a university student, who decided to respond. The ‘freak out’, as Adriana called it, was real, thereby meeting her requirement for autobiographical truth. The situation and hoarding of toothpaste was real. The letter was a logical choice of form to convey an apology, which was genuine but humorous. The timing was perfect, as both Sasha and Adriana had time to work with the letters. Adriana’s only struggle was “finding another word for toothpaste” (C3 S2, SG, p. 12) to avoid repetition. Her invention of the term “anti-cavity fluoride and anti-gingivitis paste” added humour

and reflected her concern with diction. She tried to balance a formal and informal tone.

While reading her letter to her small group, Adriana recognized that she had used the word ‘action’ twice in the first two sentences. She removed the second use of the word in her second draft. She also made several additions for clarification and transition. According to Ms Harris, Adriana had been troubled by what I term as ‘thesaurusitis.’ She abused the thesaurus in an effort to alleviate the repetition Sommers (1994) identified as one of the most significant worries of student writers. In this case, her inventive word choice to avoid repetition added to the humour rather than detracting from the meaning. Here, one of Adriana’s weaknesses in writing became a strength, exaggerated for effect. An important lesson for Adriana and others was that, at times, a previously ineffective strategy, used in the right piece for a clear purpose, can become an asset. She had found a germane function for her linguistic preference.

Adriana was absent for most of the final session of cycle three, so she did not read her polished draft of her apology, but when she arrived she reported that she was pleased to discover “that I can write funny stuff and I can write a poem” (C3 S3, WG, p. 29). In her private conversation, Adriana revealed that Sasha’s mirroring response and immediate feedback were highly motivational and instructive, like a “double view” (PC, p. 15). Her sister had mirrored her form, and expressed her own perspective of the situation, and this highlighted for Adriana how the two letters then worked together through pattern.

Although, Adriana said that she did not select genres consciously, she was the participant who most significantly shifted genres when, in cycle two, she switched from narrative to poetry and, in cycle three, when she wrote a letter rather than narrated an anecdote. Adriana’s choices of genre were the broadest among all the students. She seemed to let context and subject matter dictate and was not afraid to make significant changes

to organization, form or detail during the writing process. Perhaps her developing sense of audience contributed to her changes in genre.

Adriana was one of the three students who legitimately had their polished drafts for class in cycle two, session three. She was diligent in all aspects of completing her work for the project, including any pre-writing, all drafts and any reflection that the class was asked to complete. Her data set was the most complete. She observed the rules of school faithfully.

Adriana's initial drawing juxtaposed her inspired and uninspired writing situations. I believe that Adriana used the word 'inspiration' for when she had ideas and writing was flowing, rather than being stumped and frustrated. When Adriana refers to her drawing, she predominantly referred to "I" as in the following: "well, this is when I'm inspired in writing, normally comes from when I read, that's why all the books are there" and "when I'm inspired, I guess everything is good for me, like no matter what everything's perfect. But then when I'm not, like when I do not have an idea, when I don't know what to do..." (PC, p. 2).

Representing herself facing the viewer, she created parallel settings of writing at a desk with a window behind her head. She used the state of the external world to metaphorically mirror the emotional states-of-being for each writing experience.



**Figure 19: Adriana D1**  
Text: Inspired...Not Inspired

When inspired, the world had sunshine, leaves and living creatures. When uninspired, the trees were leafless, rain clouds overwhelmed the view and no living creatures were evident. Inside the writing world, a parallel contrasting image was also drawn. Her inspired self could smile, hold the pen to the page, produce text, manage the material surrounding her and draw on it because she was connected to it. Her uninspired self pulled at her hair and frowned in frustration, not in contact with the books around her. The wastebasket was full, crumpled paper indicating failed attempts and an empty page occupied her space as she failed to engage the resources around her. In this state, she struggled to write well. When she was not inspired, "...I just go crazy and I will sit until the last five minutes and then pour out anything that I have and it is the worst ever" (PC, p. 1). However, Adriana believed her letter and poem were both written when she felt inspired. In fact, her poem about grandparents reflected a subject she had written a lot about. Even if she did not start in inspiration, her inspiration grew "after a while of thinking" (PC, p. 2).

Adriana made an interesting observation about how mood affected her writing and vice versa. When homework was going badly, "it affects my mood too, if I don't get it I just get frustrated with myself" (PC, p. 3). She wondered "why can't I come up with something when other days I can" (PC, p. 3)? She believed that getting enough sleep, letting herself become comfortable and calm days contributed to more ideas flowing, but when there was a seed of a bad mood, her day got worse. When I asked her how this knowledge could help her in the future with her writing, she said:

I could probably watch out for it, if I get an assignment and I know tomorrow or the next day is going to be a bad day, then I might write some tonight. You know, get going on it and maybe skip that day and then continue writing the next day, if it's better. So I could go around it and kind of use it in a way. (PC, p. 3)

Adriana needed time during the project to get comfortable with the openness. She was used to a 'connect the dots' formula, where all the expectations were from the teacher. She believed she was not used to constructing her own path, so instead she responded to "this is what I [the teacher] want, this is what you shouldn't do, stick to the point" (PC, p. 4). She found her own purpose for writing each assignment.

Adriana also became aware of the need to be more tolerant and accepting of where she was with her writing. She knew she needed to keep working, but that being negative and critical were not the solution to improvement. She would like teachers to provide specific information about how to improve her writing.

In her revision choices, I saw specific evidence of diction selection and reorganization with addition of detail, which were modelled by Ms Harris and me in our writing. In our private conversation, I related how I handle the thesaurus by never allowing myself to use a word that I am unfamiliar with or do not use orally. I like to own the word orally, using it in many contexts, before trying it out in writing. Adriana was starting to recognize how a 'great word' may not always fit her context and she was open to my suggestion. In some ways, Adriana had created a problem for her writing similar to what Rose (1994) identified as the use of a heuristic rule in an algorithmic and rigid way. Adriana's adherence to the rule of never allowing any repetition was very rigid. Her fixed solution to a perceived problem often created a different one.

Adriana said that Ms Harris usually provided a solid framework for writing. With the research, she was able to come out of her box more. Having removed many constraints, she felt she "didn't really have that box to go back into, so I think I was like I can go out of my limits, try more types of things" (PC, p. 16). Further, Adriana identified that she was always aware of the teacher behind the assignment, even to the point that, because the writing she generated during the study was not assessed for class and because it was for my doctoral work, she felt she had more

freedom for risky subject matter (not that any of her subjects were objectively risky).

Although Adriana's writing was still rough, the processes she was exhibiting were more sophisticated than those of any of the other students who participated in the study. Like a carver with a hammer and chisel, she made several text-based changes at both the micro- and the macro-level, which altered both the meaning and summary of her text (Dix, 2006b). I included Adriana's rough drafts for each cycle in Appendix B devoted to participant writing, because of the macro-nature of her revision. As she develops her own processes further, she will likely learn how to polish rough stones with rasps and sandpaper.

Of the three writers presented in this chapter, Adriana informally demonstrated the most growth across the project. Although she struggled with the meta-linguistic language to articulate her writing process at times (Myhill & Jones, 2007; Dix, 2006b), she demonstrated significant shifts in her writing. She made organizational changes, genre shifts, structural additions, meaning clarification and avoidance of repetition. Further, she engaged others outside of the class in her writing and gained a better understanding of the role of audience, theme and pattern in creating meaning. Her drafts revealed growth and improvement in product. While her writing was average, she did act to improve herself as a writer. This is something she believed possible through hard work, when she did not have the natural talent she saw in others.

*Aside: Soliloquy really 'truth be told'*

As a researcher, I have a sense that the truth requirement of autobiography often inhibited individual writers; however, searching through the transcripts with several key words including: truth, true, detail, memory, remember, fiction, fact, real, and reality revealed only a few direct references to the issue of needing to give true accounts. This story is located here because of its elusive nature. It was not an easy story to capture, to trace or, for that matter, to hear. In some ways, it is more of a

feeling, a sense that is for further investigation. Now that all the players of this drama are introduced, reflecting back over the *truth* is much easier.

For example, both Adriana and Dan abandoned projects because their memories of an event did not supply enough details for accurate portrayal. Adriana said that her idea “remained the same except for it wasn’t really what I wanted to do” (C1 S1, SG, p. 8). She had wanted to write about her memory of the day they packed up after selling the family cabin, but a lack of available detail stopped her. I suggested using a composite strategy where she could collect several memories of various experiences and compile them into a single day. She did not seem comfortable with this option and instead collected a series of actual events from the cabin without a framework that created unity. Perhaps Dan’s true nature just won out, but he did claim that he “couldn’t really get enough memories together...” (PC, p. 10), neither could his parents remember enough about his sister’s funny face.

On the opposite spectrum, Diana admitted that, “if I had a story about my family, I’d just kind of twist it up a bit and like fix the names and just make up another story, but it has a little bit of what happened” (ID, p. 6). She felt no need to remain faithful to a true account. She did just that when she made up the name Lara for her mother in her wedding dress story. Even though the entire community knew Diana had twin sisters, and would be able to identify her mother, she still felt free to provide her with a pseudonym. She felt comfortable with ‘twisting up’ the truth about her family (not that Ms Harris or I recognized any twisted-up details).

When I consider the three pieces that I generated for the students as examples, there was an affinity for creating a true account, but it was not a rigid requirement or even an expectation in my mind, in my writing, or in my conception of the study. What I find strange now is that I never directly discussed the issue of truth when I asked for autobiographical writing with the class and, in hindsight, did not expect to read literal truth.

I certainly never made the distinction between an affinity for truth and rigid adherence to truth that might be expected. In fact, this was not even a discussed issue outside of the most general probing for more details. Reflecting back, in writing *The Canoe Story* I tried to capture the ‘real’ details, but even there I know that moment thirty years ago is foggy. However, in the poem *Pictures of Relationship*, I felt no need to maintain a factual relationship with the pictures from which I drew my inspiration. The poem was never about *the* picture, or even *a* picture for that matter; it was about the dynamic relationship frozen in a picture.

I now see a whole missed opportunity that danced around issues of truth as it related to my anecdotal play *Understanding*, which was a series of three fragmented conversations with my small nieces as they processed death. The conversations were, at times, word for word, while at others they were constructions of an experience. I even spoke to students about how or if I would ever show these snippets to my nieces. The story only included three of my five nieces, because two of them were too small to talk. And in an effort of fair representation, I wondered about how I could include the others in the piece; would I fabricate a conversation? Could I generalize from the death of another grandparent? The entire conversation skirted around issues of truth without actually making the issue present for discussion. It is moments like this that as a teacher I need to recognize for their potential and redirect into writing issues. How did students perceive the need for truth, rigid or flexible? Did the theme, form, subject matter or anything else affect the writer’s conception of truth for the piece?

Tatum’s cycle-three writing was a story about her grade one birthday party. I use this story to ponder the issues and implications of truth in autobiographical writing, because it is the most fully developed moment from the study that touches on and around issues of truth. First, a few reminders: Tatum’s writing was often confused, filled with extraneous details and lacking development of significant ideas. This story was her

most detailed piece; it honoured a fellow classmate and mostly stayed focused on the birthday party and the presents.

There are three moments when truth becomes significant. First, Colleen confessed for Tatum that the presents Adriana and she had supplied were fictional, because Tatum could not remember. Did Tatum in some way seek permission to amend the details of who gave which present? Why did Colleen need to confess for Tatum? Would Tatum have felt the same need? Does it really matter what the other girls brought as presents to the party? How often did the lack of memory, detail or specifics interfere with the telling of a particular story through pretextual revision? Can and should a teacher encourage manipulation of details in autobiographical writing in service to the craft of writing?

The next conversation around truth arises as a clarity issue. Tatum was working with Colleen and Adriana, who had also been in attendance at the party. She had two settings – her grandmother’s where Karly comes to spend the early part of the day and then Tatum’s mom relocates the girls to Tatum’s house for the actual party. The relevance of Tatum’s grandmother’s house is tenuous at best to the story of the gift, but Tatum needed it in the story because that was how the day with Karly actually evolved historically. What seemed important to Tatum is the fact that Karly and she spent the entire day together. Tatum was telling the story of the day and that included so many details that confuse the reader or develop other ideas at times. How much do chocolate chip pancakes and Grandma’s house matter to the story of the best present? What is Tatum’s real message?

Third, when Ms Harris tried to encourage Tatum to enhance the details surrounding the gift, Tatum blocked her efforts. For example, Ms Harris suggested describing Karly’s arrival with a big present, but Tatum claimed the present must have been in the car, because she never saw Karly with it. Her details about the present’s arrival are sketchy, but Tatum went on to list several irrelevant details about balloons, static cling

and cake. However, she was unwilling to consider adding details about the wrapping or Karly presenting her with the gift. She had worked from a photograph of her party. In her mind, was she only allowed to include visible, somewhat provable details from the photograph?

She only seemed to consider details that Karly could corroborate. Why does she recount many details irrelevant to the writing, while she resists embellishing the gift in anyway? Again, does it matter what colour wrapping paper was on the present? And if it does, why? Where, when and why is it acceptable to ‘bend’ the truth in autobiographical writing? How can a teacher help students grapple with true accounts? How did the fact that Tatum’s audience was, for the most part, present at her party shape her telling of the story? Was she nervous that her audience was so familiar with the story that embellishment could be perceived as dishonesty, even lying? How would this all be different or the same had she chosen to write a poem and not a story?

### **The Particular Influences the Future**

Eisner (2006), through his research in the arts, suggests that generalizations can be derived from a single narrative. As seen in good literature, poetry, film, art and other genres, “we can reach into the humanities to gain insights that can guide our perception and influence our course of action” (p. 15). The stories of my participants as writers echo with familiarity as I hear other student voices, while remaining particular to Diana, Adriana, and Shelly. How, then, can the portraits of these three writers guide perception and influence action? How can I attend to these various cases of one in the future?

Sometimes it is important to pause for the obvious. Dix (2006a) confirmed and reminded me that all students compose and revise differently. Now I wish to draw attention to the fact that, since

kindergarten, these students, with the exception of Diana who arrived in grade five, have all had the same educational experiences in the sense of same teachers and being in the same class with each other. Yet still they are all very different in their approach to, use and understanding of revision. These students have a wide variety of revision activities during writing and are capable of discussing rationales and intent with care and precision (Myhill and Jones, 2007; Dix, 2006a, 2006b). They tended to see revision as a macro-strategy left to the end composing a first draft and, in general, needed more explicit meta-cognitive vocabulary to both express their decisions and expand their strategies.

Shelly is a competent writer, but this is mitigated by concerns about her meta-linguistic knowledge and understanding of genres. Her sense of genres is limited and, at times, inaccurate, such as the five-paragraph theme being the only form of 'essay.' She is proud of her writing ability; is that why she resists revision? While Shelly currently had writing under control, more complex, less rigid writing assignments may lead to frustration as the expectations of writing increase in the coming grades. Her meta-cognitive knowledge of her own processes is limited by her belief system that writing is an innate ability, therefore effort and time spent on self-discovery for improvement is a relative waste of time. I wonder how she will improve as a writer? Will she develop processes to meet future challenges? Does she need to be able to articulate her processes in order to use them or change them? How might I convince the 'Shellys' of the class that self-understanding builds possibilities as a writer?

Diana's eager participation was tempered by her inaction or pre-writing action and lack of demonstrable strategies for improving her writing. While she believed she was a writer, her texts suffered from development and clarity issues. With the 'Dianas', I have two jobs. First, I need to help her match her desired goal of being a 'writer' more effectively to her actions so that she can start to see sustained

improvement. Second, she needs concrete examples of processes, so that she can trace the development of a piece of writing and assess her choices. Then she would be able to try out, accept, reject and adapt what she learns from others. She needs to make her revision process transparent to me, so that I may help her.

Adriana's writing does not always reflect the level of her sophistication in her revision processes. My perception of her writing skill is that it is average for her grade level, but a closer examination of her writing processes in relation to her peers revealed a much broader repertoire of strategies. She is dedicated to growth as a writer and, unfortunately at this point, it is only sheer effort that is carrying her forward. Although she is able to improve the quality of her drafts substantially, she does not always get the final results or marks she desires. Why then are her strategies not improving her writing as much as she, and I, would like? The 'Adrianas' of future classes need intervention as they develop ideas and to be explicitly taught to evaluate how their strategies are affecting their writing in order to refine them. It would also be helpful for her to understand that significant organizational or form shifts may require extra drafts to become polished. At the same time, it is important to validate that the strategies she employs and identify the improvements she is making in order to avoid discouragement.

Through this dissertation, I have begun to identify and untangle the processes these girls have internalized. The portraits of revision have begun to display what inhibits and facilitates writing for each of the three, as Perl (1994) suggested. Teaching about revision is important but perhaps more important is to coach students to revise their sense of revision continually. Diana and Adriana both have complex and internalized processes that will require untangling to discern what methods are working and which methods are failing them. At the point and time of the study, Shelly's processes were meeting her needs. However, because she

resisted revealing her processes, more work would be necessary to know if her processes will continue to work.

Graves (1984) provides insights into the significance of variables that contribute to student writing including home, teacher-classroom, development and peers. Diana's preference to write at home, Shelly's preference to write at school and the tension between the two young women in their peer group revealed how those influences played in each story (Lensmire, 1994, 1997). Adriana's home supports her writing practices and she uses her teacher and classroom influences to her advantage.

Flower and Hayes (1994) conclude that it is both necessary and possible to teach students how to explore the rhetorical problem in both depth and breadth. Each of the students in the study needed more assistance in this area in order to refine their writing. Sommers' (1994) work in revision processes of students provides insight into student tendencies toward lexical revision over substantive semantic change such as Diana's misunderstood sense of editing as revision. Rose's (1994) work with writer's block provides a space to reshape the heuristics that students, in a struggle to gain competence, may have made into algorithmic rules, such as thesaurus use to eliminate lexical repetition.

Students need a starting place to develop their own processes of writing and the most direct route is for teachers to build consciously the language to talk about writing. I believe what is missing from enacted writing process theory are the stories and conversations around writing designed explicitly to explore meta-cognitive knowledge (Myhill & Jones, 2004; Dix, 2006a, 2006b). Further, for many teachers, it is important to move beyond the enacted and ritualized forms that writing process has often evolved into within school settings such as pre-write, compose, revise, and share. I am well aware that I have fallen into this ritual. Re-opening for students the concept of revision so that it encompasses all stages of the writing process including pretextual and online revision may

help teachers find ways into writing issues that do not reveal themselves through the traditional, hand-in-two-drafts process.

For each student's story that I engage with in depth, I am provided with more depth and, as Perl (1994) suggests, opportunities to untangle the knots of an individual's writing processes. She further notes the case study of the individual, compiled and viewed beside many others, provides insight into patterns and themes, which might suggest regularities in composing behaviours. Over a lifetime of teaching, a classroom teacher who meticulously listens to particular students' stories will be able to draw on a wealth of knowledge acquired from many to help the one. She will hear how the rough becomes polished in varied ways and will be able to offer students many ways to polish.

# Chapter Ten

## Rings Woven Together

You asked, “How do you teach writing?” and just as you said that, it came to me that maybe it’s narrative, maybe it’s your narrative, that’s all that you can offer, because that’s all that you know, your story of your frustrations and your successes, you can offer your students, and if every teacher did that...(Natasha, 1)

I return to Natasha’s statement in an effort to anchor the inspiration for this research project and import the significance of conversation in the improvisation of both the classroom and research. The traditions of both narrative inquiry and arts-based research welcome alternative forms of research texts (Richardson 2000, 2002, 2005; Eisner, 1997a, 1997b, 2006; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My research centered on autobiographical writing; it became, in fact, autobiographical writing. Therefore, in this concluding chapter, I have elected to use three distinct forms, for three pertinent but separate audiences (students, teachers and researchers), which serve three purposes. Further, these three forms mirror and complicate the three voices (the simple roses mentioned in Chapter 1), who entered into the research: the writer, the teacher and the researcher.

The three texts are a talkback session (when an audience has the chance to ask the cast of a play questions), a letter and a lecture. Two of the three forms I have adopted are, in origin, oral. Even the letter, which traditionally forms a one part of a dialogue, can be seen as an utterance (in

Bakhtin's sense), one that strongly anticipates a response. Therefore, these forms act as metaphorical representations of the conversations that were so important to this study.

Educational research sets out to better understand some phenomenon, some situation, some setting. Mine was no exception. I created a situation to explore and then examine, one which would not have taken place without the study. In making something new and unfamiliar occur, although still within a traditional classroom context, the phenomenon of an autobiographical writing project within the grade nine ELA context of a rural secondary school was realized. The preceding nine chapters have documented, examined and explored events, elements and relationships that transpired. In this closing chapter, I attempt to stand back from the particular in order to look more across the whole.

One tacit promise every dissertation makes is a return to the initial research questions usually listed in the first chapter. Here are mine.

1. How does a teacher's/researcher's writing self and understanding of individual writing processes shape and interact with students in a secondary ELA classroom context?
2. How does creative, autobiographical writing contribute to students' awareness of personal writing processes and understanding of the writing self?
3. How do the individual writing selves that exist in the classroom interact, interconnect and relate to one another?
4. How does the experience of an arts-based research task contribute to an understanding of writing experiences?

My current response to these questions (at times explicitly and at others more implicitly) is provided in the texts/forms that follow. The first text comprises the next section. It is an imagined conversation, almost a reverse interview with the student participants, where I make them candidly wonder what the study uncovered. Each participant in the study poses a single question to me (which I carefully constructed to reflect his or her voice, themes and struggles in the classroom). In this question-and-answer session, I have two distinct roles: as a writer and as a teacher. These two roles are perhaps my most integrated of the three, with the least tension.

The second form, a long letter addressed to Ms Natasha Harris, who exemplifies a teacher willing and strong enough to slow the classroom drama down and pause for reflection. It draws attention to some dangers and pitfalls of autobiographical writing within the classroom, before highlighting tensions and resistance I observed. Finally, it takes them up as they relate to research and teaching, and theory and practice.

The third form is a more formal lecture to ELA theorists and the field I have engaged textually with, where I modestly imagine speaking directly to, among others, Donald Murray, Sondra Perl, Timothy Lensmire, Jerome Bruner and Eliot Eisner. The ideas drawn from those listed here were significant to the frame of the study. I imagine I have already discussed specifics of my study, as reported in the previous nine chapters. I pick up on the theme of resistance and subversion with respect

to process writing in my classroom setting. The lecture then examines how particular knowledge of a teacher and researcher interconnect with, guide and direct the general writing experiences of all those present in the classroom. Thirdly, it explores concerns related to autobiographical writing in the classroom.

## A Talkback Session

Aden: We didn't find our own purpose. We didn't believe we were writers. We definitely didn't write our best. Weren't you disappointed?

Ms Bowsfield: Yes, at least at first. I was nervous that if your writing quality was poor or if students did not complete the work, the data would not reveal any interesting ideas. But, then I remembered that the focus of the study was not about students producing their best writing; it was about creating a space, an experience, where individuals were engaged with writing *in order to think about writing*, about how they write and about their own processes, so that I could examine them and they could learn from them.

Because most students did not find a purpose for writing, you included Aden, I now have many questions that I need to keep in mind when I teach future classes. I'll give you three examples: Why do students not engage in defining their own purpose for writing, particularly you boys? For me, it was important to have my own purpose; however, is that really necessary for students or will marks suffice? How can I help students *enjoy* writing more, since that seems to be part of your common definition of a writer, in order to help them see themselves as writers?

Shelly: As you know, I don't like writing on personal subjects or writing without rules. Why did you take away everything that was familiar about writing in school?

Ms Bowsfield: Because that was how and when *I* started to like writing. So I assumed it could be positive for everyone else. But I was wrong! I neglected to consider how controlled students' writing experiences are in school and that, when constraints or rules are removed, too much freedom can overwhelm. I still believe you need opportunities to control your writing, particularly those of you who don't like to have control, but yanking the rug out from underneath you may have made it too difficult for you to get your bearings. In this regard, I should have expected deep resistance to change and uncertainty. I won't forget in the future.

Besides that, there is also the idea that what is called *meta-cognitive* knowledge, knowledge about yourself and how you learn, is very valuable as a person's education continues. Writing autobiographically about personal subjects helps you to figure out what you know and how you know it. It encourages self-reflection, a skill that has helped me grow as a writer. Perhaps opportunities like this will help you understand what you want and need in order to write your best.

Kenton: Do you remember the day we made jokes about the class discussions being a dictatorship not a conversation. Why was conversation so important to you?

Ms Bowsfield: I know you like a good conversation about almost anything but work, but for me, conversation has always been really important in both my personal and professional worlds. It serves several purposes. One, it sustains me and rejuvenates me. My second reason is that conversations, not dictatorships, create knowledge for all participants. I learn from everyone who engages with a conversation and therefore I assume that everyone else has the potential for the same experience. It generates possibilities. Thirdly, and this one directly relates to writing, I solve many of my writing frustrations through conversations. For example, the form of this conclusion is a result of two separate conversations with my committee members. Dr. Iveson suggested using different forms; say perhaps a letter and two others. As I mulled that over, I leafed through a senior high anthology and the genre of interview popped out. In many ways, this conversation is a group interview. Then the next day speaking to Dr. Pimm about limitations, strengths and weaknesses of my initial idea, I added a letter to Ms Harris and a lecture to some of my key theorists, those whom I wished to write back to having borrowed their ideas to frame my work. I see it as an important obligation I have incurred. The three genres provided opportunities to share my many voices writer, teacher and researcher. I had sat for ten days with nothing but starts and stops before these two conversations and then everything started to work. (Ironically, it still took months to finish this conclusion.)

Tatum: You asked over and over and over for our stories; why are stories so important?

Ms Bowsfield: I believe that learning, and perhaps change, is in the story. Writing is so complex that every attempt to make it manageable, easier, a concrete list of step-by-step actions, fails. However, when I truly know something, the most common way I share that is through a story. Therefore, hearing many stories, from many different writers, provides more ideas to consider, more strategies to use and more ways to solve problems – generally more possibility. Stories have many layers. There is the narrative that is being told a story about the birthday party or building a friend's dog house, but the important story for teaching writing is how does the writer develop, frame and advance their writing. Within that story, a community of learners can capitalize on others' knowledge. What I noticed is that as a teacher I need to draw attention to the *meta-language*, the vocabulary of writing, in order to provide you with specific language necessary to establish your goals and define the writing problems you wish to address. An example would be using intertextual references, like Karly did when she included song lyrics on her drawings. I also want to extend your understanding of revision, beyond editing your work after you have a

finished draft. I learned a lot about revision, including two new terms: pretext revision and online revision. You, Tatum and Dan are pretext revisers where often everything that you want to write exists in your mind and struggles to reach the paper. Online revision is what Aden and Kenton prefer; it is all the changes they make while they are in the midst of typing. Another very important piece of the puzzle is that everyone's autobiography and stories of writing are important, not just mine or the teacher's.

Diana: Why did you pick autobiography?

Ms Bowsfield: I had several reasons. Remember when I told Shelly I assumed the experience would be positive for you because it was for me? Well, that fits here too. My assumption was perhaps naïve. Next, I wanted you to write from your personal knowledge without needing to do research. Thirdly, I wanted to create situations where you would use your recent writing experiences to recall, reflect on and re-story your writing process. I believed that double layer of writing about yourself and thinking about writing could contribute to your personal understanding of yourself as a writer.

I did not go far enough in asking for thinking about writing. Perhaps a journal for entries on your writing process would have been an asset, but that would have been more writing. There is a researcher, Jerome Bruner, who believes that the stories we tell ourselves eventually become the story we live. What I mean is that how we tell the story of our lived experience contributes to our potential future story. For example, when we say we are lazy and we don't like writing, then after awhile we can't even imagine wanting to write. Look at how no one in this room, except for Diana and she is tentative in her claim, believes he or she is a writer. What I mean is that if people always tell stories about not being a writer, then it follows that they won't be able to 'compose' a different story about themselves. Those who see, feel and experience moments where they feel like they are or could be writers will be better able to create those stories in the future. I wanted your autobiography of writing to include those possibilities.

Avery: Are you going to tell everyone? You know.

Ms Bowsfield: Avery, your story is so important. It has taught me so many things. First and foremost, I need to reconsider how and why I ask students to perform tasks in certain ways. My intention with drafts was never to create work for you, but it became an elaborate process to prove you had worked through a writing process. Second, I have some serious thinking to consider regarding intertextuality, that is the relationship of one text within another context. The ways you 're-mixed' the stanza of the song and manipulated it to reflect an important personal theme was very interesting and revealed both knowledge and skill. Thirdly, your story provided insight into my conflicting roles as a researcher and a teacher and how I could have

handled your experience in different ways. Finally, I need to understand better how to help students who are grappling with writer's block. I need to find ways to make writing easier than the elaborate actions you felt you had to adopt. I wish I had found a way to open a dialogue between us, so that both you and I could have learned more.

Adriana: Was the project a complete success?

Ms Bowsfield: No

Adriana: How was the study a disappointment?

Ms Bowsfield: Wow! That is big question. Did I learn from the study?

Yes. Can other teachers and researchers learn from the study? I believe so. One thing I believe is important is the need for researchers to look more closely at the complexity of writing in a classroom context. This was one very small class with ten participants out of twelve students participating, a rare opportunity to explore almost a whole class. Further, it lasted really only ten classes, but it generated a very lengthy dissertation. I struggle with research that polishes everything to look simple. Life in the classroom is far from that. It is messy and, at times, ugly. It is never repeatable, because the same collection of people, with the same experiences and the same conversations will never take place again. The best we can hope for is to tell stories of learning to write, and learning to teach writing, in the expectation that they will resonate with others. I hope my colleagues will see and hear their own students with similar revision concerns or deep resistance. I hope my research will prompt others to take up the questions I asked.

Each of you opened your experience to me. As a result, I generated portraits of real students who are frequently frustrated by the writing they do or are working hard but not able to make the difference to their writing that they would like. You are particular and yet not. For me, that is how and why case studies are important. You are becoming a part of my collection of stories, my collection of questions for considering teaching and maybe you can become a part of someone else's stories or, better yet, maybe you will prompt them to ask some more questions.

Did you, the students, learn from the study? Yes, I believe you did, but that maybe at the end of the study you are unable to articulate everything you know about writing and about yourself as a writer. But I remain hopeful that someday in the future when you need to really understand how and why you write, you will be able to draw back to this experience as one way to access your personal relationship to writing. You will seek out other storytellers and writers so you can build a community geared to your interests.

My disappointments regarding the study mostly relate to the tensions I experienced as a researcher and a teacher. Hindsight is bittersweet, in that I failed to ask so many important and interesting questions in the moment. Questions like: how does each of you approach revision? Why do you and you and you resist? Why do you,

Adriana, comply? What do you see in your drawing about writing now that you couldn't see back then? But, those questions might not have ever even been available without the research experience or without the writing of the research text. I still have so much to learn. But now I have hundreds more places to start.

Dan: What would you do differently?

Ms Bowsfield: Everything and nothing. As a teacher, there were so many things I would do differently, because I can see moments in time frozen from a very different perspective. I would ask you more questions about revision. I would ask you questions to figure out what you think my motives were for doing things in a certain way. I would ask why Colleen makes plans after the fact. I would make more time for reflecting on what you learned, so you could say it out loud. Those are just a few things. As a teacher, I would never have the luxury of this intense time to reflect on a teaching experience I had framed for students, so if I dwell on what I might have done differently I would be paralyzed by impossibility. However, as a researcher, the study needed a frame and this is the frame that I built, so I needed to work within it. I am satisfied with the study now.

Colleen: How do you know what you write is the truth?

Ms Bowsfield: Another question theorists have been arguing over for years. Do you mean truth with a capital T or a small t?

Colleen: I have no idea.

Ms Bowsfield: Sorry, just a little researcher humour. At best, I can offer a story. When I asked you to write autobiographically, many of you got stuck on the idea of Truth. Dan's story is the most clear to me. He could not write the story of his sister and her funny face, because he could not get time from his parents to sit down to and share details and stories. He got stuck in what was the truth of his own experience with his sister. Adriana and Tatum also refocused the stories they wrote in order to be truthful. I tried to provide scenarios that suggested that the Truth, as in perfect recollection, with no details, times, actions or persons out of place, was not necessary. For example, I told Adriana she could make a compilation of all of her days at the lake. But no one seemed willing to shape the truth of their experience into the story they wished to tell. This all relates to my struggle with Truth with a capital letter and truth as verisimilitude.

Let me tell you my story of struggle writing up the research. Part one: When it came time to construct my dissertation I struggled to edit verbatim transcripts. It felt untruthful to cut them. But they were filled with interjections, interruptions, asides, repetitions and slang that I feared might confuse the reader. They occasionally made us, everyone in the class, look inarticulate and definitely created readability issues. Initially, I could not edit the transcripts for readability; it felt too untruthful. Eventually, I realized that transcripts are often edited cleaned up for the reader: it is an accepted action of members of the

research community. Part two: When I chose to write in more creative forms, such as the found poem, the choric play and the found play, I felt freer to cut, repeat, shape the words from transcripts and writing, in order to craft an interesting piece of text that was truthful. In the end, I realized that ironically I was struggling with exactly the same issue that many of you were struggling with, only on a much larger scale and for greater stakes. Autobiographical writers – and all writers are autobiographical writers to some extent – will always experience tensions between truth and representation.

Ms Harris: What did you learn as a writer?

Ms Bowsfield: I learned a lot about composing and revision, in that I have a process of generating text and then a process of drawing out the argument and finally the need to cut away the unnecessary. The biggest thing I learned was that I had a fairly naïve understanding of my own revision practices which was mostly at the word level, but now I have a much more complex view of the revision process that can be turned into many stories for students, as well as help my writing.

Karly: What did you get out of this research?

Ms Bowsfield: I learned so much from each of you, from the study as a whole, and then about myself.

Colleen showed me how a student can productively adjust my agenda to meet her own needs and the needs of the project. Tatum taught me to look carefully at a student's writing behaviour for patterns that might reveal alternative explanations of writing behaviour. Aden and Kenton together illustrated how constraints for some students actually become productive, as they look for ways to resist the boundaries of a given assignment. Dan taught me to listen in other ways, like through drawings, through inaction and through silence. Adriana and Diana taught me how to look very closely at students' revision processes, in order help a student grow as a writer. Avery showed me that everything is not always what it seems on the surface and that a second, third and fourth look can increasingly reveal just how complex a situation really is. And you, Karly, reminded me to put what I get out of something right out front and then try to articulate what I hope others will get.

The study as a whole created this long, elaborate time to examine and really consider how much is really going on in a classroom, at any given time, by highlighting tensions, contradictions and resistance.

Finally for me, I am becoming a more reflective teacher. I see more of my own areas of resistance, my own tensions and contradictions. Most importantly, I am a more confident writer. I return to teaching in a month...and I hope that when seeing students like you struggle to find themselves as writers I will have more to offer.

Susan Bowsfield  
102 Returning Crescent  
Small Town, AB

November 27, 2009

Natasha Harris  
79 Partner (English) Street  
Wheaton, AB

**Dear Natasha,**

Thank you, for being brave, for taking the risk to expose your autobiographical stories of writing, thinking and teaching to me, your students and now the academy. I offer back to you, first, your statement, which started everything. “Maybe it’s your narrative...and if every teacher did that...” Together, we created a story of teaching in the classroom and I have retold that story of teaching for the benefit of others and myself. As you return to the academy as a new doctoral student, you will eventually tell your story of research and, if I may be bold, I would like to offer you some observations and thoughts for consideration. This is a long letter, for I have a lot to say to you. I experienced profound tensions and resistance throughout the research process. There were tensions surrounding autobiography, tensions around resistance and tensions between my roles as researcher and teacher.

This may seem obvious, but perhaps its obviousness seemed to render it invisible. Each person who enters a classroom door brings with them their invisible presence. Teacher and student alike arrive with a wealth of knowledge about writing, multiple writing experiences, preferences and predilections along with challenges and resistance. We all come with a set of autobiographical stories that we draw on, aware or not, which participate with and seem to construct our understanding and relationship with writing. Perhaps it is time to use the resources in the room instead of looking for external ones.

Where I feel ‘we’ did not go far enough was in the crafting of our stories as teaching resources. At the time, I did not perceive how important this crafting would be. First, students do not have significant experience with pulling the salient details from a story, so initially ‘we’ must explicate and augment the story by drawing attention to how, why, when and where we might use a particular process, a pointed history with a

moral perhaps. Further, in the moment, we need to see the inherent potential of our students' stories and weave them, their examples and their processes into the current one we are telling. This creates an intricate web of real writing moments that can become conceptual hooks for abstract ideas such as universal appeal, unity and the difference between revision and editing. Unfortunately, each story we construct as a teaching resource will need to be reconstructed next class, or next year, because it is important to fold in the present students and their experiences with their past. In this way, our stories may be refined, refreshed and sometimes left behind as we encounter more and more possibilities for our on-going classrooms. A significant part of crafting our stories is in the need to incorporate the meta-language of composing and revising to help students build meta-cognitive knowledge about writing in order reflect on, engage new, revise old and assess effectiveness of the processes they adopt, as they move on into more demanding writing experiences. If this is an area of interest to you, you may want to seek out articles by Flower and Hayes, Myhill and Jones, and Dix. For your ease, I have included a brief annotated list at the end of this letter and have the articles set aside.

When I refer to crafting 'our' stories, it is also on a specific and detailed level. In order to craft, we must explicitly address with students the rhetorical problem we are solving through writing. This will include describing goals, imagined audiences, purposes, and so on and then revising those elements publicly with students as we move forward.

Each of the stories we select as suitable will have a back-story, but there is also room to consider the stories we reject, like the one of your brother that you feared might place your students in an uncomfortable position of needing to assess and critique your writing about your dead brother. The simple act of telling students why you switched subject matter makes it more reasonable for them to also reject subject matter too tangled up with their identity to be open for revision and, especially, assessment. At the same time, opportunities to explain the role of pretext revision exist in order to expand students' understanding of revision in the broadest sense possible. I will need to consider when, where and for how long it will be okay to tell Samuel and Sara-Lauren stories. At fifteen, they might become very resistant to entering my classroom, as a story, especially, if he or she is a student in the same school. You are well aware of the challenges of parenting as a teacher in a rural setting. When you chose to write about Aaron, did you consider his social positioning within the school? Would you have told a similar story about your other son, Robert, the one who is more introverted and reserved? Or was it all moot

because, at the time of the story, they were children distant from who they are now?

In order to expand students' understanding of revision beyond the editing that occurs after a first draft, I need to articulate my online revision process for students, including 'cut, paste, keep' and 'saving in multiple drafts,' so as to preserve ideas. However, after writing this dissertation, I am now significantly more conscious of old, new and less used but nonetheless important strategies. For example, I have realized how important it is for me to hold onto an idea as an unfinished sentence until the phrasing and idea are clear. This leads to my starting and abandoning several sentences that I just push down the page with returns and do not delete until I am satisfied with the crafting of a completed idea. Previously, I had not considered the notion of online revision, that on-going relationship with the delete key, as very significant, but Aden and Kenton revealed that online revision is their most significant revision process. They reject positioning deferred revision as more important than the present. Their personal preference challenges me to find ways of teaching revision that both satisfy my need to see process in order to guide writing and to improve the product that honours their actions without creating more writing requirements which can be perceived as wasting their time or being make-work projects.

As I return to the classroom, it is important to continue identifying my online revision strategies, highlighting student's strategies in order to search out new ways to meet both the students and my needs. With regard to deferred revision as a writer, I now have a whole new conception related to the scale of this project, that was not previously visible because I had not experienced it. For example, the generative stage of composing, which is then paused while the arguments, form and structure are teased out. This understanding of revision was a significant difference between the experienced and novice writer. I found Rose, Perl, Flower and Hayes, Sommers and Murray very useful for understanding my role and strategies as my students' expert writer.

It was important for students to 'see' and 'hear' how 'our', stories were open to revision, were still in process – for example, your *Monster Story*, and my *Pictures of Relationships*. Again, there is a double layer because it is both our specific writing and our stories of 'ourselves' as writers that undergo revision. The students needed to know 'our' stories were revisable, in order to see their own as revisable. In that way, their knowledge about writing becomes consciously aware to themselves and the community of writers.

The act of offering one's own and asking to hear about others' writing experiences renders them visible, alright audible technically. But it is not enough to stop there: we must examine those stories, compare them, question them and challenge them, in order to revise them. Dan's story, as a writer, may not actually be open to revision and his retelling of it may simply reinforce his vision of himself as a lazy non-writer and thus close off possibilities. Karly showed that her story *was* open to revision and I am left to wonder about Avery. The researcher was mostly satisfied; however, the teacher hungers to work through a research process with each student, so they can hear and learn more from their own stories. While students did talk candidly about their writing, I feel, this research did not slow the experience down sufficiently for the students to reflect on and consider their own writing process.

In a casual conversation a while ago, you made two very important observations that I would like to come back to. First, you noted that it is my collective experiences, my Master's, and my professional development opportunities grounded in a sense of community, that make it possible for me to talk about writing, to bring my writing into the class, to ask others to share their stories and their writing. Effectively, it is my autobiography that enables me to see this as simple or even possible. The second comment you made was that through your experiences with me, with the research, with bringing your unpolished works-in-progress into the class and with reading the drafts of the research text, you now see writing and teaching writing in new ways. Effectively, your autobiography now has a new experience that generates new possible ways of teaching. Now 'our' story of your classroom is available to others. I return to the students who once encouraged to revise their sense of themselves as writers through open conversations, may become more aware of their writing process and its influence on their writing, thinking and learning. This simply cannot happen if it is not a part of their autobiography.

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Now this story becomes more difficult, more challenging. While your classroom was quite harmonious in its relationships and level of compliance by many standards, the students still revealed a quiet but powerful resistance to both our intentions and actions, as well as to composing and revising. Virtually all students, save perhaps Colleen and Adriana, resisted composing or revising at some point in the study. The frame of autobiographical writing was both embraced and resisted,

sometimes at the same time by the same student. As a writing assignment in schools, it is familiar and frequently invoked in themes of summer vacation, letters of introduction or stories of family events. Therefore, I simply expected that it would be somewhat comfortable for students. What I found, however, was that by removing the time frame, that is summer vacation or the notion of tell me about yourself, students were left with a “broken compass,” to quote Shelly. Those who knew they like to resist had no frame to resist against and therefore resisted by not writing or not writing to their perceived ability, like Avery, Kenton, Aden, and Dan. This action or inaction, however, did not always fit the students’ image of themselves as writers, an idea most deeply reflected in Avery’s experience. For others, their resistance was subtler, such as adopting avoidance strategies like Tatum or neglecting to revise like Diana. Shelly’s resistance was complicated by her sense of her self as a competent and productive student who met deadlines and this left her with fewer avenues. She would not compromise the quality of her writing (other than not completing her writing in cycle two), so she used her conversations with others and her final drawing as places to object.

In order to understand students’ individual relationships with writing, I began by exploring the various tensions and preferences present in your class. This drew my attention to just how many wants, needs, desires and preferences there were to satisfy in any one classroom and this was a very small class. The balance between freedom and structure is tentative, relational and contextual. I believe that investing time to identify students’ interests, motivations, needs and desires by listening and responding to students will contribute to a program more capable of reflecting varied preferences and strategies. I found articles by Casey and Hemenway, Lipstein and Renninger, Schultz, Jones-Walker and Chikkatur useful in these areas.

As my experience with and understanding of autobiographical writing grows through the writing of this dissertation, I now see issues and concerns that I may have naively missed before commencing the research. First, I selected autobiographical writing for the participants in an act of hope that it would do for my participants what it had done for me. Issues of ‘truth’ and student’s adeptness with and willingness to engage in self-reflexive experiences, both about life and writing in order to expand horizons, were far more limited than I had expected.

With respect to my research questions, I now suggest that I asked the wrong question when I framed the following: “How does creative, autobiographical writing contribute to students’ awareness of personal

writing processes and understanding of writing self?” While I am confident that students learned, I am less confident in their ability to synthesize and express what they learned and I return to your comment, “I’m not sure, whether they can articulate what they got out of it. Or whether they’re even going to see what they got out of it for a while.” As Finely so aptly suggested, until something is needed or seen as useful, what was learned from an experience may remain elusive. The design of the study did not permit adequate time or distance for deepening student self-awareness regarding writing. However, that was not the case with regard to my growth as a writer, my growth as a teacher and as a researcher of writing.

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Next, the tensions I experienced between researcher and teacher were intense and, at times, incredible uncomfortable. Should you choose classroom research, you might find Ainley’s article of interest where she explores the sometimes conflicting roles of parent, teacher and researcher – in our case it was writer, teacher and researcher. As a teacher, my purpose is grounded in the immediate present of the lives of the students I am working with. It is about making a real difference to them now. As a researcher, I strip away the immediate to look reflexively at the past in hope of making a difference in the future. An example of this lies in the use of autobiography in the classroom. I have frequently used autobiographical writing scenarios in my classroom as a teacher, but now my experience as a researcher has provided me with a new lens, a somewhat problematic lens fraught with unforeseen dangers, unintended consequences and new challenges. Perhaps it is simply important to proceed in what Clandinin and Connelly call a state of mindfulness or wakefulness, with my attention turned toward the tensions of balancing the physical and intellectual preferences of students, the social risks, the fear of exposure and judgment, the representation of self through writing, drawing and conversation and more. Upon entering your classroom, I was not a researcher, although perhaps I should have been; I was a teacher embarking on research. I resisted the mantle of researcher. This complicated my actions, in particular with Avery.

I end this letter with Karly because our conversations were the hope of this research in particular and perhaps educational research in general. In those moments, in the thirty-five minute private conversation,

my tensions between teacher and researcher were eased and I felt like I, as a teacher and as a researcher, had made a difference for one student.

Her statement “Back then, how would I know what I would get out of it?” speaks to a problem, a problem that plagues education. The desire for certainty, for cause and effect results and ‘quick fixes’, is grounded in the accountability movement. We want guarantees with no uncertainties or ambiguities. Writing is too messy for that. I could not know what she would get out of it until she encountered the experience and even then the residual ripples might not be apparent for many years as you so aptly noted. Teaching writing is an uncertain endeavor entangled with each person’s autobiography. Perhaps it is time to make this explicit, so we can use the tools, ourselves and our knowledge, instead of pretending not to be shaping lives through writing experiences. Karly is right: if “I want to write better... I mean you have to start from yourself.” Ironically, she had no motivation to write and found motivation in having no motivation. She was not robbed; she learned.

Not only did she learn; she taught me, as did all the participants. Perhaps that is the ultimate gift from a student to a teacher and a participant to a researcher. I am more aware of mismatches between intention and perception, and intention and action. While I may ask good questions, I need to go further. Tatum’s entanglement with writing, the computer and revision needs probing in order to consider alternative interpretations. I need to challenge my understandings of student behaviour, to revise what I see. I learned that resistance could be productive, when it becomes part of the conversation. While students were not necessarily comfortable finding their own purpose for writing, going through the writing process, and discussing the experience of writing are important activities for students to participate in during their education. These experiences can be challenging; students will resist. However, they can teach; they can remind; they can transform; and they can build new knowledge.

You taught me. By providing space, time, and an open classroom, I now have a new research experience, amazing stories of writing to craft, and wonderful new possibilities for teaching and researching. I thank-you for the ultimate gift.

Sincerely

Susan Bowsfield

Natasha, this is the list I promised.

- Ainley, J. (1999). Who are you today? Complementary and conflicting roles in school-based research.
- Casey, M. & Hemenway, S. (2001). Structure and freedom: Achieving a balanced writing curriculum.
- Clandinin, D. J. & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*.
- Dix, S. (March, 2006a). I'll do it my way: Three writers and their revision practices.
- Dix, S. (April, 2006b). What did I change and why did I do it?": Young writers' revision practices.
- Finely, S. (2003). Arts-based inquiry in QI: From crisis to guerrilla warfare.
- Flower, L. & Hayes, J. R. (1980/1994) The cognition of discovery: Defining a rhetorical problem.
- Lipstein, R. & Renniger, K. A. (2007). Interest for writing: How teachers can make a difference.
- Murray, D. (1991/1994). All writing is autobiography.
- Myhill, D. & Jones, S. (2007). More than just error correction: Students' perspectives on their revision processes during writing.
- Perl, S. (1979/1994). The composing processes of unskilled college writers.
- Rose, M. (1980/1994). Rigid rules, inflexible plans, and the stifling or language: A cognitivist analysis of writer's block.
- Schultz, K. (1999). Identity narratives: Stories from the lives of urban adolescent females.
- Sommers, N. (1980/1994). Revision strategies of student writers and experiences adult writers.

(See Appendix B for Natasha's response.)

## **The Particular Autobiography Frames the Future**

Lecture Delivered: March 2010

University of Alberta

Good afternoon. I know that you will be familiar with many of the studies to which I refer. I studied the writing experiences of junior high ELA students engaged in an autobiographical writing project through their conversations, their writing and their drawings. I have elected to focus my comments today on the particular. Drawing about writing experiences was particular to this study and these students. However, I believe the stories the drawings participate in have a much wider implication when, as a collection, they become the experiences we draw on to guide future decision. The acts of resistance I encountered were also particular, but together they tell an interesting story of resisting process. While teachers' and researchers' responsibilities are always particular to the classroom or study they are engaged with, there are many ways that the particular story informs the general and broader practice, for that is how we as researchers and teachers grow more skilled in our endeavors. Finally, I would like to weave together how talking, drawing, thinking and writing in autobiographical ways builds multiple opportunities to expand students' knowledge of writing. Together, the particular autobiographies of a class participate in framing the future, the future of both my research and teaching.

### **Drawing on the Particular**

This study asked participants to reflect on a familiar form, writing, through an unusual form, drawing. I firmly believe that had I asked students to write a reflective essay describing their research experience,

they would have been reluctant, to say the least. Hickman (2007) noted that drawings demand our attention, capture the ineffable, represent a whole event in an instant, comprise a rich and yet economical multi-layered data source, with the power to shift our perception and I believe they are also an access point to new knowledge. In this case, students' drawings really were worth a thousand written words, as can be seen by the length of my dissertation.

Eisner (1993) believed that, through the experience of making images, it is possible to discover the unconscious, in this case participants' unconscious relationship with writing. Next, he also believed that meaning is constructed through experience and that we, as humans, contribute to the quality of experience in how we employ our minds. When coupled with his argument that form and content both shape how and what students think about, the absence of educational experiences that contribute to students' believing they are writers is dangerous.

Drawing is particular, although I found that looking across the drawings with one specific feature in mind (such as the presence of a human figure, the figure's gaze, the portrayal of writing and the actual act of writing) to be a helpful way to see variations in themes and not simply isolated individual drawings. In this way, the collection of drawings prompts questions not necessarily available through other data. For example, why is the act of writing predominately portrayed as a solitary activity? How would an individual's experience of writing be different, if writing was a more collaborative experience? How is a character's relationship with writing reflected through his or her depiction and proximity to writing implements? How does the individual identify with and/or create distance between the drawn character and the self.

Two drawings from the study that provided the greatest information unavailable through other forms of data were Karly's and Dan's. I believe Karly's angry self-expression was a direct result of her self-sponsored artistic planning. The intertextuality of the political cartoon

characterizing the project in light of Communism appeared to make her ineffable frustration more explicit, something which was perhaps even a necessary step in her ability to generate her criticism. Further, her use of self-sponsored drawing as an exploration tool for writing provides a story that might be very useful to other students who also enjoy intertextual experiences. In the case of Dan, his drawings became the only significant access point to his writing experiences. Textually, he was virtually absent from the writing project, but he was not without knowledge or stories. For Dan, drawing seemed to be a less painful way to start a conversation about writing. In the end, I have developed more knowledge about resistant writers, more ways of seeing. I have also added another mode of learning about writing to my strategies as a teacher.

Having student participants draw twice, once as the initiating activity and then as the culminating activity allowed students two different reflection points. Each image was shaped by a participant's historical relationship with writing, their broader personal, social and educational context, and the specific writing experience designed by this study. The first drawing represented something of their historical relationship with writing without influence from the study, while the second incorporated the influence and meta-cognitive experience of the study into the drawing. Let me illustrate through two students. Colleen as a writer feared poetry, she felt it left her uninspired; this is her historical writing experience. Over the course of the study, she reframed through her drawing her personal and writing relationship with poetry to look like an open door, one filled with possibilities. Her historical relationship shifted through her research experience. Tatum's dizzied ineffable question-filled experience with writing dominated her history. However, with the creation of her successful grade-one birthday party story, writing was a little less dizzying and perhaps less hated when unbounded by teacher constraints. The difference between Colleen and Tatum lies in the clarity of understanding each was able to articulate regarding their images. Colleen's very

straightforward images were accessible immediately and individually, even though they did work together to frame Colleen's experience with the project. Whereas Tatum's initial drawing took on greater significance for me as I subsequently explored Tatum's entire experience, searching out a pattern of behaviour that had limited her writing skills and products. Without her initial drawing, I do not believe I would have formed such a complex picture of Tatum.

Eisner (1997) has long argued that the particular has the ability to inform the general, to shape the future, shift perspectives and alter action. Hicks (2007) argued that the mundane daily experience, in this case of writing, becomes more meaningful through an individual's shifting perspectives. For me, the act of analysis and the act of writing the research text has allowed the particular to influence my perceptions and guide future actions as they relate to both teaching and research. I am now a more sophisticated viewer of drawings with a new skill that can be applied to future contexts.

#### Considering Resistance as More than Particular

Continuing with the particular, how can particular examples of resistance encountered within this study inform? It may have been that we, Ms Harris and I, simply did not reach students with a clear enough message of why and how articulating writing process can help to make writing easier and perhaps create better products.

However, a new thought to consider is that the resistance students generated is directed toward process writing as it is enacted in schools. It may be that the desire expressed by teachers for more and more transparency and visibility in the generation of texts in a school setting, when students are required to write in order to be assessed on that writing, reflects too much teacher desire for better opportunities to teach about writing and insufficiently takes into account student desire to resist actively or passively such an intrusion into the creative mental realm which for them is quintessentially private. A teacher's primary objective is

to teach and it is in the nature of students to want to be done, to resist possibility, to resist ambiguity, to resist openness and to resist multiple drafts. And it is not just resistance. At times, it is wholesale subversion of the teacher's attempts to teach publicly about their writing through their process, such as when Diana deleted the three-page story prior to writing her poem *The Bracelet*. I had requested frequently that students retain everything and anything connected to a piece of writing, but Diana saw no value in that. Was the story really "garbage"? Or was something greater at risk? Perhaps too much of her had intruded on the page.

In order for a teacher to access students' processes and guide instruction students must expose their thinking and in an autobiographical setting, their lives. In each classroom, there is an official version of how writing is supposed to take place and the teacher supplies that, set against this is each student's actual process for any given piece of writing. By requesting or requiring students to reveal part or all of the intermediate stages in the process of creating a piece, teachers generate the potential for an explicit clash between the official and the actual versions of writing, as was seen with Avery's plagiarism which involved multiple coverings up. This gap between the official acceptable version of process writing and the real writing experience of students may contribute to students' resentment of and resistance to writing process, arguably this resulted in actions like what Colleen alluded to when she created a plan after she wrote, a trick her mother taught her, suggesting that there is a long-standing tradition of this behaviour with students.

As Clarke (1988) suggested, students resisted because I pushed them not to let writing simply 'be done,' but rather to let writing be a work-in-process. I removed the pressure of marks, but I pushed them to keep a complete record. Even at the time, I did not understand how complete that record could be, a record that reveals a great deal about any individual, a fact to which I am hyper-aware as I revealed both my writing and myself to committee members throughout the process of writing my

dissertation. Through participants' resistance, which I encountered and documented in my dissertation, I learned about the effect of pushing in this new setting.

Elbow (2000) notes that in school settings both resistance and compliance exist. Other than Dan, the students did write. They did comply with the request to produce writing. Students resisted planning; they resisted revising; they resisted maintaining complete records, and so on. Why was that? And how then can I use that tension between compliance and resistance to students' benefit? I have started to wonder how students experience writing process. What have they internalized about writing and for what reason? What intentions do they attribute to us? What do they think teachers want to see when we ask for drafts of their work?

I suspect they believe the two should match in uncanny ways. I think students need to know how infrequently writing actually conforms to a writer's initial plan. They need to know that discrepancies are expected because the writer's understanding of audience changes, purposes evolve and the message becomes clearer. Perhaps stories of writing that portray a writer's resistance to conforming to a particular process would be an asset. I do believe I, as a teacher, need to explain to students a clearer description of why we, teachers, want to, for lack of better words, see inside their heads. How disconnected is the teacher's purpose of requesting drafts from the students' understanding of why they are engaged in a practice? What I now believe process theory has been missing in my classroom is the official explanation of why I want to know more about students' composing and revising practices, that it is not a make-work project but rather my most significant access point into writing behaviour that is not serving a student. For those students whose decisions and actions are working, revealing writing process may become a way to help them set new goals and challenges for writing as they move on to more complex texts. How can I subvert resistance to writing in general and to revealing process in particular productively?

How I, or any teacher, use the particular in the future is the very wealth of the promise of educational research. While ideally educational research should enhance the lives of participants directly, more frequently it enhances the next experience that I as teacher or researcher set out to frame and potentially those who read or hear about my work. That the observations and insight of the particular classroom, in this case the use of student's drawings to explore the phenomenon of writing and reconsideration of resistance as productive and essential, can and do become a part of the on-going story a teacher constructs in the effort to teach writing. Every experience I have with writing enters into my next experience; every experience with teaching writing enters into my next teaching experience. This leads to my next key point about the responsibilities, promise and perils of knowing and using autobiographies in the classroom.

#### Particular Responsibilities, General Possibilities

As a teachers, everything in the classroom hinges on what we do! The classroom is our responsibility. That is not to say we necessarily cause anything, because writing, learning to write and learning to teach writing is far too complex for that. Graves (1983) recognized that a model provided by the teacher does not mean the student will apply it directly. Writing's creative nature resists formulas; it resists models. Here, I invoke a metaphor of teacher as director of an improvisational ensemble. The actors move the improvisation forward, but it is the skill and experience of the director that builds the skills the actors use to advance a plot. The director must trust her actors' skills and knowledge, while anticipating gaps, and rough blocking (positioning) the action. She does not control the content (the writing) – the actor's minds' produce that – but in setting the constraints such as time limits, conversations, an emphasis on skill and strategies, she side-coaches (the act of advising the actor without interrupting the action) the actors in productive directions. This is why Ms Harris and I as writers and teachers were central to the entire project and

why the story of the researcher/teacher as writer, as learner and as teacher cannot be left out! Here I wish to make a case for the significance of the teacher's autobiographical experience as it relates to students.

The experiences students have in the classroom frame their beliefs about writing, their understanding of process, and their relationship to this important tool for learning. All too often in educational research only one side of an experience is represented, either the teacher's or the students'. I have positioned the teacher, myself included, our stories of writing and our explicit reflections about writing at the heart of my research for several reasons. We did everything we asked of students (we wrote, we talked, we revised, we shared); we exposed our autobiographical selves in hopes of fostering conversations about writing; we presented ourselves as experienced writers with knowledge to offer; we positioned ourselves as learners beside students still capable of directing the action of our drama, but willing to learn from the fellow actors, such as when Diana noted Ms Harris' clarity issues and Shelley observed my weakness with tenses. Our actions were not without risks. We risked revealing weaknesses that could then be turned against us. We risked blending our personal selves with our teaching selves. We risked being real writers in front of our students where the thrill and the struggles that come with writing can become a part of the fabric of learning to write.

Returning to my critique of single-sided representation, on the issue of student revision Dix (2006b) noted in a single sentence that students had been shown revision for clarity, had experienced demonstrations on collaborative writing and how to question themselves. For me, a single statement about instruction is not enough. When, how, what, and why students write is framed by their educational experience, by the assignment, the conventions of the classroom and by the constraints imposed by the teacher or in this case the researcher. The data or writing students produced was at my request; and the form and substance, intentions and perceptions, plans and realities of how that request entered

the classroom all mattered. The portraits of the writers I have represented previously came about as a result of my and Ms Harris' attempts to reveal our processes and our writing. While there is no direct link, the conversations we conducted established patterns, procedures, and possible forms, audiences and subject matter. Only rarely were they taken up, as in the parallel case of Diana and Ms Harris's use of reading out loud in order to hunt for awkwardness and Adriana's macro-revisions.

However, the conversations about pretext composing and deferred revision were public displays of more experienced revision behaviour, which can then be returned to when a writer has need for the information. I have come to understand that it will take more time to convince students they can be more than 'cardboard writers' (in Shelly's term), time this study did not have. This study does reveal the messy and time consuming space it takes to even tell partial stories of a whole context of a classroom, with all its interconnections, relationships, failures and successes.

Bruner (2004) believed that the stories we construct participate in structuring our future; therefore, the experiences provided in the classroom contribute to students' futures. Students need many varied writing experiences and opportunities to perceive themselves as writers in order to include themselves as a writer in their future definition. For example, Ms Harris was and is a writer, but prior to this research experience she had never offered her stories of writing, her writing process or her writing-in-process to her students as educational resources for them to explore and extract strategies. Now, with this experience as part of her autobiography, she may consider trying it again.

One of the first responsibilities of writing teachers is to define and refine their own understanding of writing and to explore their personal theory. This will involve researching themes, dominant, marginal and emerging. The on-going nature of this process will mean revising their insights as they grow as a writer. For example, it will mean attending to how, where and when they like to write. It will mean developing personal

writing experiences commensurate with experts not novices. These experiences will hopefully include, but not be limited to:

- defining and refining a rhetorical problem beyond an assignment as Flower and Hayes (1994) suggest, such as Ms Harris' discussion of audience surrounding Aaron's story, where she moved from a possible story to tell at his wedding to a magazine anecdote capturing the humorous things kids say;
- revision beyond simple error detection, lexical changes as reported by Sommers (1994), Rose (1994), Perl (1994) and Murray (1984), such as my new stories of revising this dissertation;
- expanded understanding of pretext, online and deferred revision with strategies appropriate for each as identified by Myhill and Jones (2007) and Dix (2006b), such as Ms Harris' pretext revision of the story of her brother and my online revision of saving in multiple drafts and the deferred revision strategies on a macro-level that identify theme, form and argument;
- engagement with and development of both the general writing processes advocated by Murray (1984), Perl (1994), and Graves (1983) as well as the task specific knowledge advocated by Smagorinsky and Smith (1992) and Hillocks (1982), such as Ms Harris' considerations for trimming her monster story if she was to submit it to a magazine for publication;
- use and exploration of a meta-language for composing and revising which through explicit teaching can then be used in a student's composing and revising processes in his or her own particular way;
- experiences in writing to engage discursive communities that employ all three writing positions identified by Smagorinsky and Smith (1992), such as the construction of this research text and the community it is meant to engage, as well as the communities not traditionally represented that I wished to be included such as both students and teachers.

In short, as Emig (1971) suggested, teachers need to stop underconceptualizing writing. In order to do this, a teacher's composing and revising practices need to meet and be interrupted by theories of writing. It is not enough to read the theory, one must try out the theories to see how they fit, as Murray (1984), Elbow (1973), Perl (1994), and Graves (1983) all attest. Entering the classroom as the students' experienced writer (Sommers, 1994; Rose 1994; Perl, 1994; Flower & Hayes 1994) does not require having all the answers, for that is an impossible task in writing. A writer soon recognizes that he or she simply has more options available for approaching writing and by telling stories he or she makes visible a possible solution, strategy or insight to everyone present. At the same time, through the process of listening, a writer may hear others' stories that then offer back more possibility.

Thus, the teacher of writing needs to first develop a greater understanding of writing process as knowledge-in-action, so she can generate the opportunities Applebee (1996) calls for in his *Curriculum as Conversation*. In the dialogic classroom, Nystrand knows that the learners' insights become the next possibility. Good writing by its very nature hides the process; perhaps that is part of why mastering good writing is so challenging. As a teacher, I have a responsibility to become my students' expert and, therefore, I may need to broaden and expand my personal knowledge of composing and revising processes. I propose we expose, the teachers' or the researchers' and our students' writing processes in an effort to be more transparent. This may seem counterintuitive to my discussion of students resistance to the entire project of process writing earlier, but what I wish to note here is that resistance can be productive and by increasing awareness and perhaps explicitly making it a part of our conversations we can harness students like Aden, Avery and Kenton and Dan's desires to resist into more productive writing behaviours. Perhaps through resisting resistance in a conscious way we are more able to articulate our process.

Lensmire's (1997) established teacher responsibilities (an idea I took up in Chapter 5), where a teacher establishes a learning environment conducive to deliberation, aligns herself with marginalized stories, and expands the range of possibilities for lived stories. Lensmire wrote, "When a student writes a story, she is engaged in the imaginative rehearsal of possible lines of action" (p. 99). For me, Dan's lack of stories stop him from rehearsing other ways of being, whereas Colleen rehearsed herself into poetry. Diana attempted to rehearse a story that included midnight walks in her place piece, but was sanctioned by her peer group's references to homosexuality, an act that may well have further positioned her as an outsider. Karly's story allowed her to rebel against an authority she believed was wasting her time. Tatum's fragile and struggling relationship with writing limits the stories she was capable of making clear for an audience. Each of these stories rehearses ways of being, while rehearsing writing

In order for a teacher to 'stand with the underdog' it requires noticing when, where and how a student is positioned socially. Dan's status as a student is that of an underdog. His school stories are 'writing' him into invisibility and without someone to stand up and demand he be heard, he will disappear from the landscape of school. Diana needs more opportunities to rehearse being different, as the one who perceives of herself as a writer. Socially, she tells the story of the distant student on the edge, a story that others need to hear because of how they are implicated in defining that edge. Finally, Karly demanded to be heard. While her act was not directly that of an underdog, the position she wrote from was. She had the courage to vocalize a critical opinion of a classroom experience and that needs to be championed.

Lensmire also outlined student responsibilities while engaging in sharing time within workshop settings, which I position parallel to my research. The student responsibilities Lensmire suggests are challenging even for adults. Therefore, I see a dual responsibility that of the student

and also that of the teacher in the shaping of the classroom experience to support the students' responsibilities. Listening carefully to others, both stories and comments, is the first responsibility. The second is to seek understanding of the other's ideas. How a teacher listens to the stories of others and seek understanding through affirming, questioning, and directing will supply the model of expectations for students. The third is "that they be *open to learning, growth, and changing their minds*" (p. 101), which carries significant repercussions directly related to the autobiographical nature of the project I set for students. Colleen changed her mind and through her words honoured a cousin who struggles to communicate and Adriana learned more about revision and used writing to communicate effectively with her sister and lament her loss of grandparents. Kenton and Tatum recognized the importance of their writing environments.

More work needs to be done with helping students listen to each other's messages. The unproductive and at times mean-spirited critiques and banter among Avery, Shelly and Diana affirm the need for more attention to listening. I too need to listen more carefully, really to hear why and how Tatum has made the conceptual links of teacher comments and the computer ruining her stories. Kenton, Aden and Avery taught me to listen to students who like to manipulate and resist assignments without breaking the boundaries established thus making resistance a productive act.

Lensmire also identified three relevant dangers inherent in these responsibilities, including a false sense of shared understanding that works through silencing or projecting rather than common understanding; a tendency to underestimate the challenge of understanding another's ideas; a desire to overestimate polite conversation where a break or rupture might be necessary for some voices to be heard. I will take up the first and the third next. Dan is silent. Has he been silenced? In some ways, the boys were far more silent textually and orally than the girls of the study. How

did the choice of autobiographical writing or instruction decisions contribute to that silence? How do my and Ms Harris's moments of dictatorship (rather than conversation) silence students' questions and stories? These questions were not to be resolved in this study. The rupture of polite conversation necessary to be heard can be very uncomfortable, as in the case of Karly. But it was only when she ruptured the polite expectations of the classroom and demanded to be heard that I could understand her resistance.

With respect to his second danger of underestimating common understanding, I wish to push into an area Lensmire did not discuss, which is related to the nature of the student resistance to process writing. Teachers and students, at least the students of this study, do not have a common understanding of process writing. Teachers construct intentions for class projects. How those intentions are perceived and understood by students is outside of their direct control; however, more transparency about intentions, purpose and the role of process might be necessary to reduce resistance possibly even make use of resistance.

There is a disconnect between these students' understanding of process and its purpose and a teacher's intent. Teachers see it as an opportunity to teach writing and so they establish what they believe to be helpful guidelines to provide evidence of process. Students see that teachers dictate the legitimate forms of process, such as setting goals, planning followed through, and the all-too-common 'minimum of two drafts'. Currently, perhaps students are not seeing the connections between understanding and using process to further abilities in writing and teachers are not seeing the resistance to predetermined and controlled processes that may not suit a particular writer. There is no common understanding of how this process can benefit both. Therefore, when stories of writing enter into pedagogical position, stories that contain the messy truth, actual non-official processes, they can mediate and negotiate understanding between

students and teachers as they write their autobiographies together, as writers.

### **Particular Autobiographies**

As well as framing many of the interactions that comprise the study, the true significance of autobiographical writing, even now, as I write this conclusion is becoming more and more layered and nuanced. The whole context of the study was autobiographical and this includes everything from the drawings to the writing of this dissertation. I chose autobiographical writing for several reasons. It placed the writer at the center of their subject matter. Autobiographical writing limited how students could use one another in their stories; it did not require research because it was their experience; and probably most significantly it was central in my transformation from non-writer to writer. Further, students were familiar with requests to write about themselves. This decision highlighted some interesting issues and concerns. As a teacher, I have frequently assigned autobiographical writing. I will do so in the future with new insights and more reservations.

The entangled nature of autobiographical writing holds both promise and peril. Its greatest promise in relation to the teaching of writing is the layering of reflective thinking, which can foster meta-cognitive reflection. Adriana understood the power of what she called the “double view” when her sister wrote back to her and she was able to see how her sister mirrored her form, voice, and tone. Kenton articulated observations regarding how he plans, how he likes to write and why he likes to push the boundaries of assignments as an exercise in creativity. Aden, Kenton and Shelly all recognized their personal desire to create more distance from their subject matter, which Aden accomplished through making his story about his friend Kenton’s house, where Kenton created an irrelevant list of food he liked and Shelly distanced herself by telling a story from the age of five. Colleen, Adriana and Diana all

identified their comfort with personal subject matter although Diana would prefer to control her audiences. However, Diana like Shelly felt exposed through personal writing. Perhaps the double view is inherent in its promise and perils. Autobiographical writing promises possible introspection. It pauses moments in time. It provides a place to return, to see how thinking is evolving, to see how writing is evolving. It expresses themes, issues and concerns relevant in that moment. Perhaps it is a placeholder for re-seeing ourselves as writers.

Its greatest peril is the risk of exposure, but all writing is somewhat autobiographical and therefore carries some risk of exposure. While I readily acknowledge that autobiographical writing, by the nature of being an account of some elements of one's life, is more likely to expose the writer; the writer maintains control of the material of his or her life as represented on paper. This risk can also be mediated by attending to Lensmire's responsibilities. Applebee's vision of *Curriculum as Conversation* may help here to build a living and breathing tradition grounded contextually in the lives of teachers and students who negotiate and include writer within their identity. At the same time, it is important to attend to issues of responsibility in relation to our community, our writing and the class. We minimize perils first by acknowledging them, perhaps explicitly discussing the ways a writer might create distance with stories from the distant past, where it is clear that as a person we have grown far beyond our former self, as Shelly did in both her toddler stories.

The nature of truth in autobiographical writing became an interesting if elusive issue during the study and I remain open to its consideration as more promise or peril. Perhaps truth in text is one that hides out of sight in the process and comes forward through the telling of stories about creating writing. Is it necessary for Tatum to be able to describe the present from her grade one birthday party? How critical is the accuracy of details? Does creating space for issues of truth, questions

about accuracy, and problematizing all writing as autobiographical have the potential to help students be better writers?

I have one further comment on the issue of truth as it pertains to form. When I began working with data for my dissertation, I was extremely resistant to cutting transcripts. I wanted participants' voices available in their entirety, but that is not practical. It is not interesting; it is not efficient; it does not easily allow for the crafting of a position, a story or an argument. Eventually, I got over my resistance to excisions, by explicating what I at times excised. For example, I noted that at times I cut repetition, interjections, agreements and questions that did not advance the conversation. However, for practical and conventional reasons, I chose to make a blanket statement about these acts. In other words, there is no "warning: cutting occurs" with each transcript. The intent was always to maintain the spirit of the conversation, enhance the position or argument while respecting my reader's patience. I abided with conventional practices within the academic discourse community. Research requires the crafting of information in this way or we would never be able to first read or second follow an article's position. This too connects to the question of truth in writing.

However, when I switched forms to the more creative such as the found poem, the choric drama, the found play and even the final imagined interview conversation with the student participants I did not experience the same resistance. Perhaps there was less resistance because of the creative form and the expectations of literary license. Perhaps because for each I clearly explicated what I actions I took implying that no others occurred. For example, in the found poem, I cut extensively from a whole-group conversation and individual private conversations, and then I ordered and grouped responses in thematic ways. The opening line of each stanza was crafted and interpretive to which I drew attention by using italics. However, explicating each transcript in similar manner is simply impossible and it has become standard and conventional that the

researcher's actions such as selecting, ordering, excising, and omissions preceding the research text is simply accepted. Is there such a thing as 'academic license'? Is there space to question the conventions of academic research that leave the process of crafting research as invisible.

I believe Adriana experienced a similar liberation through form in cycle two when she switched away from the story of her grandparents' absence in her life to the essence of the impact that this has had on her. As a story or anecdote, it was a list of details, dates and events, but as a poem it explored the profound sense of loss. She did not say this – it is an idea I wish to explore further. It is something to ponder. How do the forms writers select interact with autobiographical subject matter? Do certain forms provide more flexibility to represent ideas that are ambiguous or uncertain? Why was I drawn to the choric drama, the found poem and the found play? What did those forms enable that a standard dissertation form hid? Can I as a writer fully comprehend why any particular piece of writing takes the form it does? What responsibilities does a teacher have with regards to teaching with autobiography at the heart?

Now I must return to the questions I have created in everyone's mind by bringing this discussion forward. Is her data, her research, truthful? It is as truthful as any writer's. There is no intention to deceive, to hide, to mask, but in the end I sat with copious amounts of data. I saw certain themes and not others; I made decision about positioning; I composed and revised, shifted orders, made deletions, made additions and otherwise acted as a writer might and as a researcher does. Murray (1994) noted that writing is a representation crafted through an individual's autobiography. Perhaps this is both a promise and a peril. My autobiography participates in my writing, my teaching and my research that is a promise. The peril lies in the entanglement that is created through acknowledging that all research is also autobiographical.

Each teacher comes to teach writing with her autobiography intact. Each researcher comes to research with hers. Each student comes with a

series of educational and writing experiences intact. In the classroom, these stories bump into each other, interrupt the other, shift the perspective and otherwise alter the landscape of writing. What happens when we explicitly pause to ponder, consider and try something new? At the very least a new story written collectively comes to exist like the story of this research. But it is more than that that I hope for. I hope that as Ms Harris said, that if every teacher did that... students would see just how many ways they could write.

## **Endings and Beginnings**

Three simple roses entered this research and I am now more comfortable with my three 'I's'. I have come to terms with the fact that they do not have to agree. While in the classroom with the student participants, the teacher role felt as though students were pliable, compliant for the most part and responsive to the experience. However, as the researcher at almost every turn I uncovered resistance and subversion. Neither one needs to be True; it is not that my teacher self was wrong and my researcher self was right; it was that my purposes were different. The tensions and resistance existing among my three 'I's' are deep and challenging issues. To a teacher Avery's plagiarism is a horror, but to the researcher it is an interesting phenomenon entangled with students' experiences of process writing in schools. Where the teacher must cope with resistance to and subversion of her pedagogical intent, finding ways to encourage engagement and transform resistance into productive actions; the researcher can 'simply' study it.

As a writer in this experience, I had two luxuries not often available in the classroom. The deadlines were my own and as such they were subject to revision as needed by the writer. Secondly, as Natasha pointed out with her plays, I was able to trust that an ending would come despite much struggle and fear that it never would. In the classroom, deadlines are eminent and necessary; they force writing to conclude. Deadlines in school contexts are far less responsive to the individual writer's needs. One reason teachers resist research, and in particular why I initially resisted Lensmire (1993), is the feelings of helplessness and hopelessness research can evoke, because there is always more to do.

However, in my research, I have come to appreciate Lensmire's (1993, 1997) work; not least, I have found incidents and students from my study, who despite many differences of age and culture acted and spoke resonantly as his students had done. His responsibilities are hopeful and productive, but not without their own challenges. My reading of him as it relates to my own work is further example of how Eisner's (2006) '*n* of 1' can speak beyond its particularities.

Educational research often reads like a list of failings. Teachers are not doing this and this and this... For me, at times, it feels like there is an implied question "Why didn't you...?" and then fill in the blank with do, see, know, understand etc. To teachers trying to teach, frequently in less than ideal conditions, it can feel like long list of dangerous and potential side effects for an advertised drug. Why would I adopt a practice so

fraught with dangers? Why should I tell my writing stories? Why should I reveal myself to students as a writer? Why should I write in autobiographical forms? Part of the answer lies in the underlying condition; I am already teaching. 'Our' autobiographies are a part of the underlying conditions of the classroom. Many of the dangers such as resistance and subversion, tensions of preferences, autobiographical experiences and elaborate writing processes are already present in the classroom. The research did not invent the high blood pressure; it was already there. What research did was bring forward and highlight some of the underlying conditions and complexities.

I suggest there is a parallel between how I, at times, perceive educational research and how student experience process writing: "I don't want to show you my process, because all you want to do is tell me what is wrong with it." Researchers just want to help, but for teachers it is scary and difficult to really slow the process down and look at all the complexity, because inevitably something was missed or could have been done better, because there is always more to learn. Perhaps that is how students feel about process writing. Teachers want to help and if a student provides the teacher with all the tools to 'really' look at piece of writing, all the processes then the student is stuck with either ignoring the research into her or his process, or learning from it, using it and applying it. Perhaps sometimes it is easier to resist than to change practice.

There is no purity of any account in teaching practice. Teachers are compilations of multiple and often contradictory theories that derive from personal experience, beliefs and values, educational settings and theorists, and ongoing professional development designed to interrupt, shift, focus, validate and retool a teacher's public and private philosophies. Perhaps the same can be said for researchers, at least this one.

In the midst of writing this dissertation, deep in an episode of resistance to the mantle of researcher, David Pimm (a member of the supervisory committee) observed that many people undertaking doctoral studies are writing their way out of school and into the academy and that I was not. Rather, I was writing my way back into the secondary classroom. My resistance is strong and I wonder where the place of the secondary teacher/researcher is in the academy; but that is where I wish to make my contribution. I return to teaching informed by this study, wakeful and cautious, tentative and thoughtful, but enthusiastic and hopeful. Thus, with T. S. Eliot (1974), "In my end is my beginning".

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# Appendix A: Drawings

Aden

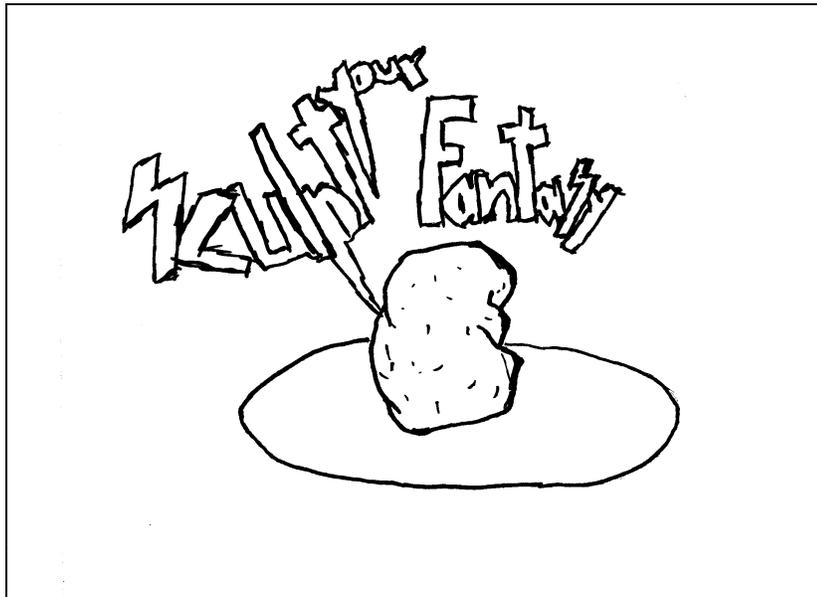


Figure 1: Aden D1

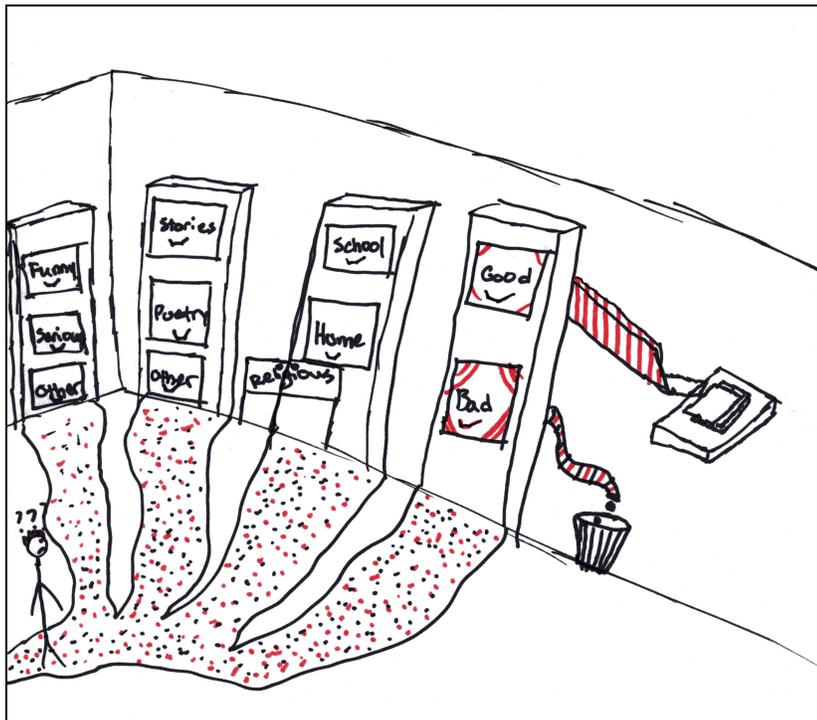


Figure 2: Aden D2

Adriana

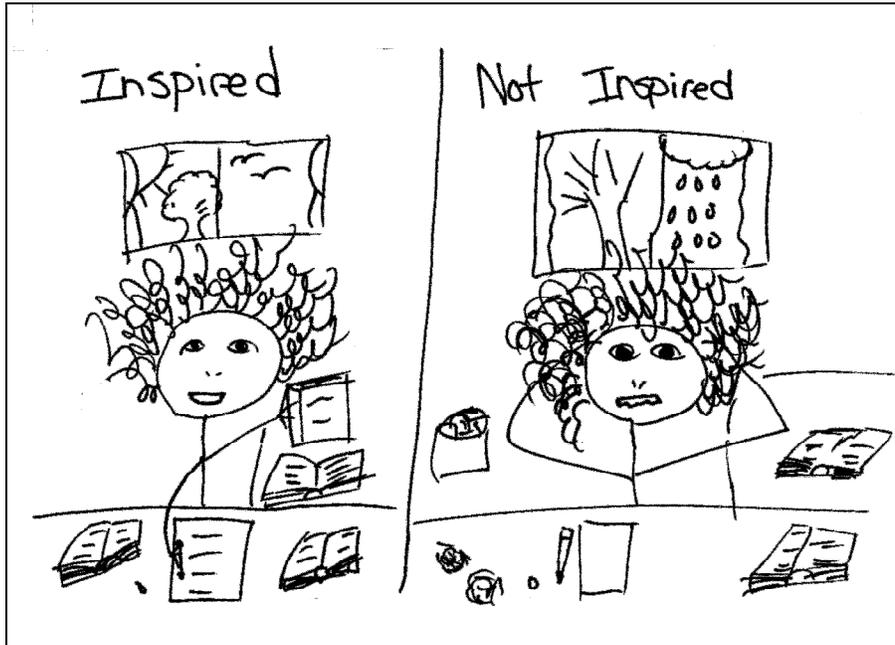


Figure 3: Adriana D1

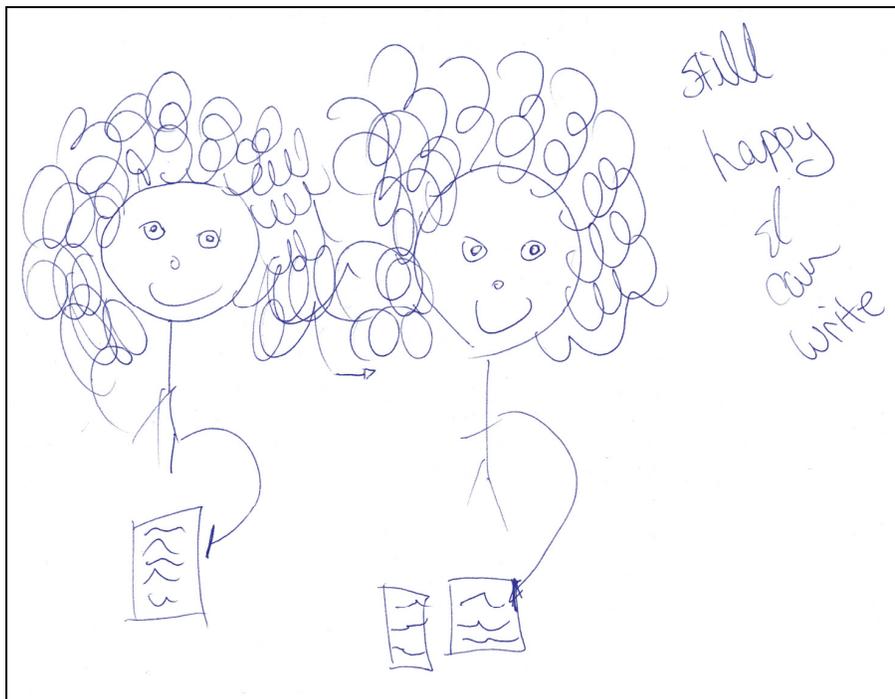


Figure 4: Adriana D2

Avery



Figure 5: Avery D1



Figure 6: Avery D2

Colleen

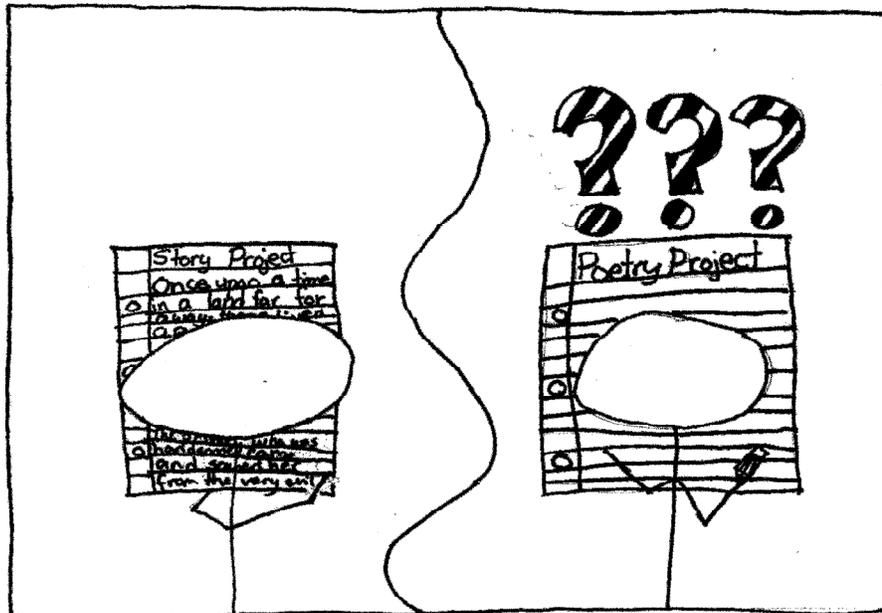


Figure 7: Colleen D1

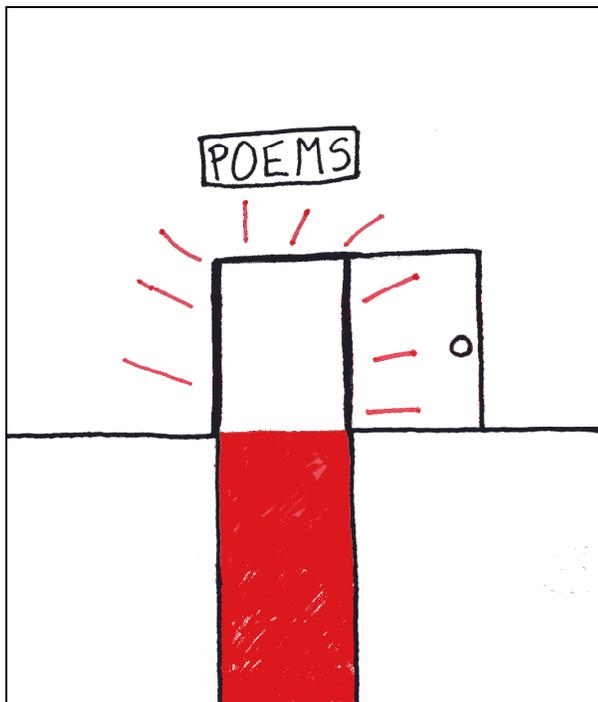


Figure 8: Colleen D2

Dan

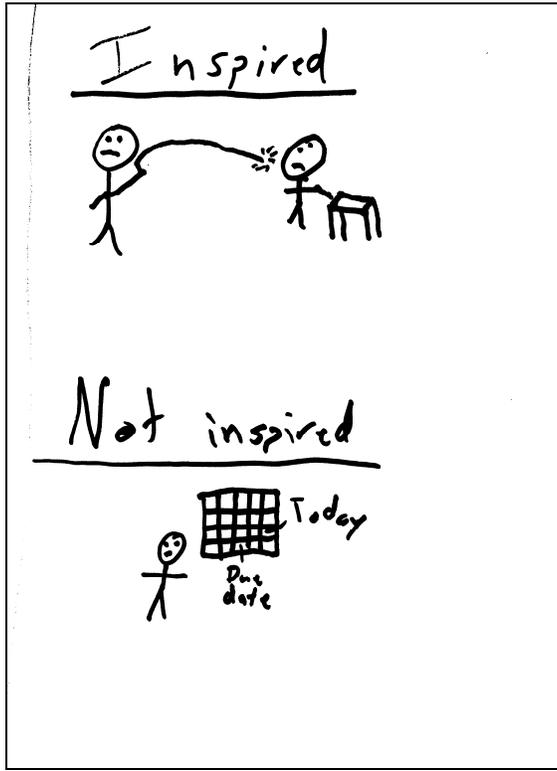


Figure 9: Dan D1

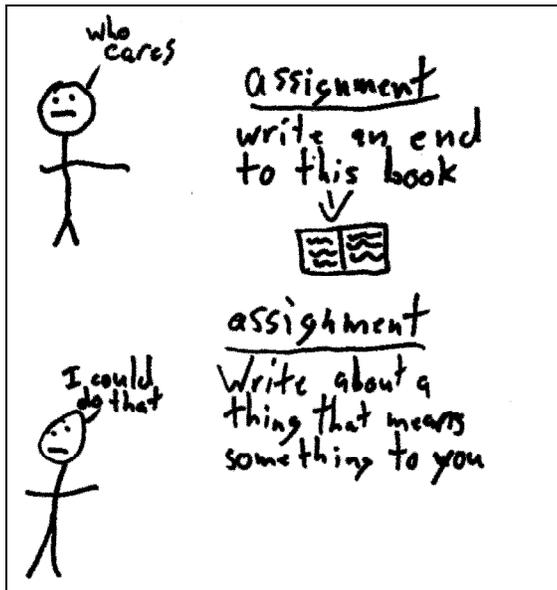


Figure 10: Dan D2

Diana

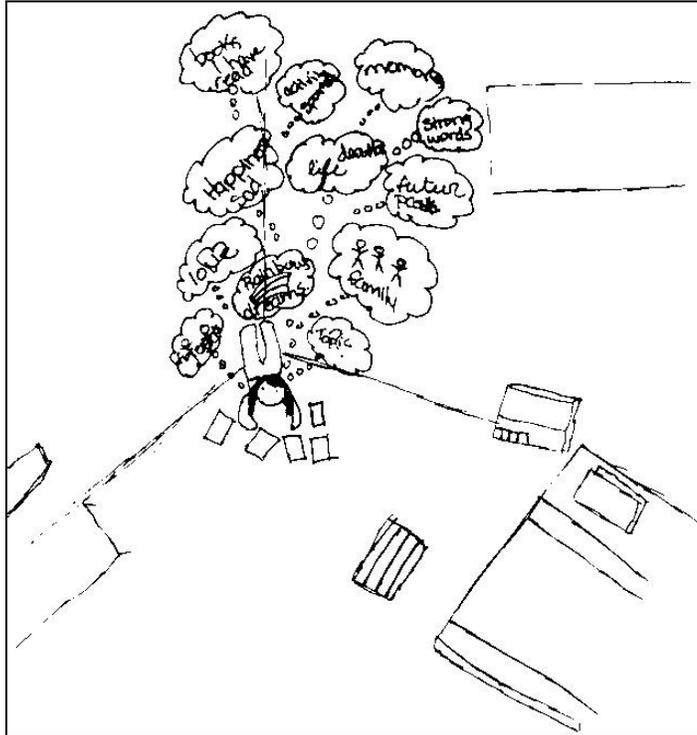


Figure 11: Diana D1

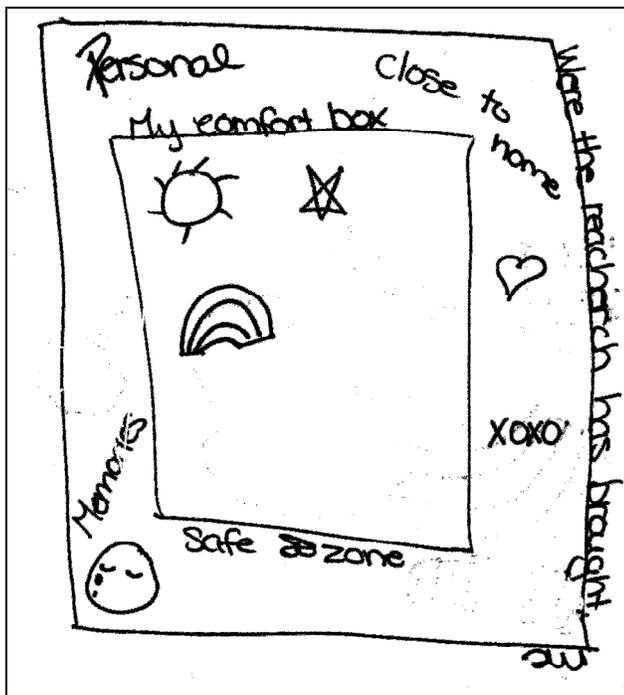


Figure 12: Diana D2

**Karly**

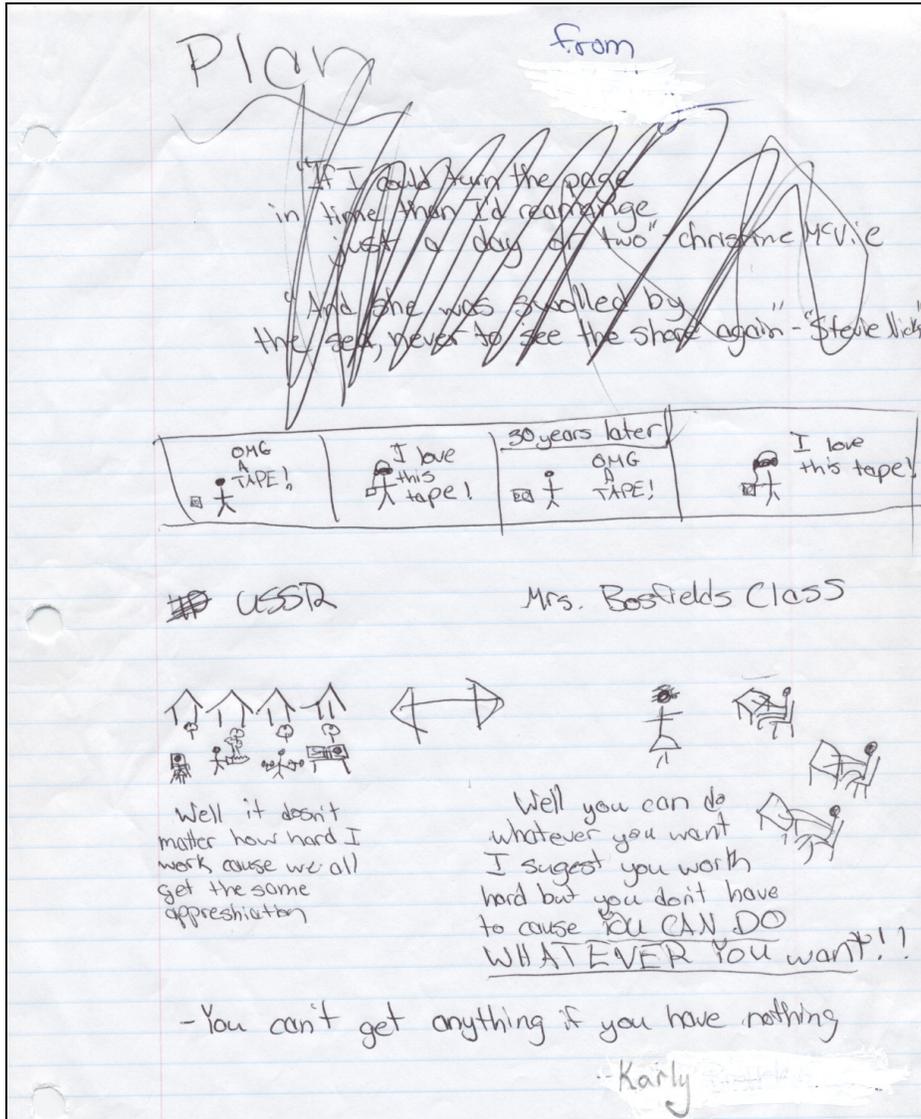


Figure 13: Karly Self-sponsored Planning

## Karly continued

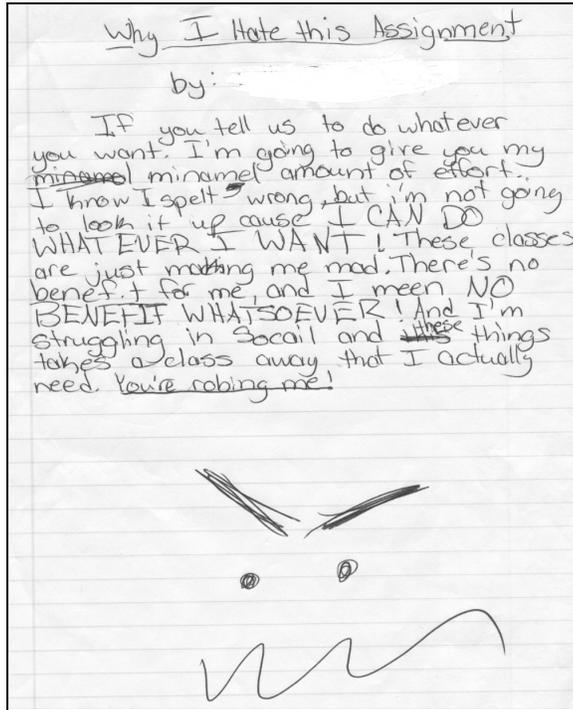


Figure 14: Karly Hate this Assignment

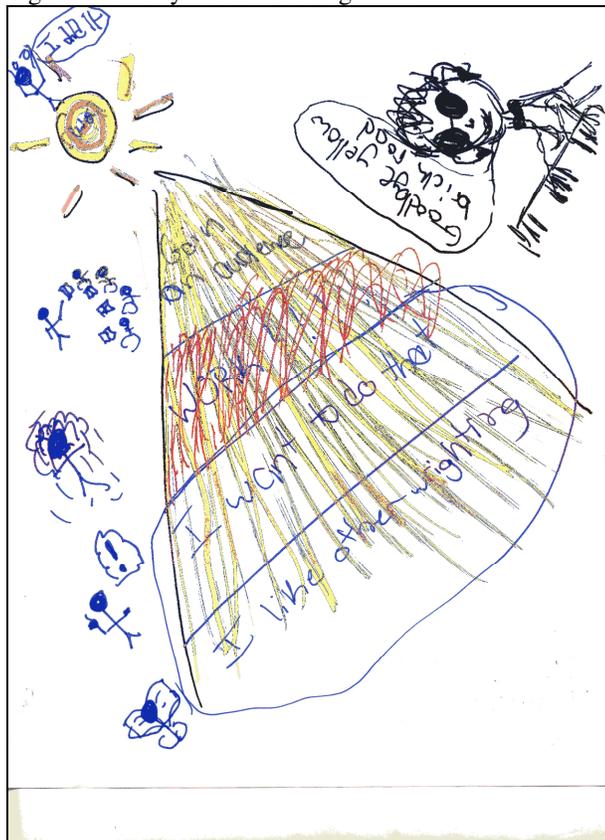


Figure 15: Karly D2

Kenton

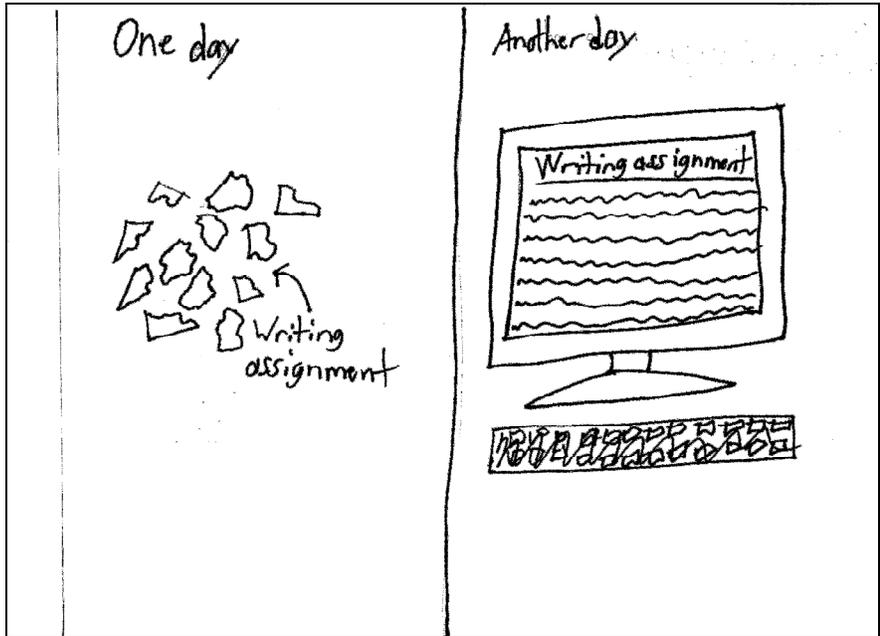


Figure 16: Kenton D2

Shelly

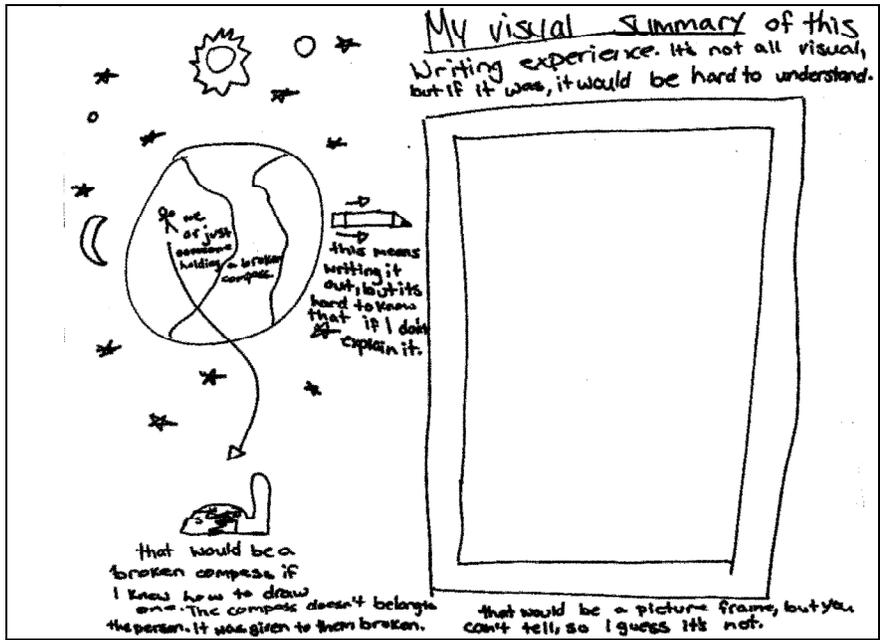


Figure 17: Shelly D2

Tatum

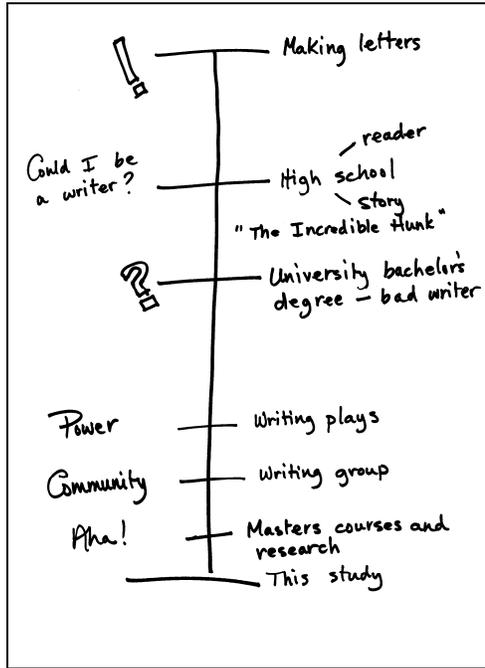


Figure 20: Tatum D1



Figure 21: Tatum D3

Natasha



Susan



## Appendix B: Study Writing

The grammatical and spelling errors were left in student writing.  
Avery's texts appear in Appendix D.

### *Aden*

Cycle 1      Final Version

#### The Martin's House

Over the course of my long and eventful life, I have been involved in some things that I can remember even today. It's not surprising to me that almost three quarters of those memorable events took place at the Martin's house. There are events such as penny fights, bubble fights, putting popcorn in the microwave on defrost, wrestling Kenton's big brothers, building a dog house without being told in advance and so on. Two events that I can remember the best are the penny fight and the doghouse. After arriving home from a long day of doing nothing I received a call from our mutual friend Kenton asking if I could come over to his house. I, figuring he had invited me out of the goodness of his heart immediately answered I could then went to ask my parents for permission and if they could drive me, only to find out that Kenton could pick me up. So Kenton and Mr. Martin came to pick me up and I was able to sit in the front, only to have Mr. Martin play one of the worst jokes on me, I thought that the rearview mirror could control the stereo. Oh...how I hate stereo controls on the steering wheel. When we (Jason, Kenton and I) arrived at his house he turned around and casually said "Oh yeah, we need to build a dog house" then got out of the car before we could even start to say anything. Well...one cannot explain the cold of the night or the pounding of nails, not to mention fingers but we definitely had motivation, supper. In the end, the dog house turned out wonderful and Jack (the Martin's hairball, dog) has given us many thanks for his new house. The second event it he bubble fight that took place in the kitchen after supper. It was Kenton's duty to do the dishes so of course, being good friends, Jason, Ian and I stayed to help. When we were filling up the sink we accidentally put in to much dish soap and got a mountain of bubbles. I don't think I know what went through his mind but you could see a glint in his eyes and a smile slowly spread across Kenton's face. He scooped up a handful of the bubbles and proceeded to slap Lyle on the cheek. Now, if you know Lyle, that simple fun gesture means war. So he grabbed a handful and ran his hand through Jason's hair. Now, Jason is one of those guys who doesn't like his hair being messed up so he took a handful and tried to slap Lyle

but missed and hit Ian on the side of the head. Ian doesn't like being hit so he tried to get Jason back but hit me instead, then I hit Lyle and it kept going until Mrs. Martin told us we had to quit. So, by the time we made our way downstairs we had bubbles in the hair and we had something to talk about at school the following week.

Cycle 3          Final Version

### Sleep

Sleep, the eternal companion of time  
Sleep, caring yet hostile  
Compassionate yet self-centered  
Gentle yet harsh  
Kind yet cruel  
Diverse yet the same  
Sleep can help heal the worst hurts  
Or cause the most harmful fear of all  
Sleep can caress you in time of need  
Or it can leave you to fight through your troubles  
Sleep can awaken the greatest dreams of all  
Or it can crush your hopes and leave you to lie still  
Sleep can cause the mind to imagine  
Or it can make the mind face the horrible realization of a situation  
Sleep can be a friend who you invite into your life  
Or it can be a (*sic*) enemy that you fear for horror beyond imagining  
Sleep can teach you things that no man can teach  
Or it can take away things that you have worked for  
For when you sleep you may rise and live  
Or you may be left to fall and die  
When you sleep you disconnect from one world  
And you connect with another  
Only in grasp with sleep to guide you  
Will you find the dreams of many  
But also the fears of thousands  
For sleep can lure you in, singing its lullabies  
And can grab hold of you and not let go  
For it is then, that you realize your fate  
A prisoner of sleep, never to awake  
But you must free yourself from its grasp and come back to life  
For a world is waiting for your return  
And so you are free from sleep at last  
Only to meet again in the presence of the night  
For sleep is eternal and will be forever  
As it trails behind time, deceiving those who wander too close  
Sleep, the eternal companion of time

*Adriana*

(Adriana's drafts are included due to the nature of her macro-revision)

Cycle 1      Rough Draft 1

Once we drove by the Hutterites colony we'd all start screaming "I see the lake I see the lake." After a long ride on a dirt road, we arrived. We would come up to a big lot, with 2 cabins and 4 sheds. This was our paradise. Every morning we woke up and played outside, afterwards we would have breakfast, and then do dishes. We were lucky enough to have running water, while other lots don't. There was one shed which we called the "tea house". It was always mud pies and leaf salads, we'd serve. Close to the end of the day we'd go boating. The water there was clear when other boats were on. Now its just full of algae. We had to sell it sadly. In the end I wish I could buy it back.

Cycle 1      Rough Draft 2

Once we drove by the Hutterite colony we'd all start screaming "I see the lake, I see the lake." After a long ride in a packed car, on a dirt road, we arrived. My whole family of uncles, aunts and cousins would unpack to our big brown cabin. Our lot consisted of two cabins, four sheds and two outhouses. This was our paradise. Every morning we woke up and went to play in the tea house. On our menu mud pies and dandelion leaf salade. Once, Dr. Harvey came and ordered the salade. When we put it down in front of him he ate one of the dandelions! All of us couldn't believe it. He was the first and only person that ate something. If we weren't there we either playing in the sandbox or out in the water. After getting out of the sandbox, we would look weathered. That sandbox was hand-made, and it took three truck pulls. With a 30 by 30 ft sandbox we had endless hours of fun. Before we left we had to clean up. The day we sold it was a very sad day, we sold it to a very good family. In the end I wish we could buy it back.

Cycle 1      Final Version

**The Cabin at Baptiste Lake**

Once we drove by the Athabasca Hutterite colony, on our way to Baptiste Lake, we'd all start screaming, "I see the lake, I see the lake," as you wanted to be the first one to see it. After a long ride in a packed van, we arrived. My whole family of uncles, aunts and cousins would unpack to our immense mahogany cabin. It had two rooms with bunk beds, two

master bedrooms and a basement that my uncles and aunts had dug out by pick and shovel. Our lot consisted of two cabins, four sheds and one adjoined outhouse for lads and lassies.

This was our paradise. Every morning we woke up and went to play in the tea house. On our menu were mud pies, leaf and dandelion salad, and a drink of lake water all served on cast away dishes from the main cabin. Once Dr. Harvey came and ordered the salad, when we put it down in front of him, he ate one of the dandelions! All of us couldn't believe it. He was the first and only person that ate something from the menu.

If we weren't there, we were either playing in the enormous sandbox down by the lake, or out in the water tubing or skiing or we would be off picking wild strawberries and raspberries.

After getting out of the sandbox, we would look tanned thinking it was from the sun but rather it was the sand on us that made us look worn and weathered. The sandbox was bordered by railway ties and it took three truck loads of sand. With a thirty by thirty foot sandbox we had endless hours of enjoyment.

The water was always the best, we didn't have the newest boat out there but it could still pull us in the tubes. One time our neighbors and us went in the water too early in the spring and we caught the itch, we were all taking oatmeal baths for weeks.

The wild strawberry patch was right between our friend's lot and ours, so we would walk over there pick as many as we could fit in one hand full and then run to the house. Mashed and squished, sugared strawberries were the most excellent delight.

In the morning, before we left to go home we would always clean the cabin and the playhouse. Leaving it ready for the next time we would be up. There was a very old vacuum that I really liked cleaning with, it gave off this smell that was pleasant but dusty, and always made the funniest sound.

The day we sold our cabin was a very heartbreaking day. It had been my other home every weekend and for most summers, all the time that we had been up there we never had two days that were exactly the same. I wish we could buy it back, although it would never be the same cabin, we will always have the memories of the fun and games that were played up there.

Cycle 2      Draft 1

When I hear about people complaining about spending time with their grandparents, I always become jealous. From the pet names that they get called to the way they treat them, I envy it all. Due to the fact that all my grandparents were dead before I was born, except one, I never had the chance to know what they were like or what they would have thought of me. Since I was only five at the time, I barely have any recollection of

what my living grandma was like, or have any memories of our own. She was constantly in and out of the hospital making it difficult to learn about her, or spend time. Therefore this picture is very important to me.

On the left side there are my pseudo-grandparents. My oldest sister asked one of them one day if they would be our grandparents, happily they accepted. These people weren't just people we knew, they were best friends with my grandparents and their daughter and their children are friends with my uncles and aunts. As result we have "grandparents" that have adopted the whole family and has never missed a reunion. Although they have taken over the role of my grandparents, but still can never replace that feeling of grandparents.

Beside them on the right there are my maternal grandparents, Thomas and Elie Mc Bride. My grandfather was born in 1918 and died in 1986 while my grandmother was born in 1927 and died in 1992 a couple of months before I was born. My paternal grandparents are Rusell and Jean Trump. My grandfather was born in 1904 to 1966 and my grandmother was 1912 to 2000.

Sometimes I hear my parents saying how proud they would be of me, but I wish I would actually know what they thought of me. Hopefully this explains to teenagers why grandparents are important, because once somethings gone, thats when you miss it the most.

Cycle 2      Final Version

### **When they're gone they are really gone**

When I hear how people complain  
About spending time with their grandparents, I cringe with irritation  
From cute pet names they're labeled or even how their grandparents treat  
them

I envy it all  
There is still a feeling that will never disappear  
Of never truly knowing my grandparents  
Personalities I will never meet  
Questions that never will get answered

With no grandparents to call my own  
I adopted some  
They may not be blood-relatives but they do their part  
At every family reunion to birthdays

So when your grandmother calls you up  
Or your grandfather wants to take you fishing  
Please say yes or answer that phone

It could be the last time  
Before they really go

Because once they're really gone  
They're really gone  
That is when you miss them the most

Cycle 2      Rough draft

### **A Note to Sasha**

Dear Sasha:

I write this letter to apologize for my actions that day in the bathroom, also I would like to explain my behaviour, when you required to use some of my toothpaste.

Since I was younger I never had to share my toothpaste with any person. As a result I have become attached to my own Anticavity fluoride and antigingivitis paste. Therefore at the moment I was not ready to let someone touch my tube of toothpaste.

Some reasons for why I don't enjoy anyone using my toothpaste is the way I squeeze it out. It is the perfect way, instead of squeezing it to the lid for easier access I prefer to squish it from the middle leaving imprints of my hand on it. Another reason is I don't appreciate the way people leave the paste all over the cap on the outside. If this minty fluoride paste was for my hands, I myself would put it on my own hands. So that these every day don't occur. I don't let people use my toothpaste.

I hope now that you understand my reasoning and do not take any offence to what I have said. My apology is out there for you to accept. To resolve any conflict, I can allow you to use my mini-calgate toothpaste that I received from the dentist. Hopefully, we can both put this behind us, as it was a misunderstanding.

Truly yours,  
Adriana

**A Note to Sasha**

Dear Sasha:

I write this letter to apologize for my actions that day in that bathroom. Also, I would like to explain my behaviour, when you asked to use some of my toothpaste.

Since I was younger, I never had to share my toothpaste with anyone. As a result I have become attached to my anti-cavity fluoride and anti-gingivitis paste. Therefore at that moment I was not ready to let someone touch my tube of breath freshening excellence. Some other reasons why I do not enjoy anyone using my toothpaste is the way I squeeze it out. It is the perfect way, instead of squeezing it to the lid for easier access to the fresh minty paste; I prefer to squish it from the middle leaving imprints of my hand on it. Another reason is I do not appreciate the way people leave the green sticky mess all over the cap and on the outside. If this pepper-mint fluoride paste was for my hands, I myself would put it on my own paws. So that these everyday occurrences do not take place, I do not let people use my toothpaste.

I hope now that you understand my reasoning and do not take any offence to what I have said. My apology is out there for you to accept. To resolve any conflict, I can allow you to use my mini-Colgate Total toothpaste that I received from the dentist. Hopefully, we can both put the behind us, as it was a misunderstanding.

Truly yours,

Adriana

P.s. Do not touch my toothpaste (If you haven't guessed)

**A Reply to Adriana (written by her sister)**

Dear Adriana,

I am deeply sorry to have used your beloved toothpaste. I did not realize that you have such a connection to it. I will explain my reasoning as to why I used your toothpaste.

As being the eldest child I never had a chance to have my own toothpaste so someone was constantly leaving their goopyness all over the cap, this I did not appreciate. Nor did I have the opportunity to have an individual tube of paste all to myself, or did I experience leaving the imprints of my hand on the freshly squeezed tube. I felt that you needed this experience to truly appreciate your own tube of toothpaste. Since you are the youngest, you never had to share your toothpaste with anyone as we had moved out of the house and left. Using your toothpaste was an act of a poor student in need of paste and a loving sister that she did not think twice that it would bother you so to share that extra drop of green plaque fighter.

I sincerely hope that you except my apology for using your toothpaste and that you are able to move on. For the future I have budgeted a little more wisely in my student finances to include that extra tube of paste so when I come home I am able to achieve my own wonderful experience of using my own toothpaste.

Sincerely yours,

Sasha

*Colleen*

Cycle 1      Final Version

### **The Hill**

As I lay on the green, green grass of the hill,  
I think about life, staying very, very still  
I try to relieve stress and become care free.  
So I sing softly a little melody  
Freeing my mind and forgetting everything  
Becomes easier as I continue to sing  
I breathe in the fresh air as I watch children play  
My trouble have now been left for another day

Cycle 2      Final Version

### **Model Perfection**

How do you always love?  
How do you never judge?  
How do you accept each shape and size?  
And never hold a grudge?

How do you trust all people  
And act kindly to each one you see?  
Why do I always feel better  
When you lie down next to me?

You live life in the moment  
And do no wrong at all  
I hope you'll always be there  
To catch me when I fall

The world could learn from you, child  
And each little thing you do  
Remember that you're special  
And that I'll always love you

**Friends Forever More**

Ever since our first day of school  
Not quite ten years ago  
We've sat in the same classroom  
We've sat in the same row

Even when girls and boys thought each other were gross  
We knew that we'd always be friends  
To this day, we are still so close  
I pray it will stay that way 'till the end

But soon high school starts and classes will change  
Which means that we all must part  
Even if I have not one class with you,  
You will always be in my heart

So promise me that we'll stay in touch  
And hang out once in a while  
You're each like a best friend to me  
You make my life worthwhile

*Dan*

Cycle 3      Transcript Version

Okay, since the first day of school, the first time I met my friends they have always given me a reason to come back. In kindergarten, I met my first friend; his name is Kenton. The one reason I decided to introduce myself is that he looked almost exactly like me.

*Diana*

Cycle 1      Final Version

Everyone has a place, whether its popularity or being a nerd. Me, I don't have a place, I don't have a group of friends that are like me. I am a large group of one. Although that is my choice, I could be part of the girls who think every single moment is the funniest moment ever. Or I could hang out with the people who study encyclopedias. I'm not saying these are bad people, I just don't like drama and I am not very smart. And don't get me wrong; I have many friends that I hang out with and have many laughs with, but I don't have a place, crowd, group. Then sometimes I would like some comfort. I see groups that have all that, but I'm happy with where I don't fit in.

Cycle 2      Final Version

**The Wedding Dress (*my title*)**

Large, round, plump belly weighted her down for 9 long months. Near the end of those months the mother couldn't get out of bed if her life depended on it. She spent those past few months laying in bed creating the best birthday present for her little girl. She would lay there almost motionless, her hands moving fast as her long thick hair engulfing the pillow when she turned her head to see a small, soft three years old face staring into her eyes.

A round 6 months later that same small soft face came running up to her mother's bed to remind her of the big news. It was her fourth birthday and she wanted to tear open the wrapping that hid her new treasures. Once her mother finally lifted her fatigue, exhausted body from under the covers, the little girl was already sitting down stairs waiting for her mother to creep down the stairs. Her findings in the boxes wrapped in pink Barbie doll paper with sparkling lettering was a wedding dress that her mother had spent the last couple months of her pregnancy with the girls new twin sisters making just for her. It was a white dress that had glitter at the top and a matching veil with more glitter along the trim.

The dress had fit perfectly and the grandparents loved it. Later that day the four year old in her new wedding dress opened one last present it was a cash register. It was perfect to top off what the little girl had thought of doing that day. As soon as she said her thankyou's for all the beautiful gifts and treasure she had received that day for turning four years old, she spun around and scampered up the stairs. She came back holding tightly to her favorite doll it was a Mickey Mouse and she announced that today she was going to marry Mickey and live happily ever after like a princess with a beautiful wedding dress already supplied for the big day. The bride ran

around the house getting everything that she thought would be necessary for a wedding, in a four year olds mind anyway. The first thing she did was unpack all of the food to go in her new cash register because the guest to this lovely event had to eat at some point.

Once she had all the things she needed she kissed Mickey and they were married. Then years later she remembers that she is married to Mickey Mouse and wonders what she was thinking she should have definitely married Donald Duck.

Cycle 3      Final Version

Given: a heart, for the absence of words  
An hour, for the darkened minutes  
An "O" for the lack of "x's"  
A memory for the days forgotten  
A smile to replace tears  
A bracelet for the kilometres in-between  
Received: beads in the form of a wrist  
Fragments of sky with no clouds  
Discovered: a bracelet means more than that  
It's there to replace the forgotten the missed and the absent

*Karly*

Cycle 1      Draft 1

Remembering is a hard thing to do. Why you say. Beause the moments gone, it's never coming back so you have to catch it and hold it in your memory. But you can't catch more things without letting some go. Let me elobarate your memories are like gybabites. If you want more stuff you have to get rid of some of the old stuff. What's funny is memory disapears in percents and you only have lets say %10 of your one memorie left. What's up with that!

Cycle 3      Final Version

**Why I hate this assignment**

If you tell us to do whatever you want. I'm going to give you my minamel amount of effort. I know I spelt wrong, but i'm not going to look it up cause I CAN DO WHATEVER I WANT! These classes are just making me mad. There's no benefit for me, and I meen NO BENEFIT WHATSOEVER! And I'm struggling in socail and these things takes a class away that I actually need. You're robing me.

*Kenton*

Cycle 2      Final Version

### **Don't Fall Down!**

“Now moon the camera!” exclaimed Lyle, as Emily laughed and took the picture.

We heard Emily's voice drifting up from the bottom of the hill, “Idiots!”

We subsequently started back down the hill. Teren got to the bottom first by a long shot, and then he and Emily left the rest of us behind. I was the next down, followed by Lyle and Rosamai. That was when we found out that Emily is a tank! We hiked up probably two thirds of old Fort Point Mountain without catching up with Teren and Emily. Most of the time I couldn't even see Lyle and Rosamai either, because Rosamai's legs are just too short. Therefore I ended up being right in the middle, all on my own. It wasn't until the very top that we all met up.

When we finally reached the top, the view was spectacular! We could see Jasper from there! There was a big boulder sitting at the edge of a cliff and we all took pictures of each other doing various poses on top of the rock.

When we were done there, we headed back down the mountain. The problem is, we missed the stairs down the mountain, and ended up climbing down an animal path. We had maybe two feet of path to walk on, with a wall on one side, and a cliff on the other. Nevertheless, we made it down safely and laughed about it that night.

Cycle 3      Final Version

### **Food**

Food. Delicious, scrumptious, amazing food. I love it. Most people have noticed that if I had the chance, I would be constantly eating. I could almost literally snack for an hour straight.

The funny thing is, I'm fairly picky when it comes to food. There are many foods that I will not eat. For example: I hate mushrooms, brussel sprouts, nuts, asparagus, most seafood, and mustard. But when I find something that I do like, I will pig out until the food is gone, I have to go, or I find something else to eat. Fruit platters disappear in mere seconds.

What is also kind of funny is the fact that I don't like chocolate. “You don't like chocolate!?” you exclaim. Sad, but true. I will never get excited by a box of chocolates. I do like some chocolate bars, but the combination of by dislike of chocolate and my hatred of nuts eliminates most choices. And I don't like chocolate cake.

So if you're trying to get a mental image of me, just picture a selective human compost, and you could describe me to a tee.

*Shelly*

Cycle 1      Final Version

### **The Toast Code In Relation to Some Very Tiny Children Attending a Babysitting Service**

I don't even remember showing up. It was simply accepted that we were there, no questions asked. After all, we had been only infants the day our parents had first plopped us down on our squishy diapered bottoms, in someone else's house, in someone else's playpen.

Naturally, our showing up was beyond our recollection. Our early years, were spent drooling happily all over each other, an indistinguishable mass of dirty diapers, flailing limbs and sickening cuteness. Through the years there were other children of different ages, but the essential characters in our tiny lives were us, each other.

At our babysitter's house, there was an unspoken "toast code". Every day we would have peanut butter toast for lunch; it was peanut butter and honey if we had been especially good. Somehow, this system had a way of applying to each of us in a very individual way. In any group of friends there is, of course, the jokester. That was Doug's role. He was always causing mischief, always making us laugh and sometimes getting us into trouble. Putting all his best efforts into being down right hilarious, Doug would request Cheez Whiz toast, and it was soon understood that this meant that you were "funny". Although the rubbery orange substance is a completely revolting topping, I have had an unusual fondness for it ever since. Then there was Doug's best friend in the whole wide world, Tyler. His greatest aspiration was to be a Navy Seal, and he greatly advertised this fact, with his constant attire of army paraphernalia and a small, shaky moustache carefully drawn above his upper lip in brown magic marker. Unspoken but understood by all of us was the fact that he was the leader. The consistent and dependable peanut butter toast. Although Doug always did everything first, from walking on top of the rocks, surrounding the unused outdoor fire pit, to sneaking out of our naptimes, it was Tyler who actually decided whether we should attempt these feats in the first place. And where was I in all of this? I was the honey toast, the lone baby girl, the one who incessantly oozed sweetness. Anxious about getting into trouble, and adamant about my girl-hood, I draped my tiny body in all that was pink, frilly and in all respects, utterly nauseating. The boys didn't mind though. Because I was the girl and also the youngest of the trio, they made sure that in all of our games I was the princess, and was given maximum protection by the chief warrior, played of course by Tyler. We, the inseparable troupe of diapered bottoms crawling, toddling and falling around the babysitter's property, finally stopped going to our

babysitter's house, as she eventually retired. Even though those days are over, we will always remember that house as the place where we made our first friends, ate truckloads of Wonderbread, and, in discovering our own unique personalities, caught our very first glimpse of who we were someday going to be in the world.

Cycle 3      Final Version

### **The New Toy**

Growing up, the Oleander's hot tub was always a special treat for me. Tyler and Linden and I would spend an entire day frolicking delightedly in the suds, and by the end of the day, our tiny feet would be too wrinkled to support our weight, and we would collapse in a sopping, prunish heap in the basement. All of this made for a wonderful day for us children, not to mention our parents, who, liberated from their parenting duties, would pass the day lounging on the deck. They were unfortunately unsuspecting of how quickly and drastically plans could change.

Tyler, Linden and I were playing in the hot tub: racing boats, splashing in the fountain, spitting water at each other, just doing what we normally did. It was a blissful autumn day, and Tyler and I were side by side amidst a variety of floating toys that littered the tub. Suddenly, Tyler spotted a new toy drifting among the others. Gazing at it quizzically, he grasped his pudgy hand around it, and ignoring a gnawing sense of foreboding, I followed suit.

"What is it?" Tyler asked as he squeezed it. Distinctly I remember the way the object oozed through my fingers as I squished the mysterious brown object. Its warm sticky pastiness caught me off guard. As my mind tried to work out what this thing that was coating my palm could possibly be, a panicked yell from Tyler's end of the hot tub pierced the air, "It's poo!" And that it was. And it was all over my hand. Shrieking, I wiped my infected fingers on the side of the tub. Tyler bolted out of the tub, and I was fast behind him, screaming for him to hurry up and get out of my way. We stood, dripping and shivering on the deck as our parents ran over, sniggering beneath their concerned facades. Tyler and Linden's mom, Jill, was the only person who appeared genuinely horrified. She rushed through the pandemonium, and I just barely heard her mutter, "I knew I should've put a swim diaper on Linden!" Poor Linden held an abashed downward gaze as his mom hauled him out of the water.

By the next day he had recovered from his mortification, but after that day, I have never again been able to enter a hot tub without a small smile for that one memorable day.

## ***Tatum***

Cycle 2      Final Version

### **Dance**

As long as I can remember I have been in love with dancing. I remember when I was three, whenever anyone came over I would put a costume on and dance around in front of everyone.

At my first dance class I was so scared that I wouldn't let my mom leave. I've been in dance; jazz and tap. But I have also been in hip hop. (What a mistake!) This year I've decided that I'm going to try ballet. Again. When I moved to Fort McMurray my mom decided to put me into ballet. OMG! The class was stupid. My teacher, Miss Linda decided that we should let our feelings loose, and show the world how could move. She took out the scarfs. "let your feelings fly."

Cycle 3      Final Version

### **Me Bag**

Everyone has memory's of objects they've gathered throughout their lives. I have a whole shoebox full of memory's. I remember this one present that I got when I was in grade one. It was from my best friend Karly. At the time me and her were unseperatable along with our other bestfriends. It was the morning of my 6<sup>th</sup> birthday and I was just waking up and walking to the kitchen to get something to eat. I was so excited because I was at my gramas waiting for her delicious chocolate chip pankakes, when suddenly the door bell rang. I jumped up from my chair and ran to the door to see if it was my mom. It wasn't, it was Karly! I was so excited that I screeched her name when I saw her. Then the door bell rang again, Karly and I sprang to go see. It was my mom. I got ready and skipped eating brekfast so I could go and see the rest of my friends. Around 11:00 a.m the other girls started to come. We all sat around the table getting ready to eat the cake and open presents. Shelly went first, she gave me a sailor moon costume, Adriana was second she gave me a tiara and my own bead set, Colleen was third she gave me a teddy bear, Karly was last. She came up to me and said, "Since your my best bestfriend I'm going to give you a present that belonged to me," she said "my great-grama made it for me, but I think you'll like it more."

"Thank you Karly," said my mom

"Yeah thanks Karly, I will always love and keep this present forever."

And I kept my promise I still have it.

(Pull out present)

It is a picture frame, kind of a diagram picture, it has a little girl sitting on a swing, the little girl is supposed to be Karly, but now, its "me."

To me its one of the best presents I can get.

*Ms Harris*

Cycle 2      Final Version

### The Monster Story

My boys, from birth, have been polar opposites. Where the eldest is calm, quiet, and reflective, the youngest is active, unpredictable, and, at times, wild. Considering their opposite natures, I have always wondered whether they will be close when they grow up. Being typical brothers, several times my hope in that has been shaken.

When my boys were young, we had a morning routine. I would wake big brother Robert first, gently shaking him awake, quietly cuddling him for a moment. Then I would go across the hall to wake his little brother.

That morning when I left Robert to wake Aaron, I followed our routine: quietly opening his door, crawling up onto his bed, and sitting with my back against the wall. Aaron woke from his warm and safe sleep and crawled onto my lap. And, as always, we cuddled and talked. Aaron was just starting to put sentences together.

This morning, he had a story.

“Monster gone now, Mommy.”

“Oh, there was a monster in your room last night?” I asked. “What did you do?”

His response? “Monster gone now. I say, ‘Go eat Robert’.”

## Natasha's Response to My Letter

Susan,

You started out your letter by thanking me, and I guess that is appropriate. But I am also compelled to thank you. I learned from this experience more than I ever expected.

One thing you did for me was to focus a lens on my students. This was a special group of students who I knew well. My son had been in their class for years, so I knew many of them outside of school, through hockey and soccer and birthday parties. When I began teaching them, it was unusual to work with students I already knew so well. Discipline was nonexistent. They were as near to a dream class as I have had, overall interested and keen. It was a small class, so I got to know them as learners quite quickly. I have to confess I felt I knew them well. Your interviews showed that, while I might have known them well, there were depths to them I had never contemplated.

You also lay my practice bare for me. Reading the transcripts themselves was fascinating. My memory of being in the classroom as the scenes unfolded, the words on the paper resonating tonally and pulling me back... this experience was physical. I felt it all again, the sun streaming in the window, the spring air coming through the screens, the gritty sand under desks and in the aisles of the classroom. The transcripts allowed for a more complete remembering of how it happened, a sort of meta-memory I have never had before and will likely never have again. I tasted the luxury of reading transcripts of my lessons, analyzing my feedback, questioning my involvement, my control, my need to tell. This was a great gift you gave, not only to me but truly to all of my students in the future.

I remember you warning me at the beginning that we didn't know where this study would go, that this could uncover things that I might not be comfortable with. I think what you were saying was that it could place a wedge in our relationship as both colleagues and friends, that no matter what, this experience was going to change us. That we, on our own, would never be the same and that we, together, would also never be the same. It is a testament to you that I trusted you enough to proceed. I never doubted that you would treat me anything but fairly, even if some skeletons and other scary creatures emerged from my closet.

Your trust in me was also important. The fact that you thought enough good things were happening with my students that you might be able to learn from them was very important to me. Your ideas stretched me and changed me as a teacher. Forevermore I will question grading writing, assigning specific writing prompts, and finding authentic audiences for my students. I wonder what writing means to them, whether they see themselves as writers, and how I can go about making that happen.

I appreciate how you invited me into your study. Of course, this was “your” study, but as much as possible, it was also mine. You shared. I never felt left out, in the dark, or silenced. I am sure that the efforts you made to include me actually made more work for you, but they certainly made this experience more meaningful for me. Ultimately, they will be a model for me when I embark on my own research.

I remember during my master’s research wondering why the participants in my study were willing to put in hours and hours for me. Or I assumed it was for me. Now I see they may have had other motivations. They have done it for themselves and their interests. But maybe the participants felt that they were part of something big. I know that I do. What I got I could never have bought or paid for. It is intangible and powerful: being part of something important, not just to the two of us in our little classroom and school, but to others. This quote, attributed to Ken Kersey, says it all for me: “We can count the seeds in the apple but not the apples in the seed.” Susan, you can never predict which of your seeds will sprout, what the resulting propagation of apples will look like, and where in this big world the iterations, reiterations, and mutations of those seeds will end up. This, indeed, has been important work.

Truly, it was a privilege. Thank you for inviting me on this journey with you.

Sincerely,

Natasha

A child's fear grows exponentially according to the fear on her father's face. Who would have thought a canoe ride would be so scary.

"Man this canoe is heavy," Stacey said struggling to pull the back of the robin's egg blue cruising canoe off the sand and back into the water. Slipping off her shoes, Cindy came to help pull, while I pushed the narrow front down the beach. We wore our life jackets, but you could not tip this heavy old canoe and believe me we had tried on many an occasion.

"I'll take the front, Stacey, you take the back," I announced knowing that Cindy had never spent much time in a canoe "Cindy you sit in the middle. Our chatter on the way out towards the third bay of the lake was unremarkable for ten, eleven and twelve year-olds. We paddled enjoying the drift of each bay listening to the quiet as we moved farther from the seventy-five campers we had left behind on shore. We knew we were not supposed to go as far as we did, but for the most part we stayed close to the shore. It was only when we crossed the head of a bay that we were more than 500 meters off shore. Quiet stillness lulled our minds into believing it was safe and we slipped off our life jackets.

"Do you hear that," I asked.

"Sounds like a boat coming this way," answered Stacey. As soon as we saw Stacey's dad's speedboat coming straight for us, we knew the third bay was too far for our evening paddle.

"Get your butts back to shore girls!" Alec barked. "And move it or it will be dark before you are back on shore and put your life jackets back on." As he spun the steering wheel and gunned the boat to head back to the beach, we knew we were in trouble and were not exactly eager to face angry fathers or worried mothers who acted all disappointed and riled up angry fathers.

While the ride out had been peacefully filled with natural sounds and idle chatter, the ride in was filled with the anxious tension of knowing you are in trouble, punctuated by motors, laughter from shore, and our own silence. Slipping unnoticed out of the first bay we paddled through the shallow reeds. Our pace required little attention as we stroked along. The faint noise of a motorboat grew in volume, until we broke out of the reeds. I heard Cindy yell, "Duck!"

Almost too late, I see a boat and skier making a sharp turn. We were trapped; boat, canoe, skier. The skier lifted the rope over his head, stretching as tall as he could. Reeds whipping at his legs jerked him off balance; falling, the rope came down with him. In the stern, Stacey who didn't hear Cindy yell, "Duck!" strained to hear like a crane exposing her neck.

I didn't see why until it was almost too late, the boat and the skier were making a sharp turn and we were now very inconveniently between the boat and the skier. The skier tried to hold the rope up over our heads. He stretched as tall as he could, but the reeds whipping at his legs jerked him off balance and when he fell the rope came down with him. Stacey who had the stern didn't hear Cindy yell duck and almost like a crane strained upward to hear better exposing her neck. (deciding between paragraphs) In a second the rope burned across her neck, lifting her out of the boat throwing her fifteen feet away from the boat. Remember when I said we had tried to flip the canoe with no success, well in the moment that Cindy and I stood up and leaned to one side to grab Stacey's hand, we were nearly successful.

Stacey thrashed her way to the boat where we held her hands on the edge and then suddenly our fathers and the speedboat were there to gather us back up. We hadn't seen them run down the beach, but those who did described three not so jolly well bellied middle aged men racing down to the waters edge. I think the boat engine must have been lowered into the sand rather than the water.

I don't remember much after the accident except that Jack Swift punched his son Dick out on the beach of Peck Lake for irresponsibly pulling a skier without a spotter at dusk. Stacey's uncle Bill's station wagon raced down the rutted gravel road to the nearest hospital in Paradise Hill. Whiplash, rope burn and a half-day at the hospital was the end result.

Cycle 2          Final Version

### **Pictures of Relationship**

Noses kiss  
Fingers entwine  
Embraces comfort  
Knees and tummy tickled  
Booboo's erased.

Smiles skip between  
as laughter flows through bodies  
and touch links the separate  
while warmth holds the present.

Frozen by stillness  
captured moments  
dance to defy  
definition  
as the background  
slips from focus.

Living and breathing  
held upside down  
lost in now.

Exposing love's eccentricity  
it captures dynamic eternity  
statically preserving time.

Cycle 3      Final Version

### **Understanding**

Jesse 2 ½

Kathleen 4

Blaire 3

Tara: Mother of Jesse and Kathleen

Susan: Aunty to all

Jesse: Where is Nana? She's not in her room.

Tara: Nana's gone. She went to heaven this morning.

Jesse: Like the old mare.

Tara: Yes. Like the old mare who couldn't live another winter.

Jesse: She's dead.

Tara: Yes.

Jesse: Oh.

Kathleen: Nana's in the pot?

Tara: No. Nana's in the urn.

Kathleen: Nana's in the urnpot.

Tara: Yes. She is in the urnpot.

Kathleen: Are we going to put Nana's pot in the ground with Grandpa  
Blaire?

Tara: Yes. Now they are together.

Kathleen: But Grandpa's not in the pot.

Blaire: She's not there anymore. Nana's a star now, but I can't see her  
face.

Susan: Really

Blaire: Her body was sick and it died. Now you can only talk to her in  
your heart and your mind.

Susan: Do you want to talk to Nana?

Blaire: Only at nighttime. You can't see her in the daytime, but at night  
she shines down.

Susan: Can you find Nana at night?

Blaire: Yes. When I sit on the railing of the deck and look at the sky. Or when I look out the bedroom window when the curtains are open. She's the brightest one.

Susan: How do you know?

Blaire: Well she is not in her room anymore. Can I watch TV?

# Appendix C: Private Conversation

## Questions

### Collective Questions for All Students

1. Describe and talk about your initial illustration about the significance of writing.
2. Discuss your interpretation of your final drawing.
3. Who do you see as a writer? Where do you fit into in relation to this person?
4. Did you learn anything about writing in general or about yourself as a writer from this project? Will you be a different writer in the future?
5. Where do you like to, or need to write? Describe why that environment is significant.
6. What other factors are important in writing, for example audience, ideas, etc.?
7. Did you ever find a purpose for writing?
8. Is there a piece of writing you are proud of?
9. Is there a piece of writing you are unsatisfied with?
10. What could teachers do to help students with writing? What could a teacher do for you specifically?
11. Is writing an innate talent?
12. Describe why you were unable to write in Cycle 2. If you did complete your writing, why do you think you were successful? Please go beyond the list of things that kept you busy and talk about the hard questions and possible answers you may think I don't want to hear.
13. Could you then generalize to the benefits of teachers offering this type of writing to their students some of the time?
14. This question came from a debriefing session with Ms Harris and was framed to students as Ms Harris' question. "The only thing I [Ms Harris] wonder is how this experience may have changed the students. That is, did an opportunity to write without structure and rubrics, change who they are as writers at all? Who were these students before, during and after this experience?"

## Questions For Individual Students

Aden

1. You never complete a rough draft, why is that?
2. What strategies do you use to improve your writing?

Adriana

1. What strategies do you use to improve your writing?
2. You wrote to your sister for your final piece and she responded. How did that experience make you feel about writing?
3. Can you describe how the writing for Ms Harris is different from writing for me?

Colleen

1. You feel you had success in writing Cycle 2 with the creation of your poem. Describe why you feel that experience was different?

Dan

1. You always talk about ideas and struggling to come up with them. Why do you have so much trouble?
2. You never completed one piece of writing. Why is that?
3. Your final reflective drawing expressed a preference for the type of writing I was asking for, and yet you still were unable to complete the writing. What stops you?

Diana

1. You like to write at home and you have a personal writing practice. Why?
2. You were frustrated by plagiarism. Is this something that occurs frequently in classes?

Kenton

1. Do you still feel you failed me?
2. You said "I write better under pressure". Why?
3. How do you see risks in regular classroom writing as compared to the risks in this writing?

Shelly

1. Frequently you have expressed a preference for writing non-fiction, leaning towards essays. Why do you feel that way?
2. You are a strong writer. What do you believe has helped you to develop those skills?

Tatum

1. You expressed a fear of judgement and that people just don't get your writing. Can you explain what you mean?
2. You have talked about how place is important for writing success. Where do you write best? Why?

## Appendix D: Avery's Artifacts

Cycle 1      Text Read to Small Group Only (Initial Draft)

One of my favourite places in the world is my own backyard. It's got everything I need; a couple volleyballs and a beach ball court. Um, I like volleyball because its fun, challenging and I get to, play with all my friends and stuff, and I can play it whenever I want.

Cycle 3      Initial Draft

### **Pointless**

Dogs are warm and furry. I like to play fetch with them. They are nice. A cow goes moo. They're fat. Steak comes from cows. Steak is good with barbeque sauce. Barbeques cook food outside. Outside is where my beach volleyball court is. I play vball (*sic*) on that court. Volleyball is my favorite sport. It's not pointless to me like this writing is.

## Handwritten Rough Draft

apathy surrounds me  
~~old school~~

rough song  
idea

- Don't believe everything ~~media~~ <sup>happiness</sup> says
- Nothing feels better than ~~lying~~ <sup>hiding</sup> these days
- We bury our fears in the drinks, in these tears
- Forget the days we believed we could fly

- Call up your brothers and sisters and friends
- We'll go down to the place where the night never ends
- We'll remember the fires, the burning car tires
- Boy now in the hell'd we get here

chorus

- So ~~why~~ don't you meet me, down behind our old school
- We'll waste away the weekend with perfect regard for
- Cavalier we used to be that, beautiful insanity
- The apathy's surrounding me
- Don't close your eyes or we'll fade, away

- over and over and over again
- We ~~hung out~~ <sup>sat down for a minute</sup> for a while, ~~then~~ grew up into men
- Now we're putting out fires, and changing car tires
- Man now in the hell'd we get here

chorus

- Don't believe everything happiness says
- Nothing's more real than our friendship these days
- As we sit by the fire we're all just liars
- Cuz we say that we won't miss this
- Guys now in the hell'd we get here.

Chorus

“Old School” Annotation

Old School – dedicated to my friends right now (k

Don't believe everything happiness says  
Nothing feels better than hiding these days  
We bury our fears in the drinks, in these tears — A lot of teens drink because they think it will solve their problems.  
Forget the days we believed we could fly

Call up your brothers and sisters and friends  
We'll go back to the place where the night never ends  
We'll remember the fires, the burning car tires — reference to a friend who died in a car crash  
Boy how in the hell'd we get here

So why don't you meet me, down behind our old school  
We'll waste away the weekend with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
The apathy's surrounding me — represents not growing up too fast and just remembering your roots and being a kid.  
Don't close your eyes or we'll fade away

Over and over and over again  
We sat down for a minute, grew up into men  
Now we're putting out fires and changing car tires  
Man how in the hell'd we get here

So why don't you meet me, down behind our old school  
We'll waste away the weekend with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
The apathy's surrounding me — this really describes my friends  
Don't close your eyes on me here

Fade away this time  
And we'll never get back what we gave away  
When we still had that fire in our eyes  
Don't believe everything happiness says  
Nothings as real as our friendship these days  
When we drink by the fires  
We are all just liars cuz  
We say that we won't miss this  
Guys how in the hell'd we get here

Ooh  
So why don't you meet me, down behind our old school  
We'll waste away the weekend with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
This moment surrounding me  
Why can't we all just stay here

Cycle 3 Avery's Final Version of Plagiarized Song

**Old School**

Don't believe everything happiness says  
Nothing feels better than hiding these days  
We bury our fears in the drinks, in these tears  
Forget the days we believed we could fly

Call up your brothers and sisters and friends

We'll go back to the place where the night never ends  
We'll remember the fires, the burning car tires  
Boy how in the hell did we get here?

So why don't you meet me, down behind the Old School  
We'll waste away the weekend, with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
The apathy's surrounding me  
Don't close your eyes or we'll fade away

Over and over and over again  
We sat down for a minute, grew up into men  
Now we're putting out fires and changing car tires  
Man how in hell did we get here?

So why don't you meet me, down behind the old school  
We'll waste away the weekend, with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
The apathy's surround me  
Don't close your eyes on me here

Fade away this time  
And we'll never get back what we gave away  
When we still have that fire in our eyes  
Don't believe everything happiness says  
Nothings as real as our friendship these days  
When we drink by the fires  
We are all just liars cuz  
We say that we won't miss this  
Guys how in the hell'd we get here

Ooh  
So why don't you meet me, down behind our old school  
We'll waste away the weekend, with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
This moment surrounding me  
Why can't we all just stay here

Cycle 3          Original Song Lyrics that Avery plagiarized and modified

**Old School**  
Song Lyrics by Hedley (2007)

Don't believe everything happiness says

Nothing feels better than hiding these days  
We bury our fears in the drinks, in these tears  
For the days we believed we could fly

Call up your brothers and sisters and friends  
We'll go back to the place where the night never ends  
We'll remember the fires, the burning car tires  
Boy how in the hell did we get here?

So why don't you meet me, down behind the Old School  
We'll waste away the weekend, with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
The apathy's surrounding me  
Don't close your eyes or we'll fade away

Over and over and over again  
We sat down for a minute, grew up into men  
Now we're putting out fires and changing car tires  
Man how in hell did we get here?

So why don't you meet me, down behind the old school  
We'll waste away the weekend, with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
The apathy's surround me  
Don't close your eyes or we'll fade away this time

And we'll never get back what we  
Gave away, when we still have that fire in our eyes  
Don't believe everything happiness says  
Nothings as real as our old reckless ways  
When we drink by the fires  
The burning car tires  
Bad girls and good liars  
The dreams we'd conspire  
The days we went crazy  
The nights wild and hazy  
Man how in the hell did we get here?

So why don't you meet me, down behind the old school  
We'll waste away the weekend, with perfect regard for how  
Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
The apathy's surrounding me  
Don't close your eyes or we'll fade away

Why don't you meet me, down behind the old school  
We'll waste away the weekend, with perfect regard for how

Cavalier we used to be, that beautiful insanity  
The apathy's surrounding me  
Don't close your eyes or we'll fade away

## Reflection Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Writing Title: Pointless

Reflection Sheet for the Conclusion of Cycle 3 of Writing

How did my writing progress between drafts?  
I changed my whole topic and idea. Originally I was going to write a poem about family, then I changed it to friends but I wasn't feeling the poem vibe so I changed my idea again.

I am proud of...  
The point I put across, I really feel like my writing says what I mean and it lets you know what my group of friends are really like.

I am still working on...  
nothing. I'm happy with it.

I learned the following about myself and writing...  
when I get a good idea it just flies.  
This piece is my favorite I've written all year.

Susan Bowsfield  
Research Day 10

Page 1

6/4/2008  
Cycle 3 Concluded

## Self-sponsored Reflection

The poem vibe wasn't working for me because I ~~couldn't~~ wanted to write about my friends but I had huge writer's block. It's always easier for me if writing has a rhythm or a musical beat to it so I wrote a song about my friends and myself.

I'm really proud of it because it really gets my message across that we're all growing up but we all want to stay friends and have good times. It's about not maturing too fast. We just have to be kids and live life.

I like the words apathy and cavalier <sup>lack of emotion</sup> <sup>arrogance</sup> <sup>ladies</sup> <sup>man</sup> because that describes how we act around each other, but that's not how we feel. ~~We~~ do we're all ~~there~~ there for each other.

This song is dedicated to all my good friends ~~to~~ They've stuck with me through it all.

Cycle 3 Unsolicited Original Writing (submitted after parent meeting)

### To a friend

After endless days of ponder  
and countless nights of stress  
I fight hard to remember  
The days I was my best

I know that we grew older  
But in our hearts we're young  
We just can't grow out of  
This feeling we can't give up

We watch all night, look to the sky  
To see the stars that shine  
I see the brightest, star of all  
And pray for it, to be mine

I know now, that when I'm down  
About the memories past  
I'll think of you, and memories  
Will all come running back

Through it all, and after all  
the days and night of sorrow  
You bring back, the days of life  
And looking to tomorrow.

# Appendix E: Student Handouts

## *Sample Protocol Sheet*

### **Round One** of Conversations (15 minutes)

Please share your story of creation for this piece of writing. It may include any or all of the following:

1. Where did your idea come from? How did it remain the same or change from your original idea?
2. What is your purpose for writing? Who is your audience? Why do you think they will want to read it?
3. How did your map illustration contribute to the writing? Or did it?
4. Where and when did you write?
5. Why did you select the genre you did?
6. Did you have any major struggles?

### **Round Two** of Conversation (25 minutes)

Once each person has shared his or her creation story. The next step is to read your piece to your group members. Before you commence reading make two suggestions to your group members about what you want them to notice about your writing and identify what you believe is your revision focus.

#### **For example**

Person A –

1. I want the group to pay attention to the timeline of the story.
2. I want the group to look for places where I create tension and suspense.
3. I need to focus my revision on dialogue, suspense and tension, and clarifying the purpose of the story (Is it to share a scary anecdote? Is it to show what a child sees during an accident? Is it to learn something from childhood?)

Once you have read your writing the group responds to your writing with comments and suggestions.

*Sample Reflection Sheet*

Reflection Sheet for the Conclusion of Cycle \_\_\_\_ of Writing

How did my writing progress between drafts?

I am proud of...

I am still working on...

I learned the following about myself and writing...

*Sample Project Reflection Handout*

Consider your writing experience during the research project.

1. Do you believe you can be a better writer? Explain.
2. Describe what you learned about writing and or yourself as a writer.
3. Describe why you were unable to write in Cycle 2. If you did complete your writing why do you think you were successful. Please go beyond the list of things that kept you busy and talk about why it happened even if you think I may not want to hear the answer.
4. Anything else to say...

## Appendix F: Ethics Requirements

### *Sample: Invitation to Participate*

#### **Student Participants**

This letter is an invitation to participate in a research project conducted by myself, Susan Bowsfield, on the experience of creative autobiographical writing in the classroom. My research interest is in understanding the relationships of teacher and student experiences and narratives through creative autobiographical writing, through conversations about writing and through the visual representation of writing experiences.

I am currently working towards completing the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Secondary Education (Faculty of Education) at the University of Alberta. This research project will become the basis for my dissertation. Subsequent dissemination will include academic publication and or presentation, and may include examples of your writing, quotations from conversation, your visual representations of your experience and copies of photographs or artifacts critical to your narrative of this experience.

The research involves a qualitative, interpretive inquiry that draws on the traditions of narrative inquiry and arts-based research. Observations, conversations, writing and drawing will take place over the course of ten to twelve weeks within your curricular setting. The project is designed to complement your curriculum requirements rather than require an addition to your curriculum. Once a week, for an English language arts period of approximately forty minutes, I would attend class during which time both the teacher and students would participate in a creative autobiographical writing project designed to generate three pieces of original writing.

Complementing the writing experience participants would participate in activities designed to generate ideas for this writing, the writing itself, peer responses to writing, conversations about the experience and moments of reflection on the experience created through participant generated drawings. The project would proceed through three such cycles of approximately three weeks duration, where participants would generate, respond and then reflect on each piece of writing. One period would introduce the project and include making a visual representation. As the

project continues, private conversations between individual participants and myself may be requested, but the majority of the time commitment for student participants will be during class time.

The complementary activities designed to generate and inspire your writing include you gathering personal items such as photographs and artifacts from your personal experiences and bringing them into the classroom for conversation about them and writing on and around them. I would ask that whenever possible a photograph should avoid the representation of people or specific and identifiable locations. This will allow for the inclusion of photographs or artifact in public presentations, if it becomes central to the meaning and representation of your writing. If a particular photograph essential to your writing contained recognizable persons or places steps would be taken, to secure permission from the persons in your photograph and or blurring words or faces to ensure anonymity. When selecting a photograph be mindful of other people's privacy and identity.

Further, your teacher is an intricate part of your classroom writing experience and I will be seek her or his insight, comments, and analysis of your work, conversations and drawing representations. Any private conversations between student participants and myself would be shared with the teacher only with your permission and with details omitted as needed to ensure your privacy. However, most of your information will be available to your teacher simply because he or she will always be present in the classroom during the activities.

Students interested in participating will be requested to discuss the research with their parents and express an interest. I will then contact parents directly to answer any questions they may have and complete a signed consent form. Any artifacts, writing and visual representations would be collected as completed and returned by September the following year or at a time agreed to by participants. Artifacts and photographs supplied by participants would be photographed. Original writing would be stored electronically, scanned and/or photocopied as necessary. Conversation groups for audiotaping will be built around interested participants from within the classroom, and those who do not wish to participate will not be recorded. Conversations among participants would be audiotaped for transcription and may be included directly in representations created by the researcher, whereas video-tapes of conversations are for analysis purposes only and not for public display.

Any research transcribers will comply with the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants, which can be reviewed in detail at <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/gfcpolicymanual/policymanualsection66>.

[cfm](#) . Further, a confidentiality agreement will be signed by any research personnel other than myself, such as transcribers.

Transcripts will be typed and returned to participants for review and accuracy checks. Participants will be able to add, delete and clarify. These will be processed on an on-going basis as transcripts are completed by the transcriber. This will be completed as soon as possible. As the data is transformed from field text to research text, participants may be asked to participate in conversations about the research text.

Your participation is voluntary. No information will be collected from or about students who elect not to take part. If you consent to be involved in this research, both your anonymity and community anonymity will be maintained through the use of pseudonyms. I will use a pseudonym to represent you in all work that is written about the project, and I will keep your writing, visual representations, interview tapes, video-tapes and transcripts locked in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of this research activity. You would be free to withdraw at any time during the data collection and will be reminded of the freedom to withdraw without any penalty at the beginning of each data collection period. If you decide to withdraw your participation after the project is completed, you would have until September 2008 to do so. Upon withdrawal from the project, any data collected by the research project from you would be removed and returned to you and transcripts you participated in would have your comments extracted. Given the collaborative nature of group conversations, however, it would not be possible to withdraw information that you contributed in this context.

*I do not foresee any harm resulting from the research activities. Instead, people often find the opportunity to reflect on their experiences to be beneficial. If you are interested, I would share with you the notes I write to clarify themes, stories or insights I develop during my analysis. A copy of the finalized dissertation will be provided to the school and any participant who requests one.*

*As a researcher, I will not be responsible for any evaluation of written or visual products created by students.*

*The research will be used for my doctoral dissertation, academic reports, presentations and publications, as well as for in-service sessions/workshops for educators. Because these documents and presentations may include quotations, original writing, and visual representations of your work, you are asked to review the attached consent form and the release forms for copies or images of your work. All data will be handled in compliance with the standards mentioned previously.*

If you have any further questions, concerns or complaints about the research project, please feel free to contact me at (h) (780) 349-4219 or (w) (780) 349-4454, my research supervisor, Dr. Margaret Iveson, at (780) 492-3658, or the Chair of the Department of Secondary Education, Dr. Elaine Simmt, at (780) 492-1731. Please complete the attached consent form to indicate your decision. If you are willing to participate, please return the consent form to me. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Susan Bowsfield

*Sample: Student Informed Consent Form*

March 15, 2008

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Project Title: Drawing and narrating the experiences of creative autobiographical writing in the ELA classroom.

Researcher: Susan Bowsfield

I give my consent:

- to participate in small-group conversations;
- for the researcher to engage in conversation with the teacher regarding my curricular experience in her or his classroom (specific details of private conversations will not be shared in a way that threatens my privacy)
- for the small-group conversations to be audio and video recorded;
- to be interviewed for this research study;
- for the interview to be recorded;
- for dissemination to include academic publications and or presentations;
- for the use of my creative autobiographical writing and participant-generated drawings;
- for the use of artifacts, participant-supplied photographs, and/or photographs/copies of artifacts/photographs (anonymity will be maintained through electronic blurring of faces and other changes if necessary);
- for the use of quotations in publications or presentations.

Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained and that any research assistants (e.g., transcribers) who handle the data will sign a confidentiality agreement. I understand that the information I provide will be kept anonymous by not referring to me by my name or location, but by using a pseudonym. If I wish to see any notes written from the findings of this study, I am free to contact Susan Bowsfield at any time and copies will be provided.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection up to September 2008, to refuse to answer specific questions, and/or to withdraw my participation at any time. After September 2008, I will no longer be able to withdraw my data. I understand that participation in any aspects of the study is voluntary and that my participation has six parts: an initial drawing (within curricular time), three individual pieces of writing and the drafts leading to what I

consider completed work (within and outside of curricular time), the use of drawings I create about the writing process as experienced (within curricular time), the recording of small group conversations about writing and drawings (within curricular time), the use of private researcher/participant conversations (outside of curricular time), and follow-up questions as necessary.

I understand that there will be no risks involved in this study. I may, in fact, benefit from drawing, conversing and reflecting upon my experience with creative autobiographical writing.

Two copies of the letter and consent form are supplied so that one may be kept by you for your records while the other is signed and returned to Susan Bowsfield as the researcher affirming your consent to participate.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

Name of participant (Please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant guardian or parent \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Sample: Confidentiality Agreement***

This form may be used for individuals hired to conduct specific research tasks, e.g., recording or editing image or sound data, transcribing, interpreting, translating, entering data, destroying data.

Project title -

I, \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_  
(specific job description, e.g., interpreter/translator) have been hired to  
\_\_\_\_\_

I agree to -

1. keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher(s)*.
2. keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession.
3. return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher(s)* when I have completed the research tasks.
  - a. after consulting with the *Researcher(s)*, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the *Researcher(s)* (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive).
4. other (specify).

Transcriber

(Print Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

(Date)

*Researcher(s)*

(Print Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature)

(Date)