Fall 1994

Writing and reading as reflexive inquiry: A reflexive inquiry

Donna Jeanne Qualley
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Abstract
In this inquiry, I draw from theories in feminist epistemology, ethnography, and hermeneutics that consider the role of subjectivity in the construction and assessment of understanding in order to examine the process of reflexivity and explore its significance for learning.

I define reflexivity as a response triggered by an individual’s dialectical encounter with an other (person, culture, text or other part of the self) whereby the individual begins to identify and critically examine his or her knowledge and assumptions. Using students’ writing from my composition classes, I suggest how writing and reading, especially essayistic writing and reading, might be used to create the conditions that invite and support reflexive thought in the writing of personal or exploratory essays, in the process of reading and responding to complex texts and during collaborative research projects. At various points in the inquiry, I turn back on myself to interrogate my own assumptions and claims. I show how understanding, the process and product of a subject’s transaction with an other, develops a layer at a time with examples from my students and my own intellectual history.

Reflexive awareness can lead persons to more complicated understandings of their subjects and themselves, and such understanding has both cognitive and ethical implications. The reflexive stance requires an agent who is capable of openness and "ethical deference," toward others and who has enough autonomy and self-trust to be able to withstand his or her own rigorous self-scrutiny. Reflexive inquiry and the cultivation of reflexive habits should be an aim of any pedagogy that seeks to help students negotiate multiple perspectives. Composition courses have a dual responsibility to teach students to compose their own understandings and to examine the implications of their compositions.

Keywords
Education, Reading, Education, Higher, Education, Philosophy of
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Writing and reading as reflexive inquiry: A reflexive inquiry

Qualley, Donna Jeanne, Ph.D.
University of New Hampshire, 1994

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WRITING AND READING AS REFLEXIVE INQUIRY:

A REFLEXIVE INQUIRY

BY

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B.A., University of Kentucky, 1974
M.S.T., University of New Hampshire, 1986

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Reading and Writing Instruction

September, 1994
This dissertation has been examined and approved.

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6.29.94
Date
DEDICATION

To Chuck,
whose constant otherness in my life
complicates and deepens all my understandings
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the following pages will attest, this work has a history that has involved many "reflexive encounters" with "others." Although the thinking for this inquiry began long before I arrived at the University of New Hampshire in 1984, the means to bring these thoughts to consciousness owes much to the teaching and learning communities, both large and small, that I have been a part of here.

I first want to express my thanks to the twenty-five classes of composition students I have taught and have had the privilege of learning from over the last ten years. I am especially grateful to Anna, Avery, Chad, Emily, Kay, Mark, Mindy, Ralph, Rob, Serena and Susan whose writing and insights appear in these pages.

I count myself fortunate to have been given so much choice and autonomy within the composition department and in my graduate program. While I don't assume these conditions fit the needs of every teacher or graduate student, they have enabled me to take risks and to constantly work at the edges of my understanding. Teaching composition in an English Department that values learning and that recognizes and encourages a diversity of teaching methods has benefitted both my teaching and my scholarship. This present inquiry carries the visible and invisible traces of the many conversations I have had with my composition colleagues over the years. I want to say a special thanks to Barbara Tindall for our ongoing dialogue on all matters of composition teaching--but particularly our discussions on collaborative
inquiry projects.

In the Education Department, I felt like a member of the reading and writing community long before I sought formal admittance to the Ph.D program in 1990. My participation as a Master's degree student in the first year-long reading and writing seminar of a fledgling, interdisciplinary Ph.D program provided me entry into a critical conversation about reading, writing, literacy and learning that I haven't stopped talking about. Those weekly meetings in Don Graves' home first suggested to me what passionate, intellectual inquiry was all about. It was here that I met my friend and frequent collaborator, Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. We have talked and (literally) walked many miles together these last nine years, first through her dissertation and now though mine.

My dissertation director, Patricia Sullivan, trusted me to make sense of all the many manifestations of this project, even when I began to doubt there was a project here. She provided a wonderful example of how to actively listen and quietly lead. Her careful reading and perfectly timed suggestions always enabled me to see where I needed to go and what I needed to do next.

I am grateful for the support and confidence of the other members of my committee: Thomas Newkirk, who has been there from the start and who always encouraged me in my parenthetical ways; Barbara Houston, whose generous response and rigorous questioning pushed me to think more clearly than I would or could have; Susan Franzosa for getting excited about this project when it was very young; Paula Salvio, for helping me to appreciate the aesthetic in finely wrought theory.
Salvio, for helping me to appreciate the aesthetic in finely wrought theory.

I also want to acknowledge the many people, family, friends and colleagues, for their willingness to be invisibly present in my life during the last couple of years while I attempted to sort through, connect and make sense of a great many messy strands of thought. I always felt them in the wings, ready to materialize if I should call. Most of all, I want to say thank you to my husband, Chuck Finnigan, for his quiet forebearance and patience with my intellectual eccentricities and behavioral extremes during these last four years. My books, papers and other academic debris have claimed most of the living space in our small house and all of our time. I hope it’s been worth it.
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ABSTRACT

WRITING AND READING AS REFLEXIVE INQUIRY: A REFLEXIVE INQUIRY

by

Donna J. Qualley
University of New Hampshire, September, 1994

In this inquiry, I draw from theories in feminist epistemology, ethnography, and
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I define reflexivity as a response triggered by an individual’s dialectical
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INTRODUCTION

My style and my mind alike go roaming.
   - Montaigne

I see that in my writing I have developed into a parenthetical thinker: (this is an aside of course) all my thoughts are tangent to the others, little tributaries branching off, but still related to the main flow (I think).

Blessed are those who begin their research with their bearings placed, their centers fixed, their point sharpened. I begin with questions and certainly with a sense that out there I will find something of value.

Often, a dissertation is the response to a single, specific research question. In straightforward fashion, the student poses the question, constructs a thesis, selects a method, follows it rigorously and writes up the results. This is not that type of study. It does not align itself with a single question or well-articulated thesis statement (constructing good questions and theses have always seemed to me like the culminating moment of a long process rather than its beginning place), nor does it follow a direct route to a pre-determined destination. I embarked on this inquiry because I wanted to think more about reflexivity and its relation to learning and understanding. I wanted to explore how reading and writing might assist in these processes. Because I wanted to open up the concept of reflexivity—not fix it or pin it down, my subject develops tangentially in widening spirals through my text, parenthetical commentary and chapter notes.
I don't follow a single, tried-and-true method. Strictly speaking, my inquiry neither employs the empirical methods of education and the (social) sciences, the close reading and historical analysis of literary studies, nor the theoretical argument of philosophy; But like a "true" compositionist (eclectic and multi-disciplinary), I take elements from all these methods, weaving them together in my own interpretive and critical framework. However, I have drawn most consistently from theories of feminist epistemology, ethnography and hermeneutics. What each of these fields have in common is that they all take subjectivity into account, and they each have begun to assert the importance of reflexivity.

I call this dissertation a reflexive inquiry into reflexive inquiry because at selected moments it attempts to enact what it describes. By reflexive, I mean the act of turning back on oneself to discover, examine, interpret or critique one's claims and beliefs in response to an encounter with an other. At various points, I turn back on myself in response to my own text to examine my own assumptions. By inquiry, I mean "the sustained work" of coming to understand "through a systematic, self-critical process of discovery" (Phelps 1991, 877). This definition of inquiry also captures the spirit of the exploratory essay and of essayism, an open, tentative, dialogic and reflexive approach to texts that is both the subject of (Chapters III and IV) and serves as the vehicle for this inquiry.

Philosopher Arthur Danto (1990) suggested that the essay is "the form par excellence for addressing a reality that resists simple, clear answers." It represents "a feeling round the contours of shapes that may never become wholly visible..." (22). As
such, I believe the essay is a fitting instrument for the kind of open-ended, multidisciplinary inquiry in which I am involved. It can easily carry its writer back and forth across disciplinary and rhetorical boundaries. It allows for both qualified assertion and personal aside (very important!). Furthermore, The visible, active presence of the writer in the writing means that it is clear that the perspectives represented in the essay belong to the writer, not to the data or the story. The essay records the writer’s attempt to make sense.

And thus, my aim in this undertaking, if I may steal from Elizabeth Minnich, is to make sense. Minnich writes in the opening chapter of her book, Transforming Knowledge (1990):

I realized that the praise I sought...was "That makes sense. Of course. It really is obvious, isn’t it." That was what I wanted, not to be ‘right,’ but to simply be part of a common effort to make sense. Making sense meant that I had found and spoken with what people were thinking in a way that made even new thoughts their own. That is the kind of thinking, the kind of relationship—political and moral as well as intellectual—in which I believe (6).

In my mind, the concept "making sense" captures a relationship between knowledge and knowers that is at the heart of this study. Theories and methods don’t make sense; people do. Making sense is the process people use to understand themselves and their worlds.

I use reading and writing as processes for making sense, and I teach reading and writing as processes for making sense.¹ For the last eight or nine years, I have also been engaged in trying to understand how reading and writing help us make sense. In 1986, I conducted a research project where I examined the ways freshman
students constructed the global meaning (the "gist" or macrostructure) of the texts they were both reading and writing. In my paper, "Making Sense of What’s Happening in Reading and Writing," I drew from discourse analysis (van Dijk and Kintsch 1983; Kintsch 1981) and the cognitive work of Flower and Hayes (1986) and Kucer (1985) to formulate a model that described the different ways students constructed the gist, and how they then used their construction to make sense of the texts they were reading or writing. I found evidence that the gist is influenced by both the developing text and the writer’s current "situation model," the situation the text represents for the writer. Some students have a well developed situation model and gist in mind before they begin composing, and writing simply becomes a matter of trying to create a text that depicts that mental representation. As these students write, they may change or edit their text to more closely adhere to their preconceived idea and gist. Other students, however, compose their situation model as they compose their text, and the gist only becomes clear as more text develops. (Much of the writing of this dissertation, for instance has followed the latter method).

Over the years I have continued to construct new representations of essentially the same problem: how do the processes of reading and writing help us to make sense, understand, as well as complicate and challenge, maybe even transform, that understanding? When I conducted my research on the gist, I considered the problem in terms of "variables" that seemed to affect students’ desire and ability to "make sense" in their reading and writing. These include "goals, plans, linguistic knowledge, schemata for reading and writing, the context, and [their] knowledge and attitude
toward the topic or subject." (My location in the field of composition at the time
should be obvious).

Nowadays, however, instead of constructing the gist, I talk about writing ready-
made conclusions versus writing for earned insights. Instead of thinking in terms of
"goals and plans," I might ask how students’ subjectivities--their historical, cultural
political, or emotional locations--affect their "desire and ability to make sense of what
is happening." Now, I am more likely to see these psychological processes of
meaning making in social, philosophical and ethical terms and contexts. The purpose
of this inquiry is to articulate and examine my current understanding of the connection
between reading, writing, reflexivity and making sense.

In Chapter I, I provide a personal history of this dissertation. Inquiries, like
questions, do not simply emerge fully formed like Athena from Zeus’s head. I have
come to appreciate that they are a long time in the making. I define reflexivity and
distinguish it from related thinking processes such as reflection. Chapter II describes
my use of theory and explains the epistemological and pedagogical assumptions that
undergird this investigation. Chapter III moves from a discussion of the relationship
between writing and thinking to focus specifically on writing and reflexivity as it is
enacted through an approach I call essayism. I attempt to describe and illustrate the
open, tentative and reflexive qualities of essayistic writing by discussing the papers of
four composition students. Chapter IV examines my notion of essayistic reading by
looking at students’ written responses to texts--their own and others. I also examine
my own reading of one of the student’s text I talk about in Chapter III. In Chapter V,
I expand my discussion of essayism as an approach to understanding the texts and ideas of others by examining the dynamics between three students involved in a collaborative inquiry project into issues of racism and diversity on campus. This chapter begins to suggest what is at stake when students engage in reflexive inquiry. The reflexive kickback that can occur from dialectical encounters with others is what makes this kind of inquiry deeply meaningful, but it is also what makes it difficult and at times, deeply disturbing. Chapter VI examines the gains, risks and implications of a reflexive pedagogy.
NOTES FOR INTRODUCTION

1. I need to distinguish between making sense for others and making sense for oneself. When the purpose is to make sense (clarify, explain, inform) for others, reading and writing are conceived of as media for communication. When reading and writing are processes that individuals engage in to make sense of ideas, situations and experiences for themselves, then making sense is an act of understanding. I am most interested in the latter process. However, these two processes are not necessarily separate--one can entail the other. In attempting to clarify my ideas for others, I can come to understand them better myself. This study seeks to make sense on both counts.
CHAPTER I

AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AN INQUIRY

I am going to do what I can to show you how I arrived at this opinion...I am going to develop in your presence as fully and freely as I can the train of thought that led me to think this...At any rate when a subject is highly controversial...one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one’s audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncracies of the speaker...

- Virginia Woolf, "A Room of One's Own" (1929)

In the opening of The Go-Between, L. P. Hartley writes, "The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." My past, a portion of it, is literally a foreign country. I spent most of my twenties living and teaching in Victoria, Australia. Writing about immigrant and outsider experiences, William Profriedt suggests that "[a]ccess to other ways of looking at the world calls into question the absolute character of our own understanding of it" (1990, 86). Living and working in Australia undoubtedly called into question a number of my understandings about the world. More importantly, it contributed to my habit of re-examining these understandings.

*   *   *

At the age of 22, I went to Australia to teach high school for fifteen months. I stayed nine years. I packed my suitcase with my suburban, midwestern values, (tempered by a 1960's philosophy) and headed to the
Land-Down-Under with a state university certified, guaranteed-to-work-anywhere-in-the-world, theory of education. Every new teacher faces a bit of a culture shock when she enters her first classroom, but nothing prepared me (not even the National Geographics I had so carefully studied) for living or teaching in the small town of Moe, Victoria. What I didn’t realize was that if I wanted to help my students become better readers, writers and thinkers, I needed to understand their everyday culture—their history, their lives, their values. Learning about them, of course, entailed learning more about me.

I had been in the country five months. A few days after the New Year (summertime in Australia) I drove to the timber yard in Moe to pick up some cornice pieces and kitchen faucets only to find the place shut down for a month. The hardware store had the plumbing supplies, but not the correct ones. The sales clerk said that he could order the taps; however, they would not arrive until the first of February, since most of their suppliers were closed between Christmas and the end of January. I couldn’t understand why these businesses didn’t stagger their employees’ vacations over the year. Didn’t they realize that if they kept their businesses open the company would make more money?

The sales person just looked at me and shrugged. "This isn’t America, mate. We’re not all bloody capitalists here."

But I wasn’t a capitalist, was I? Surely it was just good business sense to want to make as much money as possible. No doubt this was just another example of the laid-back, "no worries-mate-she’ll-be-right" attitude that seemed to dominate Australian work philosophy. Any excuse for a "bludge." Even the high school day
had a twenty minute recess every morning as well as an hour break for lunch. (All those wasted minutes that kids could use for time on task). During these breaks, while the rest of the staff chatted and drank tea in the social room, I took the opportunity to grade a few more papers or to organize myself for my next class. I learned later that my fellow teachers thought I was being rude or just showing off—"kissing up" as they would say. But I wasn't being anti-social or overly conscientious; I just couldn't keep up with everything I thought I needed to do. What seemed a normal way to compensate for my lack of experience (work hard and you'll succeed) was considered aberrant behavior by my Australian colleagues. It had never occurred to me that the work ethic, so much a part of my own country, was not a universally ingrained truth. Nor had it occurred to me how much I actually subscribed to it. But Australia had been (un-)settled by convicts, not Puritans. Australians did not see work as a direct route to goodness.

* * *

The sociologist Alfred Schutz's (1971) concept of "the stranger" is helpful in explaining my revelation about capitalism. Schutz suggests that the person trying to enter a new social environment tends to interpret the new environment with the automatic but unconscious "scheme of reference" of his or her home culture. But he or she soon finds out that this ready-made approach is inadequate. My viewing of Australian work practices through my American "screens" led to a situation that didn't make sense to me: Why wouldn't Australians want to make money? According to Schutz, "the discovery that things in his new surroundings look quite different from
what he expected them to be at home is frequently the first shock to the stranger’s confidence in the validity of his habitual "thinking as usual" (35). In the process of trying to understand Australian culture, I had to call up and make explicit areas of knowledge, assumptions and beliefs that I had acquired in my home culture, but which were previously implicit and unconscious. Going to another place is a good way to uncover these assumptions.

However coming home is sometimes an even better way.

When I returned to the United States almost nine years later, I did not return to the same country that I left. I wasn’t exactly a stranger, but I wasn’t quite American anymore, and I certainly hadn’t become Australian. I was between.

* * *

This particular sense of "between" is a concept I originally lifted from a science fiction series by Anne McCaffrey. In these books, dragons have the ability to take their human riders to other places and times by going between. Between is a transitional space of nothingness and sensory deprivation "between here and there." As difficult and taxing as going between is for human beings, it is necessary for connecting life in the dragon riders’ world. My concept of the between also draws from Victor Turner’s rich notion of liminality (a term he stole from Arnold van Gennep). Although the liminal or threshold stage in rituals of rites of passage has been likened to "a no-man’s land betwixt and between" (Turner 1986, 41), Turner sometimes describes "the liminal phase...[as] the subjunctive mood of culture, a mood of maybe, might be, as if, hypothesis, fantasy, conjecture, desire..." (42). Rituals and
performance can provide ways for cultures to move out of the "indicative mood" of
day-to-day, ordinary life into the "fructile chaos" of liminality (42). Rather than a
space of nothingness, Turner reveals the between to be a rich storehouse of possibility,
a temporary transitional moment that invites reflexive thinking.

I first encountered the concept of reflexive thinking and the concept of the
stranger seven years ago while reading Douglas Barnes' book, From Communication
to Curriculum (1975). Barnes asks if engaging in "the stranger" experience might be
connected to the development of "hypothetical and reflexive forms of thinking," and if
protecting students from having the stranger experience "might delay their movement
toward reflexive thinking" (103-104). Although I wasn't sure exactly what Barnes
meant by reflexive thinking—I didn't know if it was another term for Piaget's formal
operations or simply the British spelling of reflective—I was immediately attracted to
the metaphor of the stranger experience. At that time, I was concerned about my
composition students' reluctance to interrupt the "flow" of their reading by thinking
and writing about what they were reading. In a one-page response paper to Barnes'
book that I wrote in 1987, I said:

...The "stranger" metaphor works for me. It explains that disconcerting
feeling of being "between," the feeling perhaps first experienced in
adolescence when supposedly formal operations develop...By choosing
not to re-interpret old knowledge in light of new experience, people
avoid encountering the "other voices" that might interrupt the (limited)
homogenous flow of their lives. They remain in a sea of shallow
provincialism or worse, evangelical born-again-ism. Does this mean that
people who find themselves constantly "between" are more reflexive
thinkers? Is it okay, though, if we never get out of between?

When I voiced these last two questions, I was also thinking about myself and the
difficulties I have always had in coming to closure, wondering if this behavior was simply a personal quirk or if my resistance to closure had some redeeming intellectual value.

* * *

Reflexivity is not just the British spelling for reflection. As I now understand it, reflexivity occurs when a subject turns back on itself to become the object of its own contemplation or examination. Reflexivity is a response triggered by the individual's active encounter with an other: other ideas, theories, people, cultures, texts (or even other parts of their selves, e.g. a past life). In the process of trying to comprehend or understand an other, a person's interpretive frameworks, theories and prejudices are disclosed, and themselves can become objects of interrogation, interpretation and critique. As Schutz noted, because these encounters with "strangers" serve to de-familiarize our taken-for-granted, common-sensical or fixed beliefs and attitudes, we may temporarily feel betwixt and between. However, as Schutz, Turner, Piaget and others (working in a variety of disciplines) have discovered, it is during these liminal or transitional moments, that we are in a position to become self-aware, conscious of what we think and feel and value. And such moments, I think (as did Barnes twenty years ago), should be of interest to educators: "[L]iminality is the great moment of teachability...an opportunity is provided not only for psychic and emotional reorganization but for theoretical and philosophical enlightenment as well" (Myerhoff and Metzger 1980, 106).

* * *
Reflexivity and reflection are not the same thing, but I think they can work together as part of the same recursive and ongoing hermeneutical process—although it took me awhile to figure all this out. In 1990, the year I began my doctoral studies, I wrote an essay called "Reflections on Reflection." I had noticed that many teachers, writers and scholars paid lip service to the importance of "reflection," but it was not exactly clear what process or activity they were referring to when they used the term and why it was so important for the teaching and learning of writing. Writing that paper enabled me to sort through the cadre of concepts used to describe the process of thinking about thinking as well as to begin to distinguish between the different meanings the same terms had in different fields and disciplines.

I learned that meta-cognition, the conscious monitoring of one’s cognitive activities, was a psychological term that came into use in the 1970s when a more exact term (i.e., "scientifically measurable") was needed to describe the workings of the mind and replace the more nebulous concept of "introspection." Kitchner (1983), however, argues that meta-cognition, as it is conceived by most psychologists, is fine for dealing with simple, routine situations, but it is insufficient for describing the complex processes adults use to deal with problems involving conflicting assumptions and beliefs and that require them to negotiate multiple solutions and realities. She notes that problems without already known solutions require that people draw on their "epistemic beliefs" to deal with them. Kitchner’s work on the development of "reflective judgement" provided me with my first indication of a relationship between an individual’s philosophy of knowledge and his or her capacity for reflexivity.
(although at the time, I was still calling the process "reflection"). It also provided me with some rationale for Ann Berthoff's famous maxim that "how you construe is how you construct" (1981, 10).

It would seem that an individual's epistemic assumptions would most certainly be involved when learning required more than the mere addition of new information, when learning required a person to first undergo a process of "unlearning."

Unlearning would first necessitate access to one's "core constructs," access that I now believe is achieved reflexively via another. As I noted in my 1990 paper, "Reflections on Reflection,"

One of the major assumptions of process classrooms has been the notion of learning by doing: "You learn to write by writing." While this may be true for young children who are learning how to write for the first time, for older students and teachers who already hold assumptions about writing, for whom writing entails as much "unlearning" as learning..., learning to write by simply engaging in the act of writing may be not be enough. Without reflection, our beliefs and assumptions which underlie why, what and how we write are never exposed. Unless we examine these core constructs, change will not occur.

When individuals begin to access and examine these core constructs, they are no longer detached observers, blind to their own positioning, like the six blind men of Indostan.

* * *

The six blind men of Indostan came back to haunt me when I returned to graduate school in 1984.

It was six blind men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

This poem by John Godfrey Saxe tells how each of the blind men touched a different part of the elephant's body— the leg, trunk, tail, torso, ear and tusk—and on the basis of his observation, determined that the elephant was very much like a tree, a snake, a rope, a wall, a fan and a spear. The last stanza then reads:

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceedingly stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong.

At the time, I read the poem as a parody of the scientific method. Empiricism was not infallible, and generalizing the whole on the basis of the parts led to distortion. In an informal response paper for a graduate seminar, I wrote:

I mean they didn't say, "How about that? We are all right. Look at how many different things an elephant is." Why didn't they? The new paradigm suggests we need to accept a multiplicity of views. But is it possible to do this without "disputing loud and long?"

Interestingly, for all my talk about the importance of change and process, I was not comfortable with the idea of completely forsaking the notion of an objective reality, which I thought I would have to do if I accepted the possibility of multiple perspectives. Even though I knew it might take me many attempts, I had always believed I could eventually know The Truth if only I was observant enough, rational enough, if only I studied long enough. If there was no objective reality, then I felt like the reason I had gone back to graduate school—to have another chance at the elephant—had suddenly been taken away or at least displaced. And that left me feeling a little
insecure.

The new scientific paradigm suggests that perhaps there is no one real elephant to see. If I am to dismiss the notion of the existence of an objective reality, apart from that which I am able to observe, then I must also give up the idea of correct answers and universal truths. Fine. But why do I still hope to see the elephant?

Yes, I wanted to see the elephant; but the idea of relinquishing the burden of having to find correct answers and formulate universal truths appealed to me as well. As a teacher, I had seen how the need for "getting the answer" often replaced the desire for learning. Answers too frequently seemed to shortcut thinking and curtail further inquiry about a matter. "Answers kill thoughts," I wrote,

well, at least limit thought to finding means of justifying answers. What would have happened if the blind men framed their observations as questions? At the least, it might have led to another reading of the elephant, causing them to examine their first reactions. Even better, it could have kept the channels of thought open and led to more good questions. But once the blind men had the answer, they had nothing else to learn...

What was more, these six learned blind men "each in his own opinion/exceedingly stiff and strong" seemed more intent on persuading the others as to the correctness of their own views rather than really learning about the elephant. They were concerned with answers, but not good answers or better answers--only their answers. And thus this parable seemed to also speak of politics, of power, as much as it did epistemology.

Had the blind men seen their own conclusions as tentative, partial and approximate, as open to further examination, had they engaged in dialogue with each other and with themselves, then maybe they would have succeeded in enlarging their
understanding of the elephant. Had they explained to each other how they had arrived at their conclusions, rather than simply bombarding each other with their findings, then maybe their "discussion" would have been, in philosopher Ann Seller's words, more "epistemologically effective and less politically coercive" (1988, 177). I now realize that allowing for multiple, subjective perspectives does not preclude the possibility of objectivity; it merely pushes us closer to realizing it in all its intersubjective---wall/snake/spear/rope/fan/tree---complexity. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

*   *   *

Knowledge, facts, memorization, tests, multiple choice, discipline, structure: these made up the person known as Regina Roe...thought and, more importantly, self-actualization was not encouraged...I like to refer to this as the "What have you learned, Dorothy?" syndrome. I think it should be changed to "Who do you think you are, Dorothy?"

- Regina, upper level composition student

The belief that knowledge exists out there and merely has to be discovered or acquired contributes to the myth of objectivism both in research and in education.

Objectivism suggests that as long as researchers follow "procedure" and stand outside of their inquiry, they are not responsible or implicated in the results of their quest for knowledge. In education, the objectivist view gives rise to a belief about learning that students can (and should) learn "facts" about people, places and processes that are in addition to, separate from or unmediated by their own beliefs and circumstances. Objectivism also suggests that educational success is based on "teacher-proof" (and student-proof) methods. However, if there is one thing that most teachers know in their bones, it is that no method and no methodology works for every student (or every teacher). The art and craft of teaching is finding out what does.² I didn't
begin to articulate why, however, until I tried to write a paper critiquing the first year
writing course at the University of Pittsburgh in 1987, as outlined in the book, Facts,
Artifacts and Counterfacts (1986).

* * *

In my paper, "Examining THEORY with Theory," I realized that to understand
the philosophy behind David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky's methods for
teaching writing at the University of Pittsburgh, I had to look more closely at some of
the assumptions guiding my own composition program and my own teaching practices.
Drawing from an article by Robert Parker (1982), I distinguished between two kinds
of theory: the individual’s personal theory, which has been constructed from his or her
own experience of teaching and writing, and the more formal, abstract and explicit
"THEORY," usually formulated by some other person or group. I wrote that "we can
only appropriate new THEORY by holding it up and relating it to our personal
'theory'." And that, I now realize, is why teaching methods don't work independently
of teachers. However, this paper also showed me that I didn’t have to go all the way
to Australia to engage in the stranger experience; my engagement with other
THEORIES could elicit reflexive thought as well.

To grasp the THEORY [of the Pittsburgh program] I had to try to
articulate my ideas about reading, writing and teaching. At the same
time, it was the actual engagement with [the Pittsburgh program] that
demanded I make my own "theory" more explicit. The value of
examining THEORY is that it provides me with a new framework in
which to view my "theory," it compels me to give voice to what I am
doing as a teacher, and pushes me beyond some of my unconscious and
unexamined values and assumptions...But what if THEORY and theory
collide?
Writing this paper was the first time I consciously put into words the concept of dialectical and reflexive learning: encounters with others (THEORIES) lead us to identify and examine our own knowledge and beliefs (theories). It's only in hindsight that I realize the extent to which I have continued to explore the questions that I first voiced in this paper and in the earlier response to Barnes' text: What happens if we become lost in the process of "between?" Or worse, what if THEORY collides with theory in such a way that we resist going "between" because, like the six blind men, we can't or won't examine our own poswitionality (theories)?

* * *

For as long as I can remember, I have been more afraid of becoming set in my ways or being stuck in one place (physically or mentally) than I have been of drifting, of never finding a home. The idea that I couldn't move, change, grow or seek new ground if I wanted to, if I needed to, was and is unthinkable to me. I have always seen this as the result of the odd coupling between the philosophy I was born into--the work ethic and the American Dream--and the philosophy I came of age in--a 1960s suspicion of commitment and distrust of the status quo. Both my Puritan self and my 1960s self feared becoming too comfortable or complacent because such a state would either make me lazy or make me set in my ways. And both my Puritan self and my 1960s self each naively believed it had the freedom and the power to avoid, stave off, and rise above its own conditioning.

I grew up in a family that accepted (by which I mean did not think to question) rules and authority. If critical thinking meant wrestling with difficult questions, my
parents might tackle the occasional quiz in Reader’s Digest, but for them, all the hard questions had been pinned down; the answers were very clear. There were no public spaces in my house for children to openly speak their minds, to disagree or contend. And so I moved my speaking life inside—first in books, and later in letters and journals.

My Grandmother Qualley was instrumental in fostering my independence and showing me the way to my interior self through reading and writing. While I was growing up, she came to stay with us for a few months each year. Grandmother Qualley was not a children’s grandma. She attributed her "sore eyes," arthritis, and high blood pressure to the nervous tension she felt when she was around us children for too long a time. But for children who expressed a "grown-up" interest about the secrets contained in books, she had a great deal of time.

I can remember when she brought home Little House on the Prairie from the local library for me to read. Perhaps she sensed in me a kindred spirit, one easily drawn to a frontier fiction about rugged individualism. She greatly admired the "pioneer women" for their strength and courage. (She loved reading Grandpa Smith’s diary from the 1890’s.) In her own diary, she wrote, "I always have a feeling of nostalgia for a life I never knew, but always seemed so desirable." Life seemed so simple then, even if it was hard. But Grandma Qualley believed a hard life made for strong people. "It’s a great life," she would say, "if you don’t weaken." And if she could not tolerate softness in herself, she certainly could not accept it in anyone else. Independence. Self-reliance. This was the true meaning of America. "Let those laugh
who wish!" she proclaimed, "I belong to those who wrested this nation from the
wilderness and I am proud of it!" She felt the schools of the 1950s did not emphasize
history and English enough. "The students miss an awful lot and they do not even
know they are missing it!"

My Grandmother traced her lineage to the Mayflower --and beyond. To
William the Conqueror, she told us. "I want my children to be proud of their blood as
I am. My blood is pure New England - over 300 years of it." She kept meticulous
records, recording dates and genealogies, worrying that no one else would keep up the
"family archives" when she was gone. She was a Daughter of the American
Revolution, a D.A.R. in good standing. (She had the papers to prove it, papers she
would set aside for me, papers I would never use - even though I did earn the D.A.R.
Good citizenship award in High School for doing well on an Ohio history exam). She
was very smart, my mother told me. But Grandma's intelligence revealed her
exasperation with things she couldn't control. More often than not, she just sounded
mean and ornery to me.

When my grandmother's moods dipped and chafed bottom, she sat with empty
eyes, an open book in her lap--in a state that my father as a boy had described as "the
stares." "I am the last of my own folks," she would say. "I'm not interesting to
anyone but myself... ." She visited the doctor hoping for some magical elixir (it was
the 1950's). Instead, she would come home with an assortment of green pills,
atropine, belladonna, and whatever else the doctor thought might calm her. These
elixirs worked for a while and then she would return for more. "The children make me
so nervous," she would tell him. Finally he told her to stop taking things so personally. But she would take him to heart and be more miserable than ever. "I am just an ungrateful old lady. I should pull myself up by my bootstraps."

My mother tells me the 90th Psalm was my Grandmother Qualley's favorite. "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." I am struck by the phrase "heart of wisdom." Perhaps my Grandmother wanted to unite head and heart, but didn't know how. Instead, the mind berated the heart for feeling as it did. "Sometimes I think too much about how I feel...my task for the time I have left is to be as little 'old-age difficult' as possible...but it is impossible for me to hold my tongue...then I spend days regretting it." Grandma read numerous psychology books in an effort to understand her moods. "What makes folks go down and wallow in the bottom once and about so often?" she wondered. She always went for the authority of books, the salve of the self-reliant.

To me, Grandma was a critic; in her earlier life she might have been a critical thinker, that is before her self-imposed rigor turned into dogma. She had a marvelous capacity for detecting imperfection, error and heresy in everything and everyone, including (and especially) herself. She could always see a way to make our lives better. And yet, Grandma herself could not tolerate change. "I have moved so much all my life--too much. I am like a cat contented in my own garret...even the scratches on the wall mean something because you know how they got there...Oh for a sense of security...to just know you aren't facing change, eternal change all the time." And if she wasn't open to change, she couldn't learn from others. Grandma was introspective
and self-reflective, but not reflexive. Reflection does not require the presence of (an)other. One can reflect all by oneself.

* * *

However, it wasn't until I began to peer into ethnographic research and methodology that I began to consider the actual relationship between reflection and reflexivity. Reflexivity, as described by Barbara Myerhoff and Jay Ruby in the introduction to Ruby's 1982 collection, *A Crack in the Mirror*, came closer to the kinds of transformative experiences (the stranger experience) I was most interested in understanding. Myerhoff and Ruby argue that a critical awareness of one's "reflections" is part of the condition for true reflexivity. Reflection refers to "a kind of thinking about ourselves, showing ourselves to ourselves, but without the requirement of explicit awareness of the implications of our display. Without the acute understanding, the detachment from the process in which one is engaged, reflexivity does not occur" (3, my emphasis). Anthropologist Barbara Babcock (1980) uses Narcissus in Greek mythology, who falls in love with his own reflection, to describe the difference between reflection and reflexivity:

Narcissus's tragedy then is that he is not narcissistic enough, or rather he does not reflect long enough to effect a transformation. He is reflective, but he is not reflexive—that is he is conscious of himself as an other, but he is not conscious of being self-conscious of himself as an other, and hence, not able to detach himself from, understand, survive or even laugh at this initial experience of alienation (2).

It seemed that one thing that distinguished reflexivity from reflection was the role of "the other." My observation that Australian business practices were different from (and in my opinion not as sensible as) the ways Americans conduct business was a
reflection: I simply monitored my current beliefs. I did not experience the Australian people as distinct "others;" rather I saw them as manifestations of my native culture. I only became reflexive when their "otherness" was distinct enough to enable me to call up my unconscious assumptions and re-see myself as a capitalist. As Babcock succinctly puts it, reflexivity is "the return to the self by way of the other" (2). It is the other that keeps reflexivity from slipping into narcissism or solipsism. And it is this "pull" toward, or rather attention to, the other that, I now believe, has the potential to make reflexivity an ethical stance.

Reflexiveness does not leave the subject lost in its own concerns; it pulls one toward the Other...breaking the thrall of self concern by its very drive toward self-knowledge that inevitably takes into account a surrounding world of events, people and places (Myerhoff and Ruby, 5).

Thus, what I am offering here is a definition of reflexivity based on a normative ideal. I'm not sure everyone would agree with this distinction between reflection and reflexivity; the terms are frequently used interchangeably. However, "self-reflection," an approach to understanding that originated with the phenomenological tradition of Husserl, postulates that individuals independently of others can access their own thoughts and feelings. I am following Babcock, Myerhoff and Ruby's lead by suggesting that reflexivity does not originate in the individual but occurs in response to a person's critical engagement with an other. The line between these processes is shaky, however, especially when the "other" is an individual's "other self" or past life. For example, when Donald Murray talks about the conversation between the writer and the writer's "other self" is he being reflective or reflexive? I would tentatively suggest that reflection is adequate for monitoring our
conscious beliefs, but that reflexivity is needed to call up our unconscious beliefs.

If reflection is the "active, persistent, careful consideration of any thought or supposed form of knowledge" (Dewey 1991, 6), then it is possible to be reflective without also being reflexive. That is, we can gaze outward without turning inward, and we can look inward without having first travelled outward to the other. In fact, many educational and research methods seem to exhibit these kinds of unidirectional approaches to the seeking of knowledge. However, I believe that the most educative experiences—in Dewey's sense, the ones that can transform current understanding and lead to further inquiry—are reflexive as well as reflective.

Unlike reflection, reflexivity is a bi-directional, contrastive response. The encounter with an other introduces new knowledge and places it in relief to our current conception of things. The juxtaposition of two different representations sometimes reveals their ill fit. In order to make sense, we will need to identify and examine our own core constructs or underlying assumptions. Once we actually articulate these tacit beliefs, they become open to reflection, critique, and perhaps, transformation. Reflexivity, then, has the capacity to alter consciousness.

Does reflection also have the capacity to alter consciousness? I'm not sure reflection can, by itself, transform the way we see or think about ourselves and the world. As I have defined it, reflection enables us to monitor our conscious beliefs and to make sense of new information (as long as that information is not contradictory). Through reflection we can enlarge our current understanding. However, I think, for a genuine transformation to occur (as opposed to a cosmetic facelift) our deeply
ingrained and mostly unconscious core constructs have to change. And that can only happen through a reflexive encounter with contradictory information or through the stranger experience.

I might suggest that it is precisely reflexivity's burden/blessing of altered consciousness that can lull us into believing that "ignorance is bliss" or that makes new knowledge appear to be "a dangerous thing." If we could simply "know" without any ramifications to our past and present beliefs or for our present or future actions, if we were not implicated in any way, gaining knowledge would indeed be a safe, neutral, straightforward activity.

Reflexiveness "complicates" our understanding and efforts to know by making us self-conscious, cognizant of our role in the production of knowledge. We become aware of our responsibility to others as well as ourselves. As Elizabeth Minnich notes, this awareness is not a sufficient condition for emancipation or action, but it is, perhaps one of the grounds:

[T]hinking reflexively is one of the grounds of human freedom, in part because it reveals to us that we are both subject and object of our own knowing, of our culture, of our world. We are not just products, objects, of our world, nor are we just subjects existing in a void. We are free subjects whose freedom is conditioned--not determined--by a world not of our making but in many ways open to the effects of our actions. (1990, 189).

If we perceive ourselves as only objects, then we may lack the will or power to act. We must not relinquish our own agency. Maintaining oneself as a subject is especially important for members of marginalized or oppressed groups if they are to function as full moral and cognitive agents. What Trudy Govier (1993) says about the importance
of self-trust for women, also applies to teachers and students.

[a] person who has no resources to preserve her ideas, values, and goals against criticism and attack from others will be too malleable to preserve her sense that she is a person in her own right...In order to reflect on and appraise one’s options and beliefs and implement decisions based on the reflecting judgments, one must trust oneself...without self-trust a person cannot think and decide for himself or herself and therefore cannot function as an autonomous human being" (111-112).

However, as subjects, our agency also requires that we monitor and examine our words and actions lest we (un)wittingly impose our beliefs on others, thereby contributing to their objectification and/or victimization.

* * *

I became a teacher, or the reason I gave for becoming a teacher, was because I believed the schools stunted students’ growth by not encouraging students to search for their "true potential." In a paper written for one of my first education courses in 1971, I worried about the loss of "individuality" in education. (Interestingly, my suggestions then were not all that different from what they are now: I argued that teachers should "develop a tolerance for ambiguity and irresolution," that they "not force students to make a decision too quickly," and that "new and applicable ideas must not be condemned too soon..." No wonder I would find the tenet(ive)s of process theories and pedagogies so attractive a decade later.

What I thought were my isolated and unique concerns, ideas that showed I had escaped the conservative influence of my own education and culture, that I was marching to the beat of a different drummer, were in fact probably evidence to the contrary. As an undergraduate student in the early 1970s, I was being shaped by the
political and ideological currents of the time. In his recent book, *Fragments of Rationality*, Lester Faigley notes that a number of popular critiques of American education emerged during the 1950s and 1960s (spurred on by the fear of communism) that pointed to growing concerns that our schools were "based on conformity and order rather than individualism and creativity" (1992, 56). My own fears now seem to be simply the concrete manifestation of this larger cultural suspicion.

In a paper I wrote in 1974 for an undergraduate humanistic psychology class, I suggested that all that people needed to make their goals "a reality" was "a desire to work and a courage and willingness to experiment." I wrote that "change was hampered by a lack of awareness, lack of desire and just plain old apathy and reluctance to change, especially if people are comfortable in their present conditions or if they fear they are losing a sentimental tradition." At any rate, I naively assumed that individuals could change themselves and their worlds. Faigley suggests how much of my belief that I was capable of knowing and critiquing my world—and changing it—reflects the "postmodern, ‘free’ individual of consumer capitalism":

one who can change identities at will because identities are acquired by what one consumes. The conception of the free individual is at the foundation of dominant American ideology because it promises to empower individuals through their choice of consumer goods and thus justifies the existing social order. Because the individual is said to be free to choose her or his ‘lifestyle,’ politics, religion, and occupation, as well as which brand of soap to use, the poor are alleged to choose to be poor... (16-17).

I wrote that "happiness is a state of mind that we control. We can decide to make ourselves miserable and let things bother us or we can decide to be happy and
perceive ourselves as being so." In other words, we can "just say no" to misery or "yes" to happiness—it has nothing to do with the situation that precipitates our reactions. Work hard, have a positive attitude, and you'll succeed. At twenty-one, I see that I had absorbed a lot of my grandmother's "I'll-do-it-myself, others-be-damned" notion of agency.

* * *

I'd like to be able to say that I have rid myself of all my bourgeois and ready-made notions in the last twenty years. But that would not be true, possible, or even desirable. I'm still not sure how one can be a teacher and not believe—that in spite of everything—individuals do have some power to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and change. Otherwise, why bother with education? Instead, what I'm trying to show here is how my early thinking has contributed to and been reinvented in my present ideas.

Process theory legitimized the beliefs I already had. When I returned to graduate school, I entered the field of composition studies drafting behind the "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in Teaching Writing," Maxine Hairston's influential 1982 essay, which proclaimed that a paradigm shift from product to process had occurred in the teaching and researching of writing. I didn't need too much convincing. Process theory confirmed my negative assumptions about the fixed, the static and the inevitable, and sanctioned a way-of-being-in-the-world that I was already being. There was nothing radical in my embracing of process. The notion that thinking was always "in process" and always open to further revision simply
removed the pressure of my having to get things right the first time. And after a few years, even my desire to see the elephant disappeared. In a response paper I wrote to John Dewey's *Experience and Education* in 1987, I noted that for most systems to operate efficiently, harmony and balance were essential; but not so for education. I went so far as to suggest that education only occurs when the learner is slightly out-of-sync and off-center:

It is not harmony which makes the system function, but the effort to reach harmony, the continual "modulation"...allows for insight, for learning, to occur...Just as the learner reaches for an answer that will bring her near center, another question must be ready to move her away from this "stasis..." Knock the individual too far from center and she is left flailing in confusion. Keep her too close to center, she stagnates and education stops. Plato spoke of the soul being constantly in motion. Vygotsky noted the speed, velocity and optimal distance from center—the proximal zone—in which this movement takes place. Dewey sees the shape and continuity of motion: the "active quest" to learn is a continuous spiral...process is another word for movement.

Ironically, my belief in the necessity of ongoing inquiry and movement in itself might appear dangerously constant from what I have implied thus far. However, this conviction has undergone (and, as I hope this inquiry will make clear, continues to undergo) reflexive scrutiny. In my doctoral exams, taken in 1992, I qualified my previous understanding of the importance of continual process and change with ideas from the developmental psychologist, Robert Kegan:

Kegan helps me to see that movement "from center" is not simple, continuous or linear. His notion of "balances" suggests that individuals must return to center—it's only "stasis" if they return to the same center. Our job as teachers may be to either 1) nudge students away from center or 2) help our students who are already "out there" return to different centers.⁵

Kegan's theory that development is not all process and movement, that it also includes
periods of rest, helped me to begin to rethink my own hesitation at "staying put" and enabled me to see the importance of living in an idea long enough to be able to understand it.

* * *

If the process movement initially helped to loosen people from their fixed traditions, postmodern theory seems to have ensured that they will stay adrift. Quoting from David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), Faigley writes that "postmodernism swims, even wallows, in the fragmentary and the chaotic currents of change as if that is all there is" (1992, 4). But maybe that is not all there is.

Judith Kegan Gardiner (1993) has recently offered a thorough critique of the "subject-in-process." Just as Kegan's model depicts development as alternating periods of evolutionary movement with periods of "evolutionary truce," Gardiner writes: "That people change is a fact. But that does not mean they must always be in the process of changing or afraid of any fixation or attachment" (309). She observes that the emphasis on process...depends on an implied opposition of process to product in which process is validated as active and changing as opposed to a static and reified commodity...and so reinforces the connotation that "process" is inherently progressive. This connotation rests on the belief that change is always for the best since the status quo is assumed to be a total oppressive system...(305).

Furthermore, Gardiner notes that process doesn't necessarily imply progressive transformation from one state to another, but can mean endless repetition designed to delay progress and avoid substantive change or decisive action: "If the continual overthrow of everything is the only goal, then one doesn't need to figure out what our
specific problems are or what institutional transformations might solve them" (313). As Gardiner cautions, an "alternative state [needs to] be lived in and with long enough to examine its consequences" (313).

So while process philosophy may have often lacked a critical reflexivity, the spiraling turns of postmodernism might be criticized for being hyper-reflexive. Reflexivity--the turning back on oneself--interrupts the flow of change long enough for us to examine it. By the same token, continually turning back on ourselves just about guarantees that we won't get anywhere.

* * *

...the achievement of self-realization can only be had to the extent that we remain aware that we can never reach a point of stasis, some existential nirvana in which all desire and striving ceases...our feelings of satisfaction with our earthly pilgrimage may lie more in the journey with its pauses for self-doubt and examination, than in the arrival at any celestial city of complete and total self-knowledge (Graham 1991, 65, my emphasis).

How could I ensure that the process of change would be reflexive without being hyper-reflexive? My solution was to reconceive process as dialectical, as bi-directional, rather than unidirectional, a solution to which, I now realize, I continually return.

In a paper I wrote for a philosophy of education class in 1990 called "From Dialogue to Dialectic," I envisioned education, not as a process that separated individuals from their former selves, but as a dialectical process that allows students to "mediate oppositions" and explore connections between abstract ideas and lived worlds. The problem I saw was that students (and teachers) often try to arrive without
having travelled through this dialectical process first; they try to by-pass the messiness and uncertainty of the between.

As teachers, the best thing we can do for our students is accustom them to this flux and flow, and encourage them into the uncertain and beckoning spaces of "between." Through dialogue with themselves and with others, our students can learn to negotiate their way onto firmer ground. And once there, we must ensure that the dialogue continues as all of us, teachers and students, re-examine our positions...

A year later in a paper entitled "Thinking (Critically) About (My) Thinking," I suggested that critical thinking involves interaction between some kind of dialectical pairing: "believing and doubting, rending and joining, separating and connecting, immersing and distancing, speaking and listening, reading and writing..." My sense of what it meant to think critically also contained a reflective/reflexive component. (I was still conflating the two processes). I said that "critical thinking involves the ability to step outside of one position, not only for the purpose of entering and understanding another position, but also for the purpose of seeing the original in a new or fuller way." What goes around comes around. Here, once again is my theory/THEORY concept of learning now reconceived as a definition of critical thinking.

At the time, I didn’t know precisely why I believed reflexivity was a part of critical thinking, but as I see it now, I seemed to be seeking a definition of thinking that had more than just a cognitive dimension.

Critical thinking involves the process of experiencing and examining an idea/argument/act from different perspectives or multiple frameworks (e.g., moral, intellectual, emotional) in order to:

1) begin to understand it in its complexity;
2) assess its values/merits as well as its appropriateness to specific situations/contexts;
3) gain insight into one’s own thoughts/feelings.
I explained how this process of thinking might work with the following example:

I want to understand the arguments of Tom Harkin so that I can evaluate who I want to select as the Democratic candidate. First I must separate from my own position so I can enter Harkin's position to see the strengths of what he is advocating. Then, I must separate from Harkin's position and look at it from Tsongas's, Kerry's, etc. positions ("different frameworks and multiple perspectives"). Finally, to evaluate Harkin's platform I must reconnect to what I think and why I think it. If I have sincerely engaged in "experiencing and examining" these other positions, there is a strong likelihood that my original position will now look different; it will be more informed or changed in some way. This causes me to reflect on how I came to hold this position in the first place.

I stopped short of offering a rationale for why it would be important for me to "reflect on how I came to hold this position in the first place," and yet as a teacher, I was sure it was.

* * *

I have since thought more about the relationship between critical thinking and reflexive thinking. I now believe critical thinking contains a reflexive component and reflexivity contains a critical component. Perhaps it is the capacity for reflexivity that distinguishes the mere critic from the true critical thinker. Critics do not (see the need to) identify or examine the assumptions that form the basis of their critique. They are simply the agents of their critique, never the objects. The critical thinker is self-critical as well as critical. Likewise, reflexive thinkers are also critical thinkers. Reflexivity, as I have already suggested, entails identifying one's assumptions and beliefs and then opening them to self-evaluation and critique.

* * *
What my students have said and continue to say about their reading, their writing, and their inquiry processes has contributed to my understanding of learning and reflexivity in more ways than I can discern. In the following excerpt from her end-of-the-semester reflection on her work, Jean, a student from my upper level composition class (1989) helps me to realize in hindsight why I have felt so strongly about the potential value of reading, writing and collaborative inquiry as more than academic or intellectual processes. Having just completed a research project in which she and her partner attempted to come to grips with the case of Hedda Nussbaum, an abused woman accused of child-neglect, Jean draws from her collaborative experience to frame her semester’s work:

I was continually reshaping my ideas and trying to see Hedda’s situation from a new perspective. I have truly learned that I need time to combine my feelings, opinions and past experiences with the facts to come to some type of conclusion. This thinking and rethinking process which I never clearly understood before this class, has carried over into my personal and social life. Now when I have a disagreement with someone, I find myself holding off on making a decision or starting a fight or debate. I would rather go to my room and think. I try to see the situation from the other person’s point of view, see where the other person is coming from in order to understand his or her reactions and reasoning...Understanding how I think is important because it helps me to better understand myself and why I feel the way I do about certain subjects and how my past experiences play an enormous role in shaping my personal thoughts.

This is what Jean’s reflection teaches me: Reflexive inquiry takes time. Not only does it take time for Jean to try to grasp a "new perspective," that is, the "reactions and reasoning" of the other, it takes time for her to discover her own thoughts. To reach an understanding, Jean connects her subjectivity, her "feelings, opinions and past experiences" to the objective "facts." This process is recursive; it
involves "continually reshaping," "thinking" and "re-thinking." Jean has let me know that the kind of learning that she has experienced in composition class has implications that have spread to her life beyond the immediate classroom. What has transferred is a stance--a way of approaching, making sense of, and responding to new situations, texts and ideas--that is open, tentative, reflexive. Jean's experience makes me want to inquire further into this reflexive stance. This dissertation has provided me with the occasion to formally and consciously do what I seem to have been doing unconsciously all along.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER I

1. John Gage (1986) notes that this feeling of uncertainty that comes from being "betwixt and between" is how we should feel if we are thinking: "The uneasiness should not be something that students are conditioned to worry about. It is something they need to recognize as the fate of thinking people, and to learn to live with, and to enjoy" (23).

2. This is true no matter what method or pedagogy is used. Educational methods that claim to be more "liberatory" or "student-centered" are as prone to objectivism as other methods. The "process approach," for instance, when it doesn’t take into account the teachers and students using it, may be a different color, but its’ still the same old horse.

3. I refer only to the family I perceived while growing up. Like many women, my mother has gotten more radical (although she would not use that term to describe herself) and more outspoken with age.

4. The process theory that I came to understand and adhere to was never a purely cognitive and developmental process; it was always social and contextualized, "grounded" in my own and my students’ complex lives. At the same time I was ingesting process theory, I was also enmeshed in discussions of the importance of conducting empirical research in "natural settings." I was keenly aware that a writer’s process of writing was always tied to innumerable factors in the writer’s situation. The first "research" I attempted in graduate school was to look at the ways freshmen students used their time outside of class in composing their weekly papers. I asked students to self report the frequency of their writing sessions each week, the day of the week and the time of day they wrote, the duration of time spent writing in each session and how much time they spent on different parts of the composing process (e.g., getting ideas, drafting, revising, editing etc). Perhaps my most important finding was that I had asked an interesting question, and the interesting questions couldn’t be answered in a decontextualized or controlled study.

5. In his book, The Evolving Self (1982), Robert Kegan offers a model that envisions development as a lifelong tension between autonomy and community. Each position represents a temporary "balance" or resolution or "evolutionary truce...between the yearnings for inclusion and distinctness. Each balance resolves the tension in a different way...it is because each of these temporary balances is slightly imbalanced that each is temporary" (108). This idea is similar to William James’ notion of "flights and perches" and Dewey’s belief that inquiry leads to a "consummation" rather than a "cessation."
CHAPTER II

EPISTEMOLOGICAL, THEORETICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL CONTEXTS

...although many people still subscribe to the adage that the researcher’s methods are determined by the research question, in the field of composition it is more accurate to say that research methods are created, combined, adapted, invented and stumbled on—that ideally they are chosen based on the researcher's personality and belief system.


The Blind men of Indostan are still among us today. I hear them "disputing loud and long" about old elephants (e.g., quantitative versus qualitative methods) and new elephants (the canon, multi-cultural education). Their debates seem to rest on assumptions about knowledge—what it is, where it’s located and how it can be acquired that are not always identified, let alone examined. The purpose of this chapter is to make my assumptions about knowledge and my methods for acquiring it more explicit. I begin by discussing my use of theory in this inquiry.

"Thief and Flier" Strategies

In a conference presentation on feminist theory and sophistic rhetoric (University of New Hampshire 1990) Susan Jarrett noted that women have had to practice being both "thief and flier" while reading texts written by and for men; that is, they have had to learn to take from the bastards what they need and fashion it for their own use. I have thieved Jarrett’s term for my own purposes because I think it aptly describes the way teachers (need to) read and creatively use theory. And it is my

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teacher approach to theory that undergirds this present study.¹

Robert Fecho (1993) argues that as members of a distinct interpretive community, teachers read theory with "the intent of adapting, juxtaposing and integrating" it into practice" (271). But as a teacher, I read theory not only to integrate it into practice, but also to help me understand practice. For me, theory is a frame I take to look at what I am (or what other people are) doing or thinking. Theory allows me to see differently; it momentarily, selectively focuses my attention here, rather than there. It enables me to see some things but not others. I think it's good to have a large stash of theories on hand to use. The more theories I can call upon to help me make sense of things, the better chance I have of seeing--that is, understanding--the complexity of what I am looking at.

This creative thievery is not simply a response invented by women, as Jarrett suggests, or a strategy employed by teachers.² It is one of the "literate arts" of the "contact zone." The contact zone is Mary Louise Pratt's concept for a social place in which different cultures or groups come together "often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (1993, 444). Through a process of "transculturation," the members of subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted by a dominant or metropolitan culture...While subordinated groups do not usually control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extent, what gets absorbed into their own and what it gets used for. (448).

As a teacher, I select what I need from one theory, alter it or combine it with another theory. My allegiance is not to the integrity of the theory or the method, but to how
the theory or some part of it helps me frame an idea or situation. I determine "what it gets used for." As we will see in the following chapters, thief and flier strategies can also be employed by students reading and responding to the ideas and texts of others in the contact zones of our classrooms.

If understanding always involves application (as Gadamer believes), and if application occurs as a result of modifying an idea, object, or tradition to fit one's specific situation, then some kind of appropriation seems necessary for understanding. When I appropriate concepts and ideas from Gadamer, Pratt or Jarrett, staking my claim to their theories by re-fashioning them to my particular circumstances and needs (in the classroom, in this dissertation), I come to understand them more fully (although not exactly in the sense they intended). But I want to make clear that in the process of confiscating and changing their ideas, if I am open and reflexive, it is likely that I will be changed too. It's a dialectical process. Theories have the potential to change the ways I think about what I think about (or the way that I know what I know).

What seems like a subversive process when undertaken by women, teachers, students or other marginalized groups is really not so different than the work most academics do. The major distinction seems to be that academic theft is sanctioned (indeed, praised) by the community in power.

Certainly academics steal. (And poets too. What did T.S. Elliot say--young poets imitate and great poets steal?). Robert Scholes argues that academic work is always intertextual: new texts are made from what has been taken or "stolen" from other texts. Scholars forage attentively in the field, pilfering ideas upon which to
piggyback their own work. The rules of scholarship stipulate that scholars must not thieve from other scholars without reinterpreting or transforming what they steal. Failure to alter or add to what one takes or to change the context in which one uses an idea can result in banishment from the community at worse and ho-hum scholarship at best.

Interestingly, though, in situations where the players are not considered equal (e.g., women and men, public school teachers and university researchers, students and teachers), those with less power have typically been expected not to alter, but rather to swallow whole, mimic or imitate the ideas, theories or methods of the dominant group. (This is because women, teachers and students were/are assumed to be incapable of reason, theory or original thought themselves). Such practices serve to maintain the status quo and current balance of power between groups by ensuring that full understanding--understanding that might challenge those in power--does not occur.

Why is one form of theft sanctioned and not the other? Better yet, what might thief and flier methods look like if the wealthy stole from the poor? If privileged academics stole from others less powerful than they? But then this is not a hypothetical question--they do. The history of research is filled with examples of academic marauding done under the banner of science, scholarship and progress.4

What about my use of student texts in this inquiry? Is this not a problematic case of academic looting as well? In this study I have been aware that I might be unfairly representing my students' words, their intentions, their very selves (particularly with regard to Chapter V, which examines the collaboration of three
students based on their written journals, memos and papers). I'm not sure that I absolve my responsibility with the disclaimer that my reading of these students texts is simply that--a reading. On the other hand, I can say that I find my student's writing, at times, so perceptive and thought-provoking that I want to place their words along side of scholars and philosophers. Their writing reveals their own burgeoning wisdom--not necessarily because of, but at times in spite of, my instruction. They have much to teach all of us.

Perhaps one distinction between the two forms of theft is that since thief and flier strategies are used to cross boundaries and disciplines, to move into less familiar territory, individuals are more apt to thieve what they do not fully comprehend. Traditionally, academic scholarship has confined its borrowing from others to the immediate and familiar neighborhood.

Choosing Our Own Ancestors

In her essay, "The Tacit Tradition: The Inevitability of a Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Writing Research" (1980/1983), Janet Emig observes that in composition studies we have a habit of moving outside our disciplinary borders and choosing our own ancestors. From the start, we have employed thief and flier tactics in defining our own discipline. According to Emig, one reason we adopted a multi-disciplinary approach was because "powerful and beautiful explanations for how and why people write reside in many disciplines, as do the methods for inquiring into that vast phenomenon..." (155). While this is true, it seems to me that composition studies' "other" status within English departments may have also contributed to our foraging
for traditions and methods with which to construct an identity. Originally, we may have sought support in many places because as a young discipline we needed many ways to think about our work and our role within the academic community; however, what has happened is that the habit of multi-disciplinary inquiry itself seems to have become traditionalized, a sanctioned and celebrated practice within composition studies. Rosemary Gates (1993) notes that composition is composing, and composing entails "a putting together, a taking and making of whatever helps us to gain insight" (148, emphasis added). She continues:

In composition, there is a signal willingness to be open to the new, to create moments for trying out, to combine diverse materials and methods from diverse disciplines...Our approaches to the study of writing problems are eclectic in a way that is unconventional for other disciplines. And our eclectic openness and intuitiveness constitute the strength of our field...(148).

Although I don’t believe members within the composition community always share (or in most cases find it necessary to share) the same family tree, we are still adamant about our right to choose--and unchoose--our relations. That is another reason why the family tree is so eclectic and dynamic. For this inquiry, I have openly borrowed from some ancestors more than others, usually the newest members of my family, scholars with whom I am still in the process of coming to know well. One reason has to do with what I said above: understanding always seems to involve some kind of application. By drawing on less familiar or less thoroughly processed traditions and ideas and applying them to my own work in reading and writing, I come to understand these ideas and traditions better. At the same time, since their ideas derive from less familiar and thoroughly processed traditions, I run a greater risk of
distorting their ideas.

Emig observes that many of the scholars frequently cited and consulted by people in composition are themselves inclined to engage in multi-disciplinary thievery. Thus, not only have we appropriated these individuals’ thoughts and theories, we have often adopted/adapted their methods. Were my ancestors multi-disciplinarians? Immediately, James Britton comes to mind. Britton was a master thief and multi-disciplinarian, and if I had to name a person most responsible for my entry into "the field" of reading and writing, it would be him. An important ancestor will always lead you to other long lost relations. Through Britton, for instance, I found Vygotsky and was led back to Dewey.¹

Britton provides a good example of multi-disciplinary thievery. To formulate his own theories, Britton lifted ideas from many fields, including linguistics, cognitive psychology, philosophy and literary theory. At various points in his career he came under the sway of different, influential ancestors. For instance, D. W. Harding’s concept of the "onlooker" and his ideas on the relationship between gossip and literature were instrumental in helping Britton to construct his ideas about the spectator role. However, it is important to note that Britton lifted aspects of Harding’s work—not the entire theory and perhaps not even Harding’s original intentions—-and ran with them. I have tended to do the same in this inquiry: I have lifted concepts from other contexts and, as Bakhtin would say, have made them "half-mine" by saturating them with my own sense and intentions.

And as the next three chapters will reveal, so have my students. Just as I am
doing here, they are learning to thieve those ideas they find valuable in other people’s work and use them in formulating and enlarging their own understandings. As such, both they and I are using reading and writing to engage in kind of theorizing.

A Process of Theorizing

According to Lisa Heldke, "philosophy is valuable not because it can uncover The Real, but because it can create alternative ways to think about whatever reality it is we’ve inherited/discovered/created" (1988, 16). Heldke’s essay, "Recipes for Theory Making" (1988), gives me a way to further talk about my use of theory in this inquiry. In this essay, Heldke conducts a "philosophical investigation of cooking" that is also intended "to enhance and expand the ways in which we do philosophical theory" (19).

Heldke suggests that by thinking about the way we construct and use theories in philosophy as similar to the ways cooks construct and use recipes in cooking, we might avoid getting ensnared in the either/or imbroglio of foundationalism versus relativism. Both these positions "hobble efforts to inquire into, and theorize about, our experiences" (16), and specifically, they prevent feminists from constructing theories that are "respectful and representative of the differences in women’s experiences without being glib, unreflective or uncritical about these differences" (17). I think her concerns apply to educational theory as well: teachers also want to use and construct theories that are respectful and representative of the differences in their own and their students’ experiences.

Heldke notes that although many cooks consult written recipes, they do not use them in the same way. At one extreme are cooks who strictly adhere to the recipe as it
is written, and who follow a recipe for everything they cook. At the other are cooks who have enough knowledge, skill and confidence to construct their own recipes and who can experiment and improvise with other people's. Like cooking, Heldke points out that

it's relatively easy to take up a theory, whole cloth, and use it...To do useful theory, I think it is necessary to explore and experiment, to know extremely well the things with which you're inquiring. It's necessary in inquiry in a way that it may not be in cooking, for whereas in cooking a failure to experiment leaves you with a boring diet, in theorizing, it makes you into an arrogant unperceptive inquirer (22).

It's interesting that when the word recipe is applied to activities other than cooking, it is usually intended to mean a step-by-step procedure that someone follows (unquestionably). However, in my experience, very few cooks consistently use recipes in this way. They may be more inclined to adhere more closely to a recipe which they are trying for the first time; but even then, a cook may know--if he or she has some prior knowledge and experience of cooking what ingredients or steps he or she can substitute, omit or exchange. Likewise, many teachers consult theories, but do not follow them uncritically or non-reflexively.

Learning the limits on a recipe is part of what is involved in learning to cook. It's a self-reflective process, because in order for me to determine the spirit in which I should receive a set of instructions, I must know what kind of operator I am--how I tend to work with ingredients and so on. Ultimately, I must determine how I-and-the-recipe work together--how I am to interpret the instructions given by the writer of the recipe (25). 6

Thief and flier teachers/readers/inquirers are selective about what they steal and from whom they steal. However, they may not use everything they take right away.

Like cooking, Heldke thinks of "philosophical theorizing as collecting, trading,
developing using, adapting and discarding recipes/theories...from various sources. Some of them I try--and some of these I keep and modify for use again" (22).

When Heldke offers her recipes or collections of recipes to others, she warns others against using them exclusively:

In developing and passing out epistemological cookbooks, I include recipes on which I’ve staked my reputation--I’m not going to abdicate responsibility in the event of their failure, but will try to discover why it might have occurred, and to think of ways to fix it. Nonetheless some of them might fail...Better that my recipes be used as part of a larger collection, or that certain of them be selected and modified for use in your cookbook. These are my recipes filled with the idiosyncracies of my life (23).

The theories I’ve drawn from and constructed in the present inquiry are also "filled with the idiosyncracies of my life." I believe them to be good, workable ideas, but nonetheless I do not claim that they are generalizable to all students, all teachers, all classrooms. I have tried to reveal how I have come to the (tentative) conclusions I have--what paths I have travelled in order to arrive at this place.

Heldke’s method of philosophical theorizing as well as her desire to write "an epistemological cookbook--not the epistemological cookbook, mind you, but a largish volume that attempts to provide ways to think about a variety of issues" (23), echo my own purpose for this inquiry. But I realize that one of the reasons that I have been drawn to Heldke’s essay is that her open, participatory stance and approach to doing inquiry and using theory are reminiscent of another well known practitioner in composition studies, Donald Murray.

**Murray’s Legacy to Me**

thought of as a kind of epistemological cookbook for writers, filled with recipes (his own and others) and intended to help writers "think about a variety of issues" in writing. Like Heldke’s recipes, this collection of quotes by practicing writers is "filled with the idiosyncracies" of Murray’s life. He writes that it is an "eccentric, personal collection...organized into 16 categories and ordered...into a sequence that makes sense to me" (xii, emphasis added). As he has done throughout his career, Murray encourages readers to be thieves and fliers: "Make my book your book" (xii). Since "each writer brings an individual history to the writing task," Murray tells his audience that it is their "challenge to read these quotations in light of [their] own experience writing, learning, teaching writing, observing writing, reading writing" (xv). He even provides blank pages for readers to add their own recipes/quotes/comments.

Although I have stolen many of Don Murray’s specific ideas for writing and the teaching of writing, for me the most valuable aspect of Murray’s work over the years has been his example of self-initiated, ongoing inquiry into his own writing and teaching. (With emphasis on "ongoing." He has been collecting quotes from writers since junior high school). His habit of ruminating on what he is doing and his willingness to re-examine his thinking in light of new information (gained from his encounters with others--writers, teachers, students--as well as his "other self") have provided me with a model of inquiry. In the second edition of A Writer Teaches Writing (1985) Murray writes:

I used my own experience as a writer and all the study I have done since junior high on how writers write to construct a model of the writing process. Through the years I have created a number of other models--or guesses--of how the writing process works. These models
have been adapted and tested and revised by many people, including myself. I have not been restricted by any need for consistency. What I have sought here is a clearer understanding of how writing is made, and through the years I have begun to learn that the search is more important, in a sense, than what is found. This book presents my latest model of the writing process, the one that includes all that I know now. It may contradict my last book and it may be contradicted in my next book; it most certainly should be contradicted by you as you confront your own writing, your own research, your own reading of the research of others, your own observations of your colleagues and your students (9-10).

Murray seeks "a clearer understanding of how writing is made." The need to enlarge and deepen his understanding of the writing process has been the driving force behind his many books, articles and talks on writing. The need to understand is also the impetus for this present inquiry. These pages contain my most current thinking about reading, writing and reflexivity, but certainly not my last thoughts on the matter. As Murray says about A Writer Teaches Writing, "This book is not the end for me, but another beginning. I have learned from writing it, and having written it, I will learn how to depart from it" (5).

Over the years, Murray has shown me the importance of the provisional, the tentative, or what I have come to think of as "the learner’s stance," a stance that names itself in the here and now, that can explain how it came to be, but that remains open to the possibility of further complication and change. I find that I am more likely to trust those people who adopt such an approach toward their work because this mind-set always seems to me the most rational (and most ethical) way to be. Indeed, Georgia Warnke, writing about the philosophy of Gadamer, suggests that rationality involves
a willingness to admit the existence of better options. The awareness that one’s knowledge is always open to refutation or modification from the vantage point of another perspective is not the basis for suspending confidence in the idea of reason but rather represents the very possibility of rational progress. (1987, 173).

Murray claims that he has had "no need for consistency." He has certainly never pretended to adhere to a single formulation of how writing works—and yet he has been consistent, rationally so. His consistency comes in his willingness to admit the possibility of (and to actively seek) better, clearer ways to understand the writing process.

Even though Murray’s ideas have been stolen, embraced and modified by thousands of teachers and students, Murray has never claimed to speak for anyone but himself. His way is simply a way, not the way. Thus, he has also been consistent in his belief that "there is no single kind of person to teach, no one reason to write, no one message to deliver, no one way to write, no single standard of good writing. Neither is there one way of teaching" (1985, 5). Long before diversity became a buzz word on college campuses, Murray was arguing that: "Diversity is the basic condition of our business...the solution to the problem of diversity is diversity—diversity of teaching and learning experiences" (135). He tells readers of A Writer Teaches Writing that he hopes they "will become, through the experience of writing and teaching, the writer in the title; that each of us individually and differently will use the book and depart from it as we learn from our own pages and our own students" (5). Murray wants his audience to steal whatever they find valuable in his work and refashion it for their own needs. And I have taken (or perhaps I should say
assimilated his ideas) often without realizing I was doing so.

I first encountered Murray through his essay, "The Listening Eye: Reflections on the Writing Conference" (1979), which had been reprinted in an Australian curriculum journal that I found lying around the staff room at my high school in 1981. In this essay, Murray muses on what it is like to teach writing by conference. As he sits in his office waiting for the thirty-fifth conference of the day to begin, he worries that he is a fraud, that he will be "found out." And yet, as he reflects on how he came to teach writing by listening to his students talk about their writing, he realizes that his students are learning because he shows them what they have just discovered themselves. What struck me then was the voice in this piece. (I called it "tone" at the time). I was drawn to the hesitancy and the tentativeness this teacher felt as he reflected on and examined his own teaching. In talking about his own experience, Murray enabled me to look at mine.9

I stole Murray's habit of examining his own processes of writing and teaching. I stole his learner's stance. I stole his need to raise questions. I stole his "other self" and adapted it to my needs. From Murray, I learned that a teacher's subjectivity can be his or her most important tool for observation and interpretation, but I now want to add that this subjectivity must also be reflexive.

The Importance of Subjectivity

One of the tenet(ative)s of this inquiry is that individuals must combine their subjective frames of reference with the objective facts at hand in order to make sense of complex ideas, texts and situations. Specifically, I believe that thinking-like-a-
teacher entails combining one's subjective experience of classrooms, students and subject matter (in this case reading and writing) with the objectified theories of learning and subject knowledge. This is why, as I said in the last chapter, there can be no teacher-proof methods. I also want to suggest that this kind of thinking is valuable in any kind of situation that requires individuals to make sense of a subject through reading and writing. I did not come to this position solely from my reading of Donald Murray's work. I have been brought here by many converging currents.

**The restoration of subjectivity.**

Although the definition of subjectivity is complex, nuanced, and varies according to usage and field of knowledge, strong arguments exist for its importance in the human sciences. According to anthropologist Jay Ruby, interest in reflexivity is connected to the "the restoration of subjectivity as a serious attitude, a basis of gaining knowledge and evaluating it, a ground for making decisions and taking action" (1982, 7). In their influential book, *Women's Ways of Knowing* (1986), Belenky and her colleagues have suggested the important role personal, subjective "ways of knowing" play in the development of women's intellectual lives. And feminist philosopher Lorraine Code has argued convincingly that subjectivity "must always be taken into account when making and assessing knowledge claims of any complexity" (1993, 39), certainly one of the assumptions underlying this inquiry. In my own field of composition studies, Don Murray, Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie have all insisted that to understand the writing process, we must consult the subjective experiences of writers. In many fields, subjectivity has become an important (objective) fact of life--
something to be used rather than ignored or excluded.

While it is beyond the scope of this inquiry to delve into the many formal critiques of objectivism and the notion of the objective (detached, impersonal) researcher that have been advanced by feminists and other critical and interpretive theorists, I can briefly indicate the flavor of these critiques: Patti Lather (1986) notes that "past efforts to leave subjective, tacit knowledge out of the 'context of verification' are seen by many post-positivists as 'naive empiricism'" (270). Ellen Messer-Davidow (1985) calls for knowers to "insert themselves into the domain of inquiry and become self-reflexively part of the investigation" (16). Alan Peshkin echoes Davidow and Lather when he says: "reserve my subjectivity and I do not become a value free participant observer, merely an empty-headed one" (1985, 280).

Disillusionment with rationalist and positivist methods (particularly in the human sciences) have not in themselves led to the recuperation of subjectivity; fear of relativism has been too great. Perhaps one reason the six blind men of Indostan felt compelled to argue for their singular view of the elephant (based on each of their meticulously followed empirical methods) was because the only alternative they could envision—that every blind man is entitled to his own opinion—would have denied the possibility of their being any final measure of truth they could agree upon. Joyce McCarl Nielsen explains that in sociology, those researchers who first questioned the possibility of "true objectivity," and who chose to operate in a more interpretive tradition as an alternative to the scientific method, still believed that "social scientists should attempt to remain value-free" (1990, 7-8). An example here is the work of
Alfred Schutz (whose notion of the stranger, I referred to in Chapter I). Schutz suggested that researchers should attempt to "bracket" their subjectivity so they could be "objective about the subjectivities of others" (Nielsen 1990, 8).

While recuperating the value of subjectivity for making and assessing complex knowledge claims has been an important first step, simply inverting the dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity is problematic also. Thus, a number of theorists and researchers seeking to avoid the pitfalls of either/or conceptualizations have begun to re-envision the subjective/objective dichotomy in a both/and framework. In literary theory, reader response theories with their concern for how readers determine textual meaning based on their own personal experience or feelings in "transaction" with the text (Rosenblatt 1978, 1983; Bleich 1978), or as part of a dialogue (Bakhtin 1981), or as a member of an "interpretive community" (Fish 1980), or as a raced, gendered, classed member of a larger culture, have mostly replaced the purely "objective," formalist theories. In fact, many of the human sciences have now begun to adopt the interpretive and critical methods of literary theory (e.g., Geertz 1973). Drawing on the work of Dewey (and echoing Louise Rosenblatt's theories of reading), for instance, Elliot Eisner (1991) proposes adopting a transactional methodology for educational research because "what we know about the world is a product of the transaction of our subjective life and a postulated objective world" (52). Michael Holzman (1993) suggests that ethnographers adopt Max Weber's definition of objectivity as "intersubjectivity." By amassing many different subjective views and trying to ascertain the patterns and relationships between the views, researchers will be
more likely to determine "the whole picture." (3). Sandra Harding (1991) argues that feminist standpoint epistemologies need to develop a notion of "strong objectivity," which would require among other things that inquirers examine "the relation between the subject and object rather than deny the existence of, or seek unilateral control over, this relation" (152). Attempts to undo the subjective/objective binary will require, as Harding suggests, a "more robust notion of reflexivity." Such a notion would put "the subject or agent of knowledge in the same critical, causal plane as the object of her or his inquiry" (1990, 161). As ethnographer Barbara Tedlock (1991) notes in research involving people, "The observer and the observed are not entirely separate categories" (80).

What this sampling suggests to me is that researchers and scholars in many fields are questioning and seeking ways to explore, complicate and at times, dissolve, the subject-object binary. Within this context, reflexivity has emerged as a potential method for identifying, monitoring, examining and interrogating one's own role in the construction and evaluation of knowledge.

**Teacher subjectivity**

Michael Holzman (1993) claims that subjectivity of the ethnographer should be considered "an instrument of observation and interpretation" (2), and Thomas Newkirk (1991) has made a similar point about teachers' subjectivity:

> teachers need to recognize that the source of their authority comes from their intimate knowledge of the classroom and students, and from intuitions honed by making thousands of judgments and observations of student work. It does not come through deference to expert opinion or through suppressing intuitive resources in favor of more distanced—and academically respectable—means of observation (133).
But I would caution that the source of teacher's authority should not only come from their (subjective) classroom experience. It must also come from theory. As Louise Phelps (1991) notes, "Theory galvanizes and disrupts the system, changing its very questions, undermining long-held beliefs, introducing ambiguities, revealing complexities, setting new tasks, forcing risks" (883). Teachers need to combine their subjectivity with their objective knowledge to achieve what Phelps (after Aristotle) calls "practical wisdom." Teachers must always adapt theories to fit the needs of individual students in specific contexts, and that requires judgment. And judgment, I would argue, requires subjectivity. What is a "judgment call," after all, but the acknowledgment that sense will not be made by the objective facts of the situation alone--a human agent is needed to read or interpret the facts. However, it is the assumption of the present inquiry that this human agent also needs to be a reflexive agent, one who is willing to examine his or her own claims, assumptions and actions in response to his or her interactions with people and ideas.13

Student subjectivity

Irene Papoulis (1993) echoes some of my own feelings as a teacher when she writes: "I am dismayed by the infectiousness of the notion that to think well in a discipline one must put aside one's subjective reactions to academic material" (133). Papoulis goes on to argue that unless students learn to articulate their subjective responses to the thoughts they encounter, they will be crippled when it comes to generating their own ideas...the argument that one must even temporarily abandon one's own responses in order to build a framework from which one can eventually think creatively does not make sense, especially for students who come to college with a hesitant attitude
about their ideas (133).

I agree that students need to use their subjectivity to make sense of their academic work, but not for the same reasons Papoulis offers. I understand her concerns here—they are the same kinds of concerns that first sparked my interest (and many other teachers' interest) in the philosophy of process. For many students, writing papers on their own topics and generating personal responses to texts builds their confidence as writers, readers and thinkers; however, it doesn't automatically ensure original or creative thought. I also understand Papoulis's argument as it is advanced by practicing writers. Often, experienced writers seem to temporarily ignore the demands of audience (the other) to concentrate on what they are trying to say. But they do not do so, I would argue, until the writing pump has been thoroughly primed through the writer's interactions with the world; e.g., reflection, conversations, reading, research, previous writing experience, etc. The writer must be ready to write. I do not believe that ideas are simply endogenous to the writer so that all the writer has to do is subjectively retrieve them. I take issue with Papoulis's point that it is deleterious for students to "even temporarily abandon" their subjectivities for a moment. In fact, I suggest throughout this inquiry that if they are to institute a dialogue with other people or texts (including their own), students need to encounter the stranger experience, which means putting their subjectivities on hold.

Nonetheless, students do need to take their subjectivity into account to "think well in a discipline," if thinking well means constructing one's own thoughtful understanding. As Papoulis notes, we need not "view subjective response as alien to
the academic context" (146). Furthermore, I think Papoulis is correct when she suggests that composition studies is positioned to play an important role in discussions about teaching and learning throughout the university: "our knowledge about the interaction between intuitive insights and theoretical ideas can help us find ways to allow subjectivity to be part of the academic writing of both women and men" (135). Instead of miring ourselves in those ongoing (and debilitating) either-or discussions that so frequently occur between composition departments and the rest of the university about personal (subjective) writing versus academic (objective) writing, we should be involved in showing other disciplines how subjectivity and objectivity work together to create a more complex understanding of subject matter.

I want to illustrate how a student uses his subjectivity to help him make sense (in a deeper way) of an academic subject as well as his own experience. The following essay was written by a junior in my upper level composition course, a young man who had begun attending college at the age of twenty-four. In this essay, which is both an example and a discussion of how subjectivity and objectivity work together, Chad combines knowledge learned from his major, social philosophy, with the circumstances of his own life to arrive at a more complex understanding of what education is.

**Chad: Head and Heart**

Chad’s ten page essay begins with the sentence, "I started attending college so I could get a better job." But he tells us that after he was in school, "I saw that the real reason I was there was to feed a starved intellect, lift a sagging ego and find my heart." Chad explains that growing up with an abusive father taught him some unique
survival strategies:

When the violence was upon us I would use my intellect to put a buffer between me and it...When your father tells you that you are a piece of crap, only not so nicely, you have to say the right things in response so the verbal attack will not escalate into a beating...It was safe to live inside my head. Since I defended myself daily, the intensity of thought combined with having to constantly analyze the situation led to a mind that could handle such intensity and [one that] would often overanalyze...

The emotional bracketing that he learned to do as a child led him to major in philosophy. Chad notes that he sought abstractions in school because of the abstract way he had learned to relate to the world growing up.

As a child, I heard words used in church like "love," "forgiveness" and "father." In my home the meanings of these were different. At home "father" meant pain. In church "father" meant love. The only way to rectify my perception of the world when the language applied to the actions did not correspond to the language and actions of outside sources was through abstractions.

In school, however Chad discovers another way to use his intellect other than to "keep people away from me for safety." He has come understand that his "childhood thought was limited by the pain that consumed my heart," but that "thought is not an empty abstraction."

I now use education to find and create meaning in my world. To do this, I have to apply the concepts to my life. The education that tells me how flowers reproduce does not tell me much about life...I don't care about the sex organs of a flower, but I do care about how the flower obtains its water from the ground, which takes it from the rain, which we pollute, which kills the flower that produces the air we breathe, which keeps us alive, which allows me to be.

Chad writes that he shifts into "intellectualizations when I'm feeling unsure about myself and I talk theories to keep my heart hidden. Intellectualizations are conceptions

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of reality that are not lived; they are superficial but they protect me." Thought, however, entails combining "concepts" with his subjective or lived experience. "To know something is to have thought it out well enough to keep it as a living part of my life." Thought does not entail closing himself (as he was compelled to do as a child) to the other.

When I read a text I try to see how the author thinks and feels about his/her world. The words s/he gives me are alive with the accumulation of meaning s/he has inherited from authors she read as well as [his or] her contributions to life...The way a person thinks is a reflection of the world she perceives. And the world we perceive is determined by how we think of the world.

Chad tells us that the activities of "writing, talking to another person, re-reading and thinking are ways to clarify my thoughts. They help me to understand my heart through my head and my head through my heart." Chad's metaphor for the dialectical interplay between objectivity and subjectivity is "head and heart." Both need to operate together. Theory needs to be grounded, lived, felt, experienced. "If I use concepts to relate to my world without feeling the reality of the concepts in my life and the lives of others it is pure intellectualization."

Theories are necessary, writes Chad, because "they are a way to uncover or rediscover our hearts." And of course, that is exactly what this theorizing has enabled him to do--begin to frame his early experience. Drawing on this experience, he cautions that "intellectualization can also be a way to hide from our hearts." He notes that he was skilled at using his head to protect his heart. "I've found that when my heart is too heavy with grief or sorrow...I use my intellect to hide away, much like I did as a child." What is more, Chad finds that when "I let my head control my
actions I...usually project my low self esteem onto others by talking down to them or by my shutting them off in conversation. But when I use my head and heart, I can put myself in their place and empathize with them." For Chad then, "The separation of head and heart can't be allowed." Objective knowledge (in Chad's words, abstraction, theory, concept, intellectualization) are necessary but insufficient for his understanding and his (moral and political) being-in-the-world-of-others.

In her book, *What Can She Know* (1991) and her essay, "Taking Subjectivity into Account" (1993), Lorraine Code argues that "knowledge is, necessarily and inescapably, the product of an intermingling of subjective and objective elements" (1991, 30). I want to look at some of Code's ideas about knowledge more closely. Not only do her conclusions mirror what Chad has discovered in his essay, I believe they describe the ways many (reading and writing) teachers think about understanding and learning. I should clarify at the outset, that Code's conception of "knowing" seems more in keeping with my notion of "understanding." However, in discussing her work here, I use her terms.

**Lorraine Code: Taking Subjectivity into Account**

I remember once when I approached my undergraduate physics teacher for help, he said: "Good God girl! It's right there in the book." But it wasn't in my book. I couldn't see them, although my Professor seemed to think that the facts of physics "p" were there for any subject-knower "s" to discern. Traditionally, epistemologists have used (objective) knowledge of everyday objects (things that can be known by perception and observation "from a distance") as the paradigm case of knowing. In
theory, a knower should be able to fill the role of "s" and still discern the same facts "p." The knower's subjectivity is not at issue. However, as teachers have discovered (and as our six blind men have already suggested), learning and knowledge making for many of us is not so clean and simple. Lorraine Code notes that while the facts may be "there, present for analysis...[they] may mean different things to different people, affect some people profoundly and others not at all." (1991, 45-46). For Code (and me), facts are both subjective and objective.

Code takes issue "with the belief that epistemologists only need understand the conditions for propositional, observationally derived knowledge, and all the rest will follow" (1993, 26), and she argues that there is no justifiable reason why this model should have paradigmatic status. Under the traditional view, most "of the more complex, contentious and locationally variable aspects of cognitive practice are excluded from epistemological analysis" (1993, 20). Like Sandra Harding and others, Code suggests that "objectivity requires taking subjectivity into account" (1993, 32). The circumstances of knowers--e.g., their historical, cultural and political location, their creativity, and their "affectivity, commitments, enthusiasms, desires and interests" (1991, 46)--must be considered. Code maintains that the way we come to know people has at least as much claim to being the Rosetta stone of epistemological analysis as the way we know inanimate objects. Her reasons are instructive for those of us engaged in the human sciences.

The kind of knowledge necessary for "knowing people" requires more than objective perception of the facts. As Code notes, "we can know all the facts about
someone" and still we "would not know her as the person she is. No more can knowing all the facts about oneself, past and present, guarantee self knowledge (1991, 40). I would argue that in the same way, I can know all the facts about physics and still not understand physics. Chad can use his head to abstract or intellectualize, but as he says, his understanding is not complete.

Code makes the point that knowledge of other people "develops" and "it admits of degrees in ways knowing that the book is red does not" (1991, 37). This conception of knowledge fits with my understanding of teaching and learning. Knowledge of my subject--reading and writing--is not an all or nothing knowledge. It is a matter of degree. It accrues gradually through instruction, experience, and reflection on that experience. And like knowledge of people, knowledge of reading and writing is never final or fixed. It requires constant learning and revision (which is one of the reasons, for example, Don Murray says he continues to write: writing is a subject one never masters). Likewise, knowing people, "precisely because of the fluctuations and contradictions of subjectivity, is an ongoing, communicative, interpretive process. It can never be fixed or complete: any fixity that one might claim...is at best a fixity in flux" (1991, 38).

Acquiring knowledge of other people is a slow, tentative process and is "open to negotiation between knower and 'known', where the 'subject' and 'object' positions are always, in principle, exchangeable" (1991, 38). Thus, knowing is a bi-directional process in which both knower and known are implicated. As Code notes, even "knowing other people peripherally cannot be unresponsive, emotionless, neutral"
In addition, this kind of interpretive, tentative, never-complete approach to the getting of knowledge can offer "a safeguard against dogmatism and rigidity" (1991, 38).

By examining what is involved in the process of knowing other people, we begin to understand why Code argues that "subjectivity has always to be taken into account in making and assessing knowledge claims of any complexity" (1993, 39). Specifically, the knower's subjectivity needs to be "a situated, self-critical, socially produced subjectivity, yet one that can intervene in and be accountable for its positioning" (1991, 82). It needs to be a reflexive subjectivity, because reflexivity provides a way for knowers to monitor and analyze their subjectivity. Furthermore, if the knower plays a self-critical role in the making of knowledge, as Code suggests, then it would seem cognitive agency also entails some kind of ethical responsibility. As Code notes, "knowing well is a matter of both moral-political and of epistemic concern" (1991, 72).

Code's theories of knowledge supply an epistemological rationale for what writers seem to know intuitively (but more than likely have learned from experience): that the writer's imagination--human subjectivity--is needed to translate knowledge and fact into meaning and understanding, that understanding is provisional, and that this process is never a straightforward or neutral endeavor. I believe the personal essay, the subject of Chapter III, is a particularly useful vehicle for this purpose. In addition, Code's ideas about knowledge and knowing support the pedagogical theories that inform this inquiry. My belief that reading and writing are vehicles for making sense
rely on a number of specific pedagogical assumptions and practices. It is to these assumptions that I now turn.

**Pedagogical Assumptions**

As I intimated in the beginning of this chapter, my understanding of these epistemological matters are grounded in and tempered by my experiences as a teacher (and as a student who is used to monitoring her own learning). It is almost impossible for me think about knowledge without also thinking about the means for learning and acquiring it.

I teach reading and writing as a means of constructing, deepening, complicating, challenging and at times transforming students’ understanding of their subjects. The kind of understanding I’m talking about often requires students to engage in a process I call "unlearning," the gradual modification or revision of previous understandings in response to new theories, beliefs or experiences. To engage in unlearning, I believe that individuals have to become reflexive; that is, they must uncover and identify their old/current understandings in light of their encounters with others. My focus here is on dialectical encounters that occur via the processes of reading and writing. Thus, the other is often a text, usually someone else’s text, but sometimes one’s own (although it may also be another person). By dialectical, I mean that the encounter is not a one shot transaction, but entails engaging in a back and forth dialogue, e.g. between writer and reader, reader and text, writer and text, or reader/writer and self.

When I suggest that the essay, the subject of Chapter III, for instance, might
offer a useful vehicle for reflexive inquiry, I am making this suggestion with a specific pedagogical context in mind. I assume that students are writing on topics about which they have some knowledge and interest (or topics that they have been allowed to gain knowledge and interest), but not so much knowledge or expertise that they have no inclination to inquire further. I assume that students have time to approach their subjects openly, tentatively; that they have time to explore, talk about their ideas with others, write multiple drafts, read, change their mind, revise, or start over without fear of failure or penalty. I assume that teachers are actively engaged in the process. To help students initially learn to see their ideas from other positions, I assume teachers are providing a counter discourse in the form of other readings or through conferences and discussion. I assume the course offers ongoing opportunity for students to look back and examine what they have thought and what they have said from their current positions. And I assume that students can re-work earlier papers if they choose.

By the same token, the notion of essayistic reading that I describe in Chapter IV also presupposes a pedagogical context. Thus, when I suggest that reading texts openly and tentatively, dialogically and reflexively, can complicate students’ understandings of themselves, I mean it to be understood that this assumption holds true if students are taught how to read this way. And here, I use the term "true" in a teacher’s sense. In the composition classroom, we talk of truth as being both context specific and in terms of degree. Truth, like knowledge, like understanding, like the processes of reading and writing themselves, is always achieved a little bit at a time. So, yes, essayistic reading can complicate students’ understandings--more or less. And
the composition course provides a site for learning how to use reading and writing to engage in a kind of intellectual inquiry that students may find helpful to their work in the rest of the academy—more or less.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER II

1. I do not believe my teacher approach to theory precludes my being able to adopt a scholarly stance. In 1986 I wrote a critique of George Hillocks’ book, Research on Written Composition (1986), entitled "A Teacher’s Response to..." I lambasted Hillocks’ meta-analysis of some 60 research studies on the teaching of writing on many levels, but my central critique was that Hillocks hadn’t considered the role of the teacher or student in considering the effectiveness of each method being measured. My professor commented: "How does your central defense of process fall under your ‘teacher speaks’ thesis? It seems much more distanced, more objective and scholarly, than teacherly." (Although the professor accused me of being an imposter, at least he didn’t accuse me of stealing). I spoke as a teacher then and I speak as a teacher now because first, I see myself as an individual always concerned with the pedagogical; and second, because I bring an understanding of knowledge that is not easily separated from questions of acquisition, learning and development.

2. The original thief and flier was in fact a male god—Hermes, the clever and mischievous winged messenger of the Greek pantheon.

3. In the same vein, Lorraine Code (1991) argues that it is vital that women learn to evaluate the "experts' expertise." She notes that women "have to challenge and reconstruct the meanings of expertise if they are to take control of their lives" (185), which to my way of thinking is another way of saying that women have to learn to be thieves and fliers.

4. I decided that when someone publishes their work, it becomes part of the public domain, and as such, it is there to be used by all. Thieving from a book (as long as we acknowledge that is what we are doing) is a quite different matter than taking from a culture, group or individual. I think we must always be careful when our research concerns those less powerful than ourselves, as in the case of ethnographic research, for instance (where researchers tend to "study down" rather than "study up"). Reflexivity, of course, can act as one kind of check on this process.

5. This phenomenon of certain scholars leading you to the ideas of other scholars happened throughout this inquiry. For example, one reason the work of Gadamer felt so "familiar" to me when I first began reading it, may have been because he was an important influence for Donald Bartholomae and Mariolina Salvatore’s work on reading at Pittsburgh—I had already met him indirectly through them. However, no doubt timing plays a role here too. We may not have appreciated or understood the thinking of some of our ancestors if we had met them at earlier points in our careers.

6. Heldke uses the term "self-reflective" here. I probably would have used "reflexive" because I imagine that people only know what kind of operators they are from having had many previous encounters with other recipes. Some might argue that people must
first discover what kind of operator they are (by simply looking within themselves?) before they begin to cook (or teach or do philosophy). However, as should be getting clear by now, I tend to take a Vygotskian view: inner dialogue with oneself (reflection) is only possible as a result of having engaged in dialogue with others (reflexivity). Nonetheless, as I mentioned in the first chapter, I think reflexivity and ongoing self-reflection work together.

7. Other feminists have suggested similar approaches to expressing and sharing ideas. Joyce Trebilcot (1989) uses another cooking analogy—that of the potluck dinner in which everyone offers a recipe that they themselves like, and that they believe others may find tasty/satisfying as well. The focus here is specifically on the recipe giver, the spirit in which she offers her recipe to others and the context in which the recipe is given. Heldke, on the other hand, focuses on the methods of recipe users and receivers as well as recipe makers and givers. As my later chapters will attempt to show, I believe that the kind of exchange these philosophers advocate can not be the sole responsibility of either the writer/teacher or the reader/learner. Both play a role. For instance, someone may offer me a recipe to use, to modify or discard as I see fit, but I still may receive their recipe as an imperative and thus feel compelled to strictly adhere to its directions. In this instance, neither the recipe or the recipe giver is at fault.

Taking a different tact, Carlos Fuentes suggests that the kind of text (or to continue the current analogy, the actual recipe) is as important as the stance of the reader and writer. In a Harpers excerpt (1989) written in response to the death decree laid on Salmon Rushdie by the Ayatollah, he distinguishes between sacred and secular texts. He writes that "the sacred text is, by definition, a completed and exclusive text. You can add nothing to it. It does not converse with anyone. It is its own loud speaker" (17). The sacred text is one from which it is not permissible to steal, adapt or ignore. In contrast, Fuentes believes the novel is a text that "indicates we are always becoming. There is no final solution. No last word" (17). The sacred text is supposed to represent The Truth; whereas the secular text (in this case, the novel) represents the search for truth. Although, I still maintain that the readers of these texts, rather than the texts themselves, determine their secular or sacred nature, as a reader, I am always appreciative of a writer (for example, Donald Murray) who makes clear that his or her approach/theory/belief is just one of many.

8. I hope by this point, readers will know that I use model in the sense that Heldke uses recipe: not as something to be imitated or slavishly followed, but as something that is worth stealing from, as something to adapt and modify for one’s own purpose and context.

9. I see Murray’s shadow everywhere (starting with the title) in the first article I ever wrote: "My Students Are Teaching Me to Be A Teacher of Writing: The Voice of a High School Teacher" (1982), which was distributed to high schools in Victoria and New South Wales. Here is the by now familiar genre of teacher reflecting on (and wowing about) her experience of teaching the writing process. Murray’s essay had
given me permission to examine and share what I was noticing in my own classroom, however partial, approximate and particular my findings were. What is significant for me now about this piece is how I have modeled Murray's tentativeness and learner's stance. "However doubts begin to threaten my elation... Nonetheless, I continue because I'm more excited by what I'm discovering than discouraged by how it will fit into the system..." Here is a teacher filled with uncertainty about what she is doing, yet (boldly and heroically) proceeding nevertheless (Oh the drama of it all).

The whole approach would mean me ignoring years of conditioning as a teacher. I would need to disregard notions of what my students should be doing in favor of concentrating on what they were doing. I would have to create time for establishing a conference framework, time for my students to gain control over their ideas, time for them to view the processes they used and time for predictable routines to be developed. Did we have that much time?

As much as I may poke fun at myself here, I can see the beginnings of the very same tentativeness that will become the basis for the essayism I describe in Chapter III.

10. The teacher's subjective understanding of subject matter suggests why Murray so strongly believed, and why I believe, that teachers of writing should write or have had the experience of writing themselves. By experience, I mean the experience of having to construct a topic, of getting stuck for ideas, drafting, of having a draft not work, revising, having others read your work in process, revising some more, editing, cutting your favorite lines, abandoning a piece, starting over and so forth. While I do not believe these kinds of experiences are sufficient (a point on which Murray and I perhaps disagree) to be a teacher of writing, I do see them as necessary.

11. In my essay, "Being Two Places at Once: Feminism and the Development of 'Both/And' Perspectives" (1994, forthcoming), I suggest that the road to multiple perspectives runs through many emotional, social and political either/or positions. While inverting the elements of any dichotomy may be an important and necessary first step in the development of more complex perspectives, I caution that it should not be the last step.

12. For example, see Julie Nelson's interesting model for complicating gender dichotomies (Hypatia 7(3), 1992).

13. I have been implying that a teacher's subjectivity is important for effective teaching. However, teacher subjectivity is also at the heart of another current discussion about teachers. The whole area of teacher research encompasses important arguments about subjectivity, reflexivity and reflection that would add an important layer to my current inquiry. My questions and the concerns voiced by a number of people in the field of teacher education overlap a great deal. I will briefly refer to some of that work in the last chapter, when I talk about implications for further
research.

14. When I say students need to use their subjectivity, readers need to bear in mind that I am making a distinction between knowing and understanding/making sense. To "know" the origin and insertion points of the muscles in the body or what formula will produce the standard deviation may not require subjectivity. To know what Plato's concept of the dialectic is may not require subjectivity. I believe that making sense of this knowledge does. To make sense, a knower must be actively engaged in constructing understanding and meaning for him or herself. Generally in the academy, the most common way that knowers use to communicate both their knowledge and their understanding of the subjects they are studying is through writing. In this inquiry, I am suggesting that writing and reading are also methods for constructing an understanding of knowledge, and that this construction requires subjectivity.

15. I am not sure what Code means by "knowing" and "knowledge." I find the these concepts exceedingly frustrating and confusing. Some people, I think, would reserve the use of knowing for specific kinds of knowledge claims. They would argue that knowing and knowledge can not be subjective, although they might allow that subjectivity could be a factor in the construction and assessment of knowledge claims. Code, however, suggests that just because "perfect objective knowledge of people is not possible gives no support to the contention either that 'other minds' are unknowable or that such knowledge as people may claim of one another never merits the label 'knowledge'" (1991, 39). While I am sympathetic to Code's position, I have nonetheless tried to avoid getting entangled in these heady epistemological discussions.

I simply acknowledge that for many people, knowing and understanding are interchangeable terms. People talk about specific kinds of knowing and knowers--e.g., "women's ways of knowing" or "teacher knowing." Nonetheless, I have tried to be careful not to use the term "knowing" or conflate it with "understanding" or "learning." I have opted to describe the product generated by knowers in response to themselves and their worlds as understanding. The process I see is one of "making sense."
CHAPTER III

WRITING AND REFLEXIVITY: ESSAYS AND ESSAYISM

Writing and Thinking

In teaching writing, we are tacitly teaching a version of reality and the student’s place and mode of operation in it...we are not simply offering training in a useful technical skill...We are teaching a way of experiencing the world, a way of ordering it and making sense of it.

Many claims have been made about the relationship between writing, thinking, and learning. Writing has been said to either support, enable or transform the thinking of individuals (and societies) for many reasons including the following ones offered by Langer and Applebee:

1) the permanence of the written word, allowing the writer to rethink and revise over an extended period;
2) the explicitness required in writing, if meaning is to remain constant beyond the context in which it was originally written;
3) the resources provided by the conventional forms of discourse for organizing and thinking through new relationships among ideas; and
4) the active nature of writing, providing a medium for exploring implications entailed within otherwise unexamined assumptions (1987, 4-5).

In their book, How Writing Shapes Thinking (1987), Langer and Applebee study the ways writing improved the thinking and learning of secondary school students. They find that while writing does indeed "assist" learning, "different kinds of writing activities lead students to focus on different kinds of information, to think about that
information in different ways, and in turn to take quantitatively and qualitatively different kinds of knowledge away from their writing experiences" (135). Short-answer and extended, analytical writing (as opposed to note-taking, comprehension questions or summary) increased students’ knowledge of the topic under consideration and encouraged students to reconceptualize the information and integrate it with their own knowledge. Analytic writing enabled students to manipulate a smaller amount of information in more ways, process it in more depth and remember it for a longer period of time. The other forms of writing lead to a more superficial understanding of a larger body of information. In addition, Langer and Applebee found that writing has a greater effect on learning when the material is more complex. When the information to be studied or manipulated is familiar or well understood, writing appears to contribute little if anything to learning.

Cognitive psychologist Frank Smith suggests that learning occurs when we modify what’s in our heads as a result of our encounters in the world. Langer and Applebee’s quantitative study, which focused mostly on students’ ability to recall and use topic knowledge and construct a gist from their reading, however, seems more concerned with comprehension, which, according to Smith, is the ability to relate what’s in our head to what we find in the world. Comprehension may or may not occur as a result of learning. If what’s already in our head is sufficient to understand what we encounter in the world, no modification is necessary and no learning occurs. But if we have to modify what’s in our heads before we can make sense of our encounters with the world or as a result of our encounters in the world, learning does
occur. Langer and Applebee's study doesn't distinguish between comprehension and learning, nor do they specify what they mean by learning. Learning might simply entail adding to what individuals already know, it might mean complicating or deepening what they already know, it might mean transforming what they already know and it might mean reflexively identifying or articulating what's in their heads--what it is that they know (that they didn't know they knew).

Because Langer and Applebee's study was confined to examining assigned writing about specific, teacher-selected subject matter (e.g., economic expansion in the early twentieth century), it does not provide a sense of how "interest" might affect the writing-thinking relation. As Frank Smith reminds us, we do not usually think well about material we find boring, tedious or purposeless. We do not think well about material that we have only engaged superficially. Being asked to write about such information just compounds the tedium (or the confusion). However, Smith notes that both reading and writing can "promote thought--provided that what is read is worth thinking about [to the reader] and that writing is used for extending the imagination of the writer" (1990, 128).1

Taking a different tact, John T. Gage (1986) draws on the ideas of Plato and Aristotle to examine the relationship between writing and thinking. He suggests that writing can "clarify and improve understanding" when it "provide[s] the occasion for genuine inquiry and the exercise of reasonable judgment" (19). Writing teaches students "to have ideas of their own and to accept the responsibilities that come from having them" (19). However, he warns, that "such ideas do not occur to people
spontaneously...it is when confronted with the ideas of others, that we look for our own" (20).

In the following section I offer a "real-life" example of writing in response to "the ideas of others." Meg Peterson-Gonzalez's work examining the writing of peace corps volunteers complicates Langer and Applebee's findings by suggesting that it is not simply the writing task or the kind of writing that contributes to what we learn; it is also a matter of the individual's personal and cultural ways of apprehending the world. I have suggested that we are more likely to become reflexive through dialectical encounters with others and that such encounters can potentially result in learning--significant modification of the theories in our heads. Peterson-Gonzalez's work supports this contention, but it also reveals the extent to which we work to resist this modification.

_Writing to Learn: An Example from the Peace Corps_

In her dissertation, _Vivencias: Writing as a Way into a New Language and Culture_ (1991), Peterson-Gonzalez examines how writing contributes to the cross-cultural transition process of four peace corps volunteers to the Dominican Republic. In their training classes each week, the volunteers are required to write a "Ile" (pronounced "zhay") in Spanish, usually on a topic of their choice. In some ways, the Ile is similar to a personal essay. It is an account of a "life learning experience" (vivencia) that holds significance for the writer, or an experience that changes the writer in some important way. Although the Ile has a prescribed form consisting of five parts, the "essential elements of the Ile are the experience itself and the reflection
on that experience to create meaning" (15).

Peterson-Gonzalez finds that each individual's literacy, which she defines as his or her "way of knowing about the world, of learning, of adapting themselves to new circumstances" (336), determines the manner and degree to which he or she is able to integrate into the new culture. All of the volunteers (Peterson-Gonzalez included) use their literacy in many different ways: "to try to contain this new world and make it more familiar, to act upon it, to reflect upon it, to understand it, to present ourselves to it, to try to control the emotional stress of the transformation we were going through (337). However, the volunteers also "had characteristic ways of using literacy which were in part a product of [their] personal and cultural history as literate persons and in part [their] reaction to suddenly being thrown in a totally unfamiliar environment" (337). What is more, the volunteers seem to approach the writing of the lile in ways that mirror their approach to the new culture (347).

Even though the lile is an analytic genre, even though informants can write about what is "interesting" to them, and even though they are writing about "complex" material, because the informants also have to actively manipulate the language as well as the ideas, it is not simply the writing task, but also the ways the informants interpret the task that contribute to their "learning." No one is able to grasp the concept of the lile right away, and one volunteer never does--the same volunteer who resists or limits her integration into the new culture. Rather than modify the theory in her head to fit her new circumstances, Leanne, a fifty year old, fundamentalist Christian from the midwest, modifies what she finds in the new culture to fit the
theory she has in her head. Leanne reconceives the lle as a story or account with a
Christian moral or universal truth attached to it. She does not use the lle to construct
meaning in Spanish or to try to understand her experience in the new culture. Instead,
she focuses on technical correctness, limiting herself to using only the words and
forms she knows. As Peterson-Gonzalez notes, Leanne did not "allow the lle to
become authentic, precisely because of its potential for catalyzing cultural and
linguistic transition" (372).

However, "[t]hose who were able to use the lle in more personal ways seemed to
integrate better into the Dominican community" (370). "Personal ways" refers to the
volunteers' capacity for using the lle as a vehicle for reflecting on and making sense
of their experiences. For most of them it appears true that "the road to a clearer
understanding of one's own thoughts is travelled on paper" (Gage 1986, 24). Three of
the volunteers use the lle in "personal" ways, but not the same way. Gerald uses
the lle to determine what an experience means and to draw a "lesson" from his
experience. The lesson or the significance of the experience only becomes clear to him
in the actual writing. Marie uses the lle "like a journal;" it is a place for her to make
sense of her emotional experience and "to work out personal issues." (375). Like
Gerald, she discovers her meaning as she writes. The process of writing is what is
most important for her. Maggie, on the other hand, has a better indication of what she
will say about the experience before she writes. She uses her lle to extend and craft
her thinking. For these three volunteers, writing becomes a way for them to deepen
their understanding of the new culture as well as enlarge their understanding of their
native culture and themselves. Writing the Ile thus provides the occasion for reflexive or bi-directional learning. As Gage observes,

Writing is an occasion for making ideas matter, and without ideas to compel it, it is an empty exercise...the serious attempt to compose one's thoughts in writing is what can lead one to the very important discovery not only of what to think, but why...This is the most significant sense in which writing is a way of learning (1986, 25).

**Writing for Discovery: Generating Earned Insights**

As three of the Peace Corps volunteers demonstrate, and as many writers, academics and students will attest, writing (like teaching) can be a useful medium for making ideas, beliefs and assumptions more fully manifest--not only to another audience but also to oneself. In the process of trying to articulate an idea for another, we can inadvertently "discover" new meaning, significance or depth in that idea ourselves. I believe that the notion of "writing for discovery," which Donald Murray, Peter Elbow and others have written extensively about, is in many respects a reflexive process.

Writing for discovery is very much connected to reading for discovery and involves what Donald Murray (1978/1982) described many years ago as a process of "internal revision." Once writers have produced a text, they "read to discover where their content, form, language and voice have taken them" (Murray, 77). The written text becomes a medium for discovery. Writers look "through the word--or beyond or behind the word--for the information the word will symbolize...[They] discover what they have to say by relating pieces of specific information to other bits of information and use words to symbolize and connect that information" (Murray, 79).
Writing for discovery, then, is not simply (or not only) "free" writing. It is a
deliberate, intentional way of manipulating information to access meaning. As
meanings emerge and evolve, the writer may learn how she has come to hold these
ideas or she may "remember" something she did not know she knew. The process of
internal revision can yield what Thomas Newkirk (1989) has coined "earned insights."
I understand an earned insight to be a kind of understanding, whose essential truth is
only realized or more fully grasped as it is made manifest through the individual’s
experience and contemplation of that experience.

Earned insights may be contrasted with what I call "ready-made conclusions."
When a parent tells a child not to touch the stove because it is hot, the child is
expected to accept this already formulated truth based on the parent’s knowledge and
experience. However, if the child touches the stove and experiences the heat for
herself, she "earns" her knowledge and comes to understand the truth of the parent’s
request in a different, personalized (painful) way; it is a truth now confirmed by her
own experience. Obviously, we would not need or want to have to earn every bit of
knowledge we own. For example, at the moment I am quite willing to accept ready-
made conclusions about what my car needs and how my computer works. I am
thankful that I do not have to "earn" my insights.

Gerald, one of the Peace Corp volunteers in Peterson-Gonzalez’s study,
provides another example. A few weeks into his training, Gerald wrote an Ile about
how he had come to understand his teacher’s point that Spanish es diferente. In the
Ile, Gerald wrote, ""I understood that I was not thinking correctly. Spanish had a
different set of rules. This recognition has made learning Spanish much easier"
(Peterson-Gonzalez 130). However, in the course of discussing his lle with Peterson-Gonzalez, he commenced a process of internal revision. Gerald looked "through the word--or beyond or behind the word" and, drawing on his own experience in the Dominican Republic, realized that *es diferente* could also be applied to cultures as well as languages: "[E]ach culture has evolved within its own traditions and 'seems logical within a certain paradigm.' Behavior in different cultures *es diferente* and difficult to interpret, especially when ‘90% of the clues you have in the United States, including language, are missing" (130). Gerald has now "earned" this insight. His experience has not only confirmed the "truth" of his teacher's statement, it has also allowed him to extend or apply this truth about language to culture.

Like Leanne, the volunteer who only wrote lle that confirmed her world view, many student writers have only learned to use writing as a medium to communicate "ready-made conclusions." They have not experienced or been taught the generative capabilities of writing. When writers already understand the significance (or the "gist") of what they write before they begin to write, or when writers simply attach a generic point or meaning to some event or experience, they are not writing to discover or earn their insights. However, when writers use their writing to think through their encounters with new ideas or reflect on past experiences, it seems likely that they may begin to formulate new understandings.

Much of the text I have written here--indeed, much of the text I will write--is the result of internal revision. Working with an abundance of information (and
abundance needs to be emphasized; the pump must be primed for water to flow.

Discoveries do not appear *ex nihilo*; I write by juxtaposing one idea with another idea and then reading what I have written to find out what it means or what it suggests. In the process of trying to explain the idea of writing for discovery to my readers and myself, I have made a connection between the concept of internal revision and the notion of earned insight. Of course, I wouldn’t have thought to do this if I hadn’t already had this information (from my research and experience) available to begin with. Putting these two ideas side by side on the page has not only enabled me to flesh out a fuller description of writing for discovery, I find that my own understanding of both internal revision and earned insight has deepened. Thus, I come to see that perhaps writing to discover entails more than writing to find out what I think about a given topic; it also involves making these kinds of unanticipated insights. Written texts, however, do not usually reveal their writers’ personal epiphanies. Certainly these discoveries are not visible in most academic texts or works of fiction. They would not be discernable in this text if I had not deliberately chosen to expose them by moving from straight exposition into *essaying*.

Perhaps then, one way that the process of writing contributes to thinking is through its capacity to generate earned insights. It is important to note, however, that working on *any* piece of writing for an extended period of time has the potential to assist the writer in coming to know something in a different or more complicated way. Immersion and experience play a role here. Seasoned, well-practiced writers (novelists, poets, non-fiction writers) or scholars who use writing regularly in their work
(scholarly or philosophical article or essay) are also more likely to discover new meaning through writing no matter what they write because of their stance and approach to inquiry. I want to suggest, however, that for less practiced writers or for persons not used to the rigors of long-distance thinking, learning to write exploratory essays (on topics these writers find engaging) might be a particularly useful practice for enabling them to make connections and generate earned insights through writing.

Before I discuss more fully what I consider to be the qualities of personal essay writing that make it a useful vehicle for inquiry, let me offer an example of a student essay that I think depicts writing that earns rather than simply carries its own insights. This was the final version of a paper that Susan, a student in my upper level composition class a few years ago, had worked on intermittently throughout the semester.

Susan: What's In a Name?

In her essay, Susan writes about trying to decide whether or not she should take the name of her mother’s new husband who wishes to adopt her and her twin brother. She and her brother, Rich, are both twenty-one years old and, as she observes, "being adopted seems out of the ordinary at this age...[I]f we were younger...adoption would not seem like such a peculiar thing to do." Nonetheless, Susan has been leaning toward taking her stepfather’s name. "We have grown together as a family, full of loving, caring and sharing...Our acceptance of his name would mean a great deal to him and make him very proud."

However, her choice is complicated by the fact that Rich does not wish to
change his name. Because they are twins, they feel they should have the same name.

As Susan begins to examine their reasons for their choices, she realizes that she and her brother are each looking at this decision from a gendered perspective. "We are both playing the roles that society has dictated."

Susan tells us that Rich is faced with deciding whether to adhere to the tradition "that the male(s) are responsible for carrying on the family name throughout the generations."

My brother is torn between accepting the name Barton at the expense of terminating the continuation of our family name, Johnson, given to us by our natural father. There is, among men, a sense of loyalty to their fathers in this respect. If they were to give up that name for any reason, it would be as if they were betraying their father. I know that Rich feels this as well...I remember him distinctly saying, "How would you feel? It would be like a slap in the face to Dad."

But Susan, herself, is not so sure. "How could we possibly speculate or know what our father would think without being able to ask him?" For Rich, however, not only would giving up his last name be an insult to his father, it would take away his own identity as a person:

My brother also feels that his name is what gives him his identity and serves as the backbone of his existence. The name Johnson is his birth right... His name is a means with which others will associate with him, with how they will treat him, what they will think of him. How he is accepted by society, determined by his particular name, will indirectly shape the person he becomes. If he were to change his name, the new name would not be a true indication of the person that he is. He would be a person with another name.

Susan wonders, though, if names actually "give us a particular identity, [or] is it what's inside that really counts, or is it a combination of the two?" And it is upon this point--the relationship between one's name and one's identity--that their
differences of opinion hinge:

I believe that one's sense of being and identity comes from within. A
name to me is simply a convenience... there seems to be too much
emphasis on the importance that names carry as indicators of our
identities, over and above the importance of realizing the person that
lies inside. A name is more like a shell that covers us to represent who
we are to the outside world, but that name gives no real representation
of the thoughts, ideals, emotions that make each of us a unique person.

Here, Susan makes a provisional discovery, an "earned insight," that has emerged
through her close examination of the subject. Up until this moment, she has been
reflective; now she also becomes reflexive. She begins to contemplate the reasons for
her beliefs.

My own thoughts have been shaped primarily because of the person I
am... I cannot deny that the person I have become has been a
consequence of how I have been raised by my parents, the small town I
grew up in and because I am female. I find that I am not socially
aggressive, always trying to be different, the one to stand out in a
crowd. I don't make a conscious effort to go against the trends in
society. I don't feel I have a reason to...I don't consider myself a weak
person...I am old fashioned. I believe in the [traditional] roles of men
and women...women over the years have not been expected or
conditioned, as men have been, to carry on a family name, but rather to
accept a new one...I am content with accepting a new family name. I
will become Susan Barton...it is simply the right thing to do for myself.

As Susan begins to articulate why the decision to change her name doesn't create the
same conflict for her that it does for her brother, she realizes that each of them, in
acting out these traditional, gendered roles, are doing so out of a sense "of loyalty to
our father and to his family before him."

I feel the person my father helped me to become, the identity and the
self that I have, lies deep within me. It was not my father's name that
has helped make me who I am. It was his soul and the love that he
gave...That is what I will carry on for the rest of my life.
For Susan, then, accepting a new name (something she plans to do when she gets married) is what her own father would have wanted. She is honoring his values by subscribing to them. It is not the name that is important, but his beliefs that she plans to "carry on for the rest of my life."

Writing this essay has not caused Susan to alter her perspective. She has, however, developed a deeper understanding of why she has come to the decision that she has. What makes Susan's conclusion an "earned insight" and not a "ready-made conclusion" is that these traditional beliefs have not just been unconsciously accepted, their truth has now been consciously "justified" by Susan's contemplation of her experience. She has articulated her tacit beliefs and is now more aware of why she holds these beliefs. As readers, we may not agree with Susan's conclusions, or we may feel that she has curtailed her inquiry too soon; nonetheless, we should now understand her conclusions. As Newkirk notes, the writer's earned insights are conclusions that often win a reader's respect and understanding, not because they are "startling truths but because of the speculation and the examination of experience that went into them...we... are moved by them because we have had access to the process of their formulation" (1989, 22).

What is important here is the nature of Susan's inquiry. As the teacher, I have witnessed how Susan's ideas have evolved from her prior drafts. I also know that the insights generated in an essay are provisional. "An essay is worth more than the resolution because the passage, the traveling of the mind, surpasses taking a position, since any position is inherently tentative and bound to be supplanted by others" (Tetel
1990, 2). I have learned from my own experience as a writer and a teacher that often the thinking does not end when the paper does. Susan notes in her concluding paragraph that "this decision has forced me to look at myself as a female in society." Although Susan may have curtailed her inquiry at this point of "temporary illumination" (Good 1988), my hope and expectation as a teacher are that writing this essay has not only helped her to reach a more complex awareness of the factors influencing her decision to keep her name, but that the process of writing this essay has provided Susan with a method for thinking that she can use to see where she stands in relation to many subjects.

In the rest of this chapter, then, I want to consider in more detail how a specific kind of writing, the exploratory essay, might provide the occasion for a specific kind of thinking--reflexive thinking. Reflexivity, as I have suggested, occurs in response to an other. As we saw with Susan’s essay, the juxtaposition of her position with her brother’s enabled her to more clearly identify and examine her own tacit assumptions and prejudices.

In suggesting that the personal essay can provide the occasion for reflexive thought, I need to make the point that the writer herself (recall Leanne) and the topic she’s writing about, rather than the kind of writing, are the more important variables here. On the one hand, I believe the propensity to adopt a reflexive stance is context dependent and subject specific. Just as we are not always able or inclined to think critically about every new situation that confronts us, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, for us to be reflexive about some (deeply, unconscious, deeply ingrained)
aspects of ourselves. On the other hand, reflexivity may also be a tendency or
stance individuals have developed or have learned to adopt (more or less) whenever
they engage and attempt to understand new situations.

When I suggest that reflexive thinking may be both specific and general, I am
drawing on discussions from the field of critical thinking because I believe many of
these arguments have implications for my discussion here. Critical and reflexive
thinking, while different kinds of thinking, are nonetheless intimately related in my
mind. As I noted in Chapter 1, each is part of the other. Drawing on the work of John
McPeck, Frank Smith (1990) says that as long as individuals "know enough," they are
"always capable of critical thinking" (103). At the same time, Smith implies that
critical thinking "is a disposition...a tendency to behave in particular ways on
particular occasions...Critical thinking is an attitude, a frame of mind" (103). I agree
that knowledge is necessary for both critical and reflexive thinking. By the same
token, too much knowledge (or the illusion of too much knowledge--recall the six
blind men) may have a deleterious effect on both critical and reflexive thinking (for
certain kinds of people or people in certain positions of power).

But I also agree that critical and reflexive thinking may be attitudes, stances
and approaches that are learned, habits of mind that can carry over from one situation
to another (with varying degrees of effectiveness). Recall Chad’s story in Chapter II.
He suggested that his ability to deal with abstractions in college was a thinking habit
he had learned to adopt in childhood as a survival strategy. Just as philosophers seem
to be able to translate every situation into a series of propositional if...then statements,
I am exploring the possibility that learning to write the personal essay, a form in which the writer measures the (objective) facts at hand against some (subjective) frame of reference, might provide a method for thinking about (or a way of approaching problems) in a variety of situations. Provided writers are writing about topics on which they have gained some knowledge, the personal essay with its bidirectional focus on both the subject and the writer’s apprehension of the subject might provide a useful vehicle for engaging in reflexive thought.

The Personal Essay

The essay is "a small, yet significant space between pure literature and straight science; in a certain sense it is the marketplace where all intellectual achievements are to be freely exchanged."

In 1988, Ross Winterowd noted that "the essay is...and should be the central genre in composition instruction...students should have the right not to be conclusive--as they must be in formal essays--but rather to explore themselves and their worlds in informal essays" (146). The personal essay is and has been the heart of the Freshman English program at the University of New Hampshire for over twenty years. As in many English departments, our faculty have argued about the purpose and mission of freshman composition and its relationship to the rest of the university. We have worried that all the "personal writing" our students are asked to do in Freshman English has little relevance or application to their writing in other subjects. However, I think we have been asking the wrong questions.

When we teach students to write personal essays, we are not just teaching a
way of writing, but also a way of learning. It is this way of learning or making sense, this method of inquiry, that we hope transfers to students' other courses in the university (and life). While we are certainly interested in obtaining clear, forceful writing, writing that is well developed and detailed, writing that communicates its intentions to readers, we also seek to provide students with a way of understanding and critiquing information and ideas. The personal essay can be a useful vehicle for helping students to make sense of things and engage in "authentic" learning (Freire). I believe that authentic learning, learning that deepens and expands our understanding of both our subject and ourselves, is reflexive.

Reflexivity involves a commitment to attending to what we believe, think and feel (at any moment) as well as examining how we came to hold those beliefs, thoughts and feelings. This kind of monitoring and self-awareness seems critical for enabling us to apprehend new ideas and information without ourselves being appropriated in the process. Such a process does not mean, however, that we are resistant to change or transformation. Arguing for a feminist concept of integrity, Victoria Davion (1991) notes that many students arrive in her contemporary moral issues class with "firm beliefs about the issues...but without ever having examined how they came to have those beliefs and whether they wish to keep or change them" (185). Her goal is to help students "see that their beliefs about issues reflect deeper commitments and deeper principles" (185). Davion contends that people "are not born with integrity and those who develop it must choose at some point to do so" (185). Since knowledge of one's own beliefs and the principles that underlie them are a
necessary condition for having integrity, Davion suggests that the development of integrity can only commence when individuals start to inquire into the origins of their beliefs and actively begin to monitor these beliefs.

Davion does not see the examination of one's own beliefs as being tied to an individual's "verbal" proficiency; nonetheless I believe that in a specific pedagogical context (of the kind I outlined in Chapter II), writing, especially essayistic writing, can greatly assist this process by making one's beliefs visible, explicit and open to examination. Kurt Spellmeyer (1989) notes that the essay takes "the writer's situatedness" as its central concern. How the writer understands her subject is grounded in her "presuppositions" and beliefs about the subject. As we saw in Susan's essay, her decision to take her step-father's name rests on her beliefs about women's roles in our culture. However, it wasn't until she was involved in the process of writing and re-writing that she came to realize how she was situated (what her beliefs were) and that gender was one of the reasons she was situated differently than her twin brother.

In this study, I have reluctantly chosen to use the term "personal essay" to distinguish it from thesis-driven, expository writing. The descriptor, "personal" implies writing for and about the self. For many people, "personal" seems to suggest self-absorption or narcissism or the taint of (capitalist) individualism. However, when I use the term "personal" to describe the essay, I intend it to mean not only writing for and about the self, but also to include writing about a subject other than the self that is examined in relation to the self. What makes such writing personal is the visible and
active, self-interested presence (subjectivity) of the writer within the piece. It is important to note that although essays are often written for the self and about the self, they are eventually intended for a wider audience. Even though Montaigne professed a "domestic and private" goal in writing his essays, he himself oversaw their publication in three books (Tettel 1990). The personal essay, despite its self-interest, is still a public form of writing.

Although personal writing such as the journal or diary, which is done primarily for the self and not intended for other readers, is often reflective, such writing lacks the requirement of the "other" that would ensure the bi-directional movement of thought. Despite claims that the personal essay and journal share similar ancestors (e.g., see Heath 1987; 1990; Gannett 1992; Spellmeyer 1989), the personal essay and the journal differ in both function and form in important ways. Journals are usually not intended to be read by others, and as John Gage notes, "the possibility of being read creates responsibilities that thinking alone can neglect" (1986, 25). For the most part, journal writing does not have as its goal the "creation of consummatory, aesthetic experience" (Graham 1991, 65), something that Dewey felt was necessary for full self-realization. Nonetheless, the journal can serve as an "other" within. As Barbara Myerhoff and Deena Metzgar (1980) suggest, the journal can be a "means by which subjects make themselves known to themselves" (104). My point here is simply that any reflexivity afforded by journal writing probably has more to do with the disposition of the journalist than any inherent requirement in the journal form itself.

On the other hand, the personal essay, at least in theory, embodies a "perennial
dialectic" (Kauffmann, 1989) between an "other" and an "I." And while always analytical, the personal essay is more often used for purposes of exploration rather than justification.\(^4\) It frequently depicts the writer's process of thinking, of coming to a new understanding rather than simply presenting the conclusion or product of thought. As Molly Haskell observed, "what seduces us in an essay has less to do with the subject itself than with the writer's way of curling up with a subject and rubbing it like Aladdin's lamp until it takes on shadings and lights of the writer's imprint and sensibility" (1989, 10).

Haskell's metaphoric comment about the essay suggests a way of learning, of apprehending knowledge, that I hope my students will experience during their stay at the university. This kind of learning involves the student getting close enough to a subject so that the subject becomes part of her or him. Such a view of learning means conceiving the purpose of education in something other than strictly utilitarian or vocational terms. As Chad, the student whose essay we looked at in the last chapter, put it, it means using "education to find and create meaning in my world."

Furthermore, finding and creating meaning in our worlds is an ongoing process. I believe the personal essay, the essay that we teach in Freshman English, can be used in many subject areas as a vehicle for making sense: for finding and creating meaning, for deepening understanding and for generating earned insights. And while it is true, as Kurt Spellmeyer notes, that "no genre will automatically empower student writers," the personal essay (with pedagogical assistance) nonetheless, seems "uniquely conducive to dialogue in all areas of knowledge" (1990, 338). And dialogue seems an
important precursor to reflexivity.

**Growth of the Personal Essay in Freshman English**

In the introduction to *The Contemporary Essay* (2d ed.), Donald Hall notes that "ofen one literary form dominates an era" and today, "we live in the age of the essay" (1989, 1). To live in the age of the essay is to live in a world of dynamic and multiple complexity that resists standardization; it is to live tentatively and cautiously in a world where certainty can only mean "a report of qualified findings" (Danto 1990, 22); it means being able to suspend preconceived beliefs so as to entertain new ideas, to "glean their energies and insights without entirely succumbing to them" (Kauffmann 1989, 237). Whether or not we accept Hall’s grand claim for our age, plenty of evidence points to the essay’s resurgence of popularity as a literary genre in English departments and the commercial press. As I noted above, the personal essay is a mainstay of many freshman composition programs, although its potential as a method of philosophical and educational inquiry has been less well explored.

For awhile, it seemed that almost every collection of essays began with the editor’s attempt to define the essay and then defend and justify its worthiness as a genuine literary form. Even in the most recent edition of *The Best American Essays* 1993, guest editor Joseph Epstein laments the fact that the essay is still assigned a place at "the children’s table" at the literary banquet of genres. "Poor essay, a versatile but never a major form..." he writes, "I hate to see it put down, defamed, spat upon, even mildly slighted" (xiii-xiv). Scholars such as Kurt Spellmeyer and others have felt compelled to defend the personal essay as something other than an elite, radically
individualistic form that elevates personal knowledge to the exclusion of socio-political and cultural understanding (For example, see Haefner 1992; Miller 1990). However, part of the problem is that the essay does not lend itself to any one, clear, precise, "ready-made" definition. As Joel Haefner (1992) notes, "essays are continually being 'remade' by different communities at different points of time, with new textual elements and traditions added, deleted, modified" (131). In a sense, I am attempting to remake the essay into a vehicle for learning in this inquiry. Using my thief and flier methodology, which I discussed in the previous chapter, I will be foregrounding some traditions while modifying or ignoring others.

According to Haefner, "the context in which essays are written and published affects the form and nature of the genre" (1992, 128). I would add that the context in which essays are read and studied also affects "the form and nature of the genre." The pedagogical context, which I believe always mirrors the larger socio-political and cultural context, plays a critical role in how students and teachers will come to define and use the essay for themselves. The gradual shift from product to process paradigms resulted in sweeping pedagogical changes for the teaching of freshman composition, which also led to a reconception of the form and purpose of the essay.

The groundbreaking research of Janet Emig's *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (1983/1971) exposed the pervasiveness of what she considered a particularly insidious "species of extensive writing...the five-paragraph theme...This mode is so indigenously American that it might be called the Fifty-Star Theme" (93). Emig’s research certainly contributed to the use of more personal forms of writing in
many composition departments. Bacon was replaced with Montaigne; mastering formal, abstract "academic" discourse became less important than finding one's own voice; and the teacher-assigned, thesis-driven essay moved over to make room for the personal narrative essay, a kind of writing that more closely characterized Emig's category of "reflexive" writing.\textsuperscript{5} Emig described this form of writing as writing that was self-sponsored, "committed and exploratory," and primarily written for the self, "or occasionally, a trusted peer" (89). Emig noticed that when students were engaged in this self-sponsored writing, they spent a longer period of time "stopping and contemplating the product...and reformulation occur[ed] more frequently" (88).

Accompanying the work of Emig, of course, were the many books and articles by Donald Murray, Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie that focused on the writer and the process of writing. The pedagogy for teaching writing that these writers offered came from insights they had "earned" from examining their own experiences of writing and teaching. In particular, Murray's model of inquiry--his predilection for paying attention to his own thinking and writing, his insistence that his was only one view among many, and the tentative and provisional nature of his findings--exemplified the kind of ongoing approach to learning I have been advocating here. Murray and Elbow were especially interested in the kinds of (pre-)writing that led to the finding and formulating of (personally significant) ideas. Elbow's freewriting and "first-order thinking" and Murray's rehearsing, exploring, and collecting all celebrated the ongoing process of discovery and exploration. With the advent of a pedagogy that modeled itself on the work of "real," practicing writers, it's small wonder that some
teachers and scholars began to turn their attention from the "formal," expository essay of the academy to the more "informal," exploratory essay that, as I mentioned earlier, was making "a comeback."

Until the ideas of these composition theorists began to take hold in English departments in the 1970's and early 1980's, the expository essay, a way of writing derived from the scientific and philosophical models of "thesis and support" (often in the guise of Emig's five-paragraph theme), held sway. In a 1985 article, William Zeiger suggested that the academy's insistence on writing that demonstrates truth or validity, defends a point, or "confirm[s] a result contributes to a general trend in American education away from speculative and ruminative thinking" (457). The aims of expository and exploratory discourse were different, he argued. One curtails inquiry; the other initiates it: "we 'prove' an idea, not to learn about it, but to fix it in certainty... Inquiry, or exploration, on the other hand, aims to discover the fecundity of an idea" (456). Zeiger proposed that teachers seek ways of teaching writing that would "balance demonstration with the inquiry that sustains it" and "establish the art of exploration as an equally acceptable and worthy pursuit" in composition courses (459). The method of inquiry he suggested that teachers use was the personal essay: "The familiar essay, characterized by a friendly tone and an open form, provides a literary vehicle for the act of exploration. A propensity to explore is exactly what composition classes with their habitual emphasis on proving a point, now lack" (464).

It is important to see Zeiger's hopes and claims for the exploratory essay within the context of the times in which they were formulated. Zeiger, like Emig,
Murray, Elbow and Macrorie before him, was attempting to redress an imbalance in an educational system that had come to emphasize ends rather than means, a situation these theorists not only saw as oppressive, but one they felt resulted in mediocre writing at best. Zeiger noted that concentration on the expository essay has reached a point of severely diminished returns. It continually demands that the writer prove a thesis, even while slighting the exploration that would provide the substance of the proof; it asks the writer to make bricks without straw. It augments this impediment to free creation by confronting the writer with a critical audience, dispelling the congenial atmosphere in which exploration would thrive (459).

By emphasizing the importance of exploration and the process of discovery in a "congenial atmosphere," these theorists offered an alternative to the "current traditional rhetoric" that was both revolutionary and reactionary. The pedagogy of process and discovery was revolutionary in that it called into question the existing power relationships in the classroom, but it was also reactionary because its intentions were not so much directed at forging a new beginning as recapturing an imagined and idealized spirit of a disappearing "liberal education." Zeiger's calls for the inclusion of the exploratory essay into the composition curriculum were made with the understanding that such writing would eventually result in better exposition. Likewise, Murray's and Elbow's emphasis on process and their strategies for exploration and discovery were always intended for the purpose of producing better pieces of writing. Learning, or the deepening and transformation of understanding--the mostly intangible product (and process) of this pedagogy of inquiry--was important but secondary or preliminary to the more tangible written product.
My focus in this study, however, is less on the essay as a written product and more on the practice and process of "essayism," a way of dialogically and reflexively approaching and thinking about a subject through writing and reading.

The Essay As a Writer's Vehicle for Inquiry

An essay is an investigation of a subject, but not its possession; it probes a reality with a succession of hesitant contacts.
- Marcel Tetel, Montaigne, 1990.

As I proposed in Chapter II, the restoration of subjectivity (and the current interest in intersubjectivity) as a legitimate basis for constructing and assessing complex knowledge provides fertile ground for nurturing the literary genre of the essay as well as the cognitive and ethical process of "essayism." Thomas Recchio believes that

[i]n considering the place of the essay in the college curriculum, it would be useful to clear away the excess baggage that has accumulated around the categorizing of the essay as a form and to define the essay as a kind of writing that reflects most openly the struggle of individual writers to harmonize the conflicting demands of the self, language and experience (1989, 280).

As many theorists have pointed out, essay is both noun and verb. It can mean an attempt, a trial, as well as to attempt, to try. It can mean an assay, a sifting through and weighing out; or it can mean to assay, to sift through and weigh out. While I am more concerned with the essay as a verb (a method and process) than as a noun (a form and a product), unlike Recchio, I see these two aspects as intimately connected. It seems to me that in learning how to write an essay and in trying to figure out what distinguishes an essay from other forms of prose writing, students also learn to essay.

In the same way, learning to essay assists students with their writing of essays.
In attempting to define the qualities that mark the essay as a particular form or genre, most professional writers and scholars conclude that the quality that best distinguishes the essay is its versatility and refusal to be rigidly categorized. It is an open form—"more digressive than systematic, more interrogative than declarative, more descriptive, than explanatory" (Harrison 1992, 3)—continually being remade by its practitioners.

Often the essay is divided into formal and informal types following the distinct styles of Bacon and Montaigne. John McCarthy argues that Bacon and Montaigne should be viewed as two sides of the same coin, rather than different coins: "The commonality of Montaigne and Bacon lies in their use of the printed word to promote critical and independent thought. Both were skeptics, both sought free expression of their personal views, both rejected rigid rationalistic systems" (1989, 43). Their differences lie in their approaches to their subjects—"one proceeds intuitively, deductively, the other rationally and inductively" (43)—as well as the attitude they adopt toward their intended audience. And so some theorists have begun to intimate that perhaps the form is not what distinguishes the essay as a genre, but rather what characterizes the essay is the stance and approach the writer adopts toward her subject and/or audience. McCarthy suggests that it is the writer’s way of thinking about an idea that determines whether a piece of writing is "essayistic" (58). It is this way of thinking about ideas that concern me here.

Essayism is a way of thinking about or responding to texts or situations that is characterized by tentativeness and openness. According to Harrison, essayism offers
"a paradigm for both thinking and acting," and it "supplies the ground for a cognitive and ethical methodology" (4). My purpose here is not to examine Harrison's claim, but rather to use it to frame my own thinking about how the essay may be used pedagogically as a form of reflexive inquiry. I also want to suggest that perhaps essayism, with its emphasis on openness and tentativeness, offers the best (written) response to situations of seeming simplicity as well as to situations that are complex and/or uncertain. Recchio (1989) has pointed out that the writing of either overly formal ("objective") responses to texts or strictly personal ("subjective") responses to texts allows students to resist genuine dialogic engagement with their subjects and serious reflexive engagement with themselves. The student writer of the objective report, "skeptical about the authority of self," relinquishes her subjectivity and yields to the authority of the other. The writer of the personal narrative all too often ignores the other and reduces "the complex to an anecdote" and "privilege[s] the authority of experience" (276). On the other hand, the writer of essays (ideally) attempts to weave objective knowledge and subjective experience together in mutually informing and enriching ways. As Kurt Spellmeyer (1989) suggests, "students who learn to use writing as a way of thinking dialogically achieve in the process a heightened awareness of their situation, an awareness which allows them to overcome past misunderstandings without at the same time disowning the past" (271).

McCarthy proposes that we define essayism "in terms of the author's and reader's receptive postures" (315, my emphasis). This is an intriguing idea for it suggests that essayism is a response that may be determined either by the writer's
approach to her subject or the reader's way of receiving or interpreting the subject.

According to McCarthy,

True essayism reflects a multiplicity of perspectives presented in an engaging form designed to awaken and maintain reader interest, even after the piece of writing has been 'completed'...[E]ven when the essay is finished, it is not complete. If a so-called essay is not marked by a discursive, open-ended quality... we should think twice about labelling it essayistic (58).

Is this open-endedness a quality of the writer's text, the writer's attitude toward his or her subject, a perception of the reader, or all of the above? If essayism is a way of approaching texts that is open and tentative, it would seem that it is indeed a "posture" that could be adopted by a either writer or reader (or perhaps in the best possible circumstances, both together). I will explore the reader's role in this process more thoroughly in the next chapter, but for now, I want to concentrate on the essay writer/thinker/learner.

The following paper, written by a student in my freshman composition course, reveals one student's movement away from writing that communicates ready-made assumptions to writing that becomes more open, more essayistic, and begins to earn its own insights. Like many freshman students, Mindy does not initially approach the idea she is writing about "essayistically." It takes several drafts and conferences with her peers and me for her to learn how to adopt an essayistic stance.

Mindy: "Patients" is a Virtue

Mindy's first two drafts of her paper are characterized by certainty. She has already come to the conclusion that the elderly receive substandard care in nursing homes because of the quality of people working there. Her first draft focuses on the
attitude and behavior of Lucille, the person who trains her. Lucille "was aloof, sauntering into each patient's room with a look of disgust on her wrinkled face, complaining with each step." When Noel, a patient, asks Lucille about breakfast,

Lucille chanted back, "Shut up, Noel. You're the grossest thing in here!" I was dumbfounded...I looked at her and she sensed my bewilderment. She quickly explained to me that once I got to know Noel, I would speak to him that way too. I made no comment but thought to myself, I don't speak to anyone that way, never mind a feeble old man who knows more about the world than I do.

After Mindy has worked at the nursing home for awhile, she begins to notice that the home is filled with many "Lucilles," and she wonders "where in the world these people came from." She decides that the nursing home "doesn't pay its employees enough to hire 'respectable people'...Filling out an easy application and a quick interview got someone hired as simply as if they were applying to Burger King." But now, Mindy assures us, "steps are being taken to attract a different 'type' of person to become certified nursing assistant[s]." A four month training program that "costs $800.00" and requires "that one must pass a written and practical state exam" has become mandatory. Mindy believes that "this will definitely weed out those who are actually serious about helping the elderly from those who simply need a job."

In a reflective commentary written at the end of the semester, Mindy admitted that when she began writing this paper she knew what she wanted to say: "I began with one basic thought. I was emphatic that Lucille was cruel. She was in the wrong profession because the job required caring, loving patient people...My focus was to write an essay about the abuse Lucille aimed toward the elderly." Mindy had a point that she wanted to make; in this case, though, it seemed as if she had arrived without
having travelled. Her already formulated thesis was preventing her from moving into "essaying." As Elizabeth Hardwick reminds us, "A well-filled mind itself makes the composition of essays more thorny rather than more smooth...There is seldom absolute true assertion unless one is unaware" (1986, 45). In our conferences, I asked Mindy to tell me more about Lucille, hoping that she would complicate her assessment of the people who worked in the nursing home. She did. In her commentary, she shares the questions that led to her next draft:

My mind started reeling. Do I think Lucille first started out as a sincere and caring as I? Would I be like Lucille if I worked there for fifteen years? Do I think it has something to do with the nature and demands of the job? Could the administration be at fault for the way the residents are treated?

By imagining the younger Lucille as herself and by projecting herself into a future Lucille, she makes Lucille and the staff at the nursing home less alien, less other, and takes a first step in establishing what Kurt Spellmeyer calls "a common ground.”

Seeing herself in the other and finding the other within herself allows for the possibility of dialogue. Such a dialogue is capable of generating a more complicated, less assured and simplified understanding of Lucille, but it also offers a reflexive kick back for Mindy. Earlier, she had wondered where people like Lucille had come from—as if "Lucilles" were born, not made. Now her questions begin to reveal her growing awareness that perhaps people don’t come whole; they are at least partially constructed—as she herself will be—by the circumstances in which they live and work. Her final paper has more of the openness and tentativeness that characterizes essayism. It shows a growing awareness of complexity. Rather than simply impose a single
interpretation on Lucille, Mindy begins to view Lucille from multiple perspectives.

When she introduces us to Lucille in this draft, she hints at reasons for Lucille’s bad temper beyond the "type of person she is."

"Great. Who called in sick today? I’m so tired of working short," Lucille grunts. She rolls her distressed eyes. They have large dark circles under them. Her mouth is turned down in a frown. It is a rare occasion when Lucille smiles and I wonder if she is not only tired of working short, but tired of working. She has been a nursing assistant for the past fifteen years.

Lucille and Mindy make their way to Noel’s room. Now, however, when Lucille speaks roughly to Noel, we see her actions in the context of the demands of the job:

"Where’s my breakfast?"
"Shut up Noel! You’re the grossest thing in here." Lucille yells. I hate when she speaks to him like that. Her face is wrinkled and filled with disgust. I hope that maybe Noel thinks she is joking with him. Who am I kidding? Just because he’s old doesn’t mean he’s stupid.
"You’re breakfast will be here soon, Noel. You’ll just have to be patient." I try not to sound rushed, but we still have 34 people to wake before the breakfast trays can be passed out.

Mindy then takes us through the rest of her morning "rounds," and in each room, we get to experience her ongoing conflict between wanting to provide quality care and needing to provide for a large number of people.

I decide to take care of Henry...Parkinson’s disease has overtaken him and he has a hard time doing things for himself because of his trembling...as I am finishing, he asks me to shave his face for him. I can tell it hasn’t been done in a week.
"I asked the girl yesterday to do it for me but she said she didn’t have time. Imagine that!" he stutters.
I don’t have time either. He doesn’t like the electric razor, so I have to use the plastic one with the dull blade. I am getting nervous. I have to hurry but I don’t want to cut his face...Slow down, I tell myself, but I know that’s impossible...

Later, as Mindy attends to her unresponsive charges in the ward the staff refer
to as the "loony bin," she begins to imagine herself in "Bermuda or Hawaii or even Hampton Beach." She worries that if she loses her ability to daydream that she "may lose my own sanity." Reflecting on her own tenuous situation enables her to see Lucille less absolutely: "I wonder if that [losing her ability to daydream] is what happened to Lucille. Maybe she has just become hardened, no longer capable of showing emotion." Instead of casting normative judgements or imposing "ready-made conclusions" on Lucille's behavior, she now attempts to understand it. She has relinquished certainty to embark on an inquiry that will "earn" her a more complicated insight, an insight, however, that will reveal her own complicity. Later, as Mindy gets more and more behind, she is told:

"Just get in there. Do what you have to do and leave"...
She is right. I don't want to admit it, but she is exactly right. Lucille with her constant bickering, incessant complaints and never ending grievances, speaks for us all. I feel guilty when I think some of the same things that she verbalizes. I wonder if I would be like Lucille if I worked here for 15 years. I'd like to think that I wouldn't, but I'll never find out. I can't deal with the way this place is run for that long.

Mindy has already caught herself "thinking" what Lucille openly "verbalizes." Yet, rather than continue to face the difficulty of the job, a job that has already begun to affect her, Mindy knows that she will leave, knows that she can leave. It is this knowledge that she could become like Lucille--indeed, that she may be already have started the process of transformation--which enables her to see that, perhaps, fifteen years ago, Lucille may have once been very much like her. She has just discovered "where these people come from."

At the close of her paper and the close of the day's shift, Mindy remembers
that she hasn’t visited with one of the patients whom she had promised to see: "...but she always naps at this time and I don’t want to disturb her. Besides the elevator is on it’s way up. I’ll see her tomorrow." We are left wondering at what point rationality begins to merge into rationalization, as Mindy stands, "zombie-like" waiting for her "escape." In her commentary on this draft, Mindy says that she now realizes there are "many factors" that might explain Lucille’s behavior.

I now place the blame on the nursing home administration rather than on Lucille. And who knows, if I were to investigate why the nursing home operates as it does, maybe I would find that the blame I place on them also involves multi-dimensional dilemmas. I suppose nobody has a single, definitive answer to any of life’s complications.

In writing this essay (or in learning to write this essay), Mindy is also learning a method of inquiry. A final "essayistic" comment reveals her willingness to open up her own conclusions to further examination--an examination that seems aimed at complicating the pedagogy of over-zealous English teachers: "I only wonder if they really are legitimate complications or if the human race, unconsciously, creates the multi-faceted complications surrounding most every issue in our lives." Indeed!

In an introduction to an essay anthology, Hunt (1990) notes that "essayists have been drawn to subjects where the facts do not speak for themselves, but must be measured against some personal frame of reference" (1). (The present inquiry is a good example). Both Mindy and Susan, whose essay we looked at earlier, measure the facts of the situations they are writing about against their own personal frames of reference. But what Hunt’s statement does not reveal is that an essayist’s "frame of reference" is not always something that the essayist is consciously aware of prior to
her encounter with her subject. Like the anthropologist in the field, it is through the essayist’s open engagement with the other that she comes to identify, enlarge and, at times, challenge her own perspectives. Not only do essayists measure the "facts of the situation" against "some personal frame of reference," as we saw with Mindy’s later drafts, they also measure their "frame of reference" against the "facts of the situation." If we recall Frank Smith’s definition of learning and comprehension, we might say that the practice of essayism can enable individuals to add to or modify the theories in their head so they can relate to or understand what they see in the world.⁸

To gain a better sense of how important identifying and examining frames of reference are for enlarging one’s understanding, I now turn to the last draft of a paper in which the student does not approach the situation he is writing about essayistically; he does not use the paper as an opportunity to probe his own perspectives; nor does he acknowledge how his frame of reference works to shape his interpretation. This writer’s inability or refusal to examine his own assumptions and how he came to hold these assumptions prevents him from viewing this situation from multiple perspectives and limits his ability to engage essayistically with his subject. After four drafts, this paper remains virtually unchanged in both surface and deep structure.

**Ralph: Who Wears the Pants?**

Ralph’s paper describes the effects of his friend Steve’s romantic relationship on Ralph and their male friends. Ralph said he chose to write about this topic because he had not completely resolved how he felt, but as the following description of Steve’s relationship makes clear, there is little doubt as to where Ralph stands.
Steve couldn’t do this; Steve couldn’t do that. He couldn’t go here; he
couldn’t go there. And all because She said so. If God were a woman,
she would’ve been named Sheila. How does she think she can control
him like that? Does she even realize what she’s doing? She has taken
a really nice, outgoing guy and turned him into silly puddy. Steve used
to “cut loose” with us whenever we had a big night lined up, but sadly,
that’s a thing of the past. He simply has too much trouble convincing
Sheila that “the guys” are entitled to a night by themselves once in a
while. So now instead of confronting Sheila when they have a conflict
of interest, he keeps his mouth shut and, as a result, we never see him.
I always thought the male was supposed to wear the pants in a
relationship. Boy, was I wrong. Sheila doesn’t wear the pants in the
relationship; she wears the pants, shirt, shoes, socks, boxers and
suspenders. Poor Steve is butt naked and not sure what to do about it.

The question Ralph really seems to be asking is “Who should wear the pants in
a relationship?” and the answer, the foregone conclusion, is “the male.” As Ralph sees
it, Steve doesn’t spend time with “the guys” anymore because he is no longer the same
old Steve, that “really nice, outgoing guy,” now, he’s “silly puddy.” Now, “Steve
doesn’t drink, tell wild stories, or get a little rowdy.” The reason that Steve has
become “silly puddy” is because Sheila has taken to wearing the pants in their
relationship, leaving Steve defenseless and “butt naked.” She has bewitched Steve.
He “simply seems to have lost his confidence [and] assertiveness...We never see him
anymore, at least not without her. I hate that."

Not only does Ralph hate the fact that he doesn’t get to spend as much time
with his friend Steve, he also sees this situation as unjust: “What she’s doing is not
only unfair to Steve, but it’s unfair to us also. Because of her, we hardly get to see
Steve, and that’s not right.” It’s as if a moral code has been broken.

For Ralph, Sheila--the woman--is an "other," a foreign being who doesn’t
seem to operate in the same (moral, logical, sensible) manner as he and supposedly
other "normal" males (males not under the influence of a woman?). Not only does he
not understand why Steve appears to be "afraid to stand up to her," he doesn't
understand her. For instance, he has noticed that since Sheila began dating Steve she
seems to have "almost abandoned her girlfriends...No one told her to 'dump' her
friends...Steve didn't dump us, thank God." His explanation for such "irrational
behavior" is that perhaps "she is insecure or just plain lonely without him." But for
the most part, Ralph remains utterly confused. "Why Sheila can't see that she's
crowding him absolutely mystifies me. Perhaps that is just the way some women
are..."

Here, then is part of his difficulty. He can find no common ground. When he
attempts to measure the facts of the situation against his own personal frame of
reference, he comes up mystified: women are different—that's "just the way they are."
And in this case, the differences are threatening, and he feels compelled—not to
examine his own perspective—but to privilege it, to argue for its superiority. After all,
he is doing this for Steve's own good, which, as he sees it, is the right thing to do.

As good a friend as Steve is, I always have trouble talking with him
about Sheila because while I want to be honest, I don't want to
condemn her....I'm always afraid I'll get Steve mad. Maybe that's what
we need to do, though. Get him good and pissed by talking about the
negatives of their relationship so he actually wants to confront her in
order to bring about a change. It may sound like we are sticking our
noses where they don't belong, but Steve is a good friend, so we have
all the right to involve ourselves to a certain extent.

Ralph feels that he and his friends have an obligation to Steve. Longevity of friendship
gives them the right to interfere. After all, they "have known Steve since
kindergarten." Even though Steve's behavior with Sheila makes them "so mad at
Steve that we don’t want him anywhere near us," that’s "not right" either. "We’ve got
to stick beside Steve through thick and thin because we’ve been friends for too long to
let anything come between us."

Writing this paper has not helped to generate any earned insights for this
writer. Ralph has not come any closer to understanding what his beliefs are and what
principles might underlie these beliefs. Like Leanne, the peace corps volunteer in
Peterson-Gonzalez’s study, Ralph seems to be modifying "the world" to fit the theory
already in his head, a theory that is unconscious, but pervasive. Part of the reason
may lie in Ralph’s failure to actually "essay" this topic, to approach it openly and
dialectically. It is interesting to note that Ralph wrote this paper in a special section
of an upper level composition class that focused on exploring how gender affects the
way people think. Students in this class had read the literature describing "connected"
and "separate" ways of knowing as well as various articles that examined the relational
needs of males and females. I had encouraged students to use their reading to inform
their revisions of their papers. Instead of using the literature to complicate his
understanding, however, Ralph seems to have found a way to make it support his
world view. The inclusion of the following paragraph in his final draft constitutes
Ralph’s total re-thinking of his topic:

    Maybe women just have the tendency to gear into a relationship more
    than guys. Women traditionally "define" or "see" themselves through
    their relationships, so perhaps that is why they involve themselves so
    thoroughly. On the other hand it is believed that men "define"
    themselves apart from their relationships, which means that their friends
    and other "outside" variables still bear great importance.

Because he takes relationship to mean specifically "male-female relationship," Ralph
merely uses these ideas to further confirm what to him seems very clear. Sheila needs
Steve to define herself and so she "abandons" all her female friends; Steve doesn't
need Sheila to know who he is and so he doesn't need to "dump" his male friends.
Instead of using these theories to open a window to "the other," a reflexive window
that might also shed light onto his discomfort with this situation, Ralph remains
firmly, but unconsciously entrenched in his position and no closer to understanding the
actions of his friend. Because he sees his friend dangerously on the verge of going
"native," of losing his "real" (unified and coherent) self to the other, Ralph feels duty
bound to try to pull him back, to "get him good and pissed by talking about the
negatives of their relationship," and to return him to his senses (which, interestingly,
also happen to be Ralph's senses).

Essayism is a close relative of "process" in that it is as concerned with
understanding the thinking that leads to the thought as it is with the thought itself.
Thomas Harrison suggests that an essay "give[s] shape to a process preceding
conviction...and records the hermeneutical situation in which such decisions arise"
(1992, 4). He notes that a conviction is a decision that has already been made. The
essay, on the other hand, seeks to capture the mind in the process of reaching a
decision, of coming to know or understand something. As such, it offers wonderful
pedagogical possibilities. If we can understand how our students come to the
conclusions they do, we will be in a better position to know how we need to respond
as teachers. More importantly, if students write about how they reached the
conclusions they did, they may discover underlying causes, reasons, principles that
they can examine further. Both Susan and Mindy concentrate on the process preceding their "conviction" in their essays. In "What's in a Name?" Susan "records the hermeneutical situation" that gave rise to her decision to change her name. Mindy, too, by taking readers with her on her daily rounds in the nursing home allows them to experience the situation as she experiences it, a situation that they come to understand will probably result in her leaving or risk becoming more like the other workers. However, Ralph does not show us how he came to his conclusions about Steve and Sheila. Instead, he presents his already formulated (and formulaic?) "convictions" and tries to argue for them. As far as we can see, there has been no dialectical encounter with his topic (much less any reflexive engagement with his own assumptions). Not only do his arguments not convince, his stance makes it harder for readers to read his paper "essayistically"—in an open, dialogic manner. Because we have little reason to believe that Ralph's conclusions are provisional, we are more likely to adopt a combative stance in response. I will return to this issue of reading in Chapter IV.

I have examined student papers like Ralph's, papers that boldly parade their black and white perspectives, through many theoretical lenses over the years and yet, interestingly, I now realize that my pedagogical response has been similar no matter which theory I apply. It does not seem to make a difference whether I apply a developmental, feminist, Marxist or postmodern frame to explain what I see; my sense of what I need to do as a teacher has remained the same: I need to provide some kind of situation that poses a counter-discourse (in my current terms, a "dialectical encounter with an other") that might expose a student's previously
unquestioned assumptions. In a sense, I am also modeling a process I hope students will learn to perform for themselves, the habit of re-examining one’s ideas through the lens and frame of an other.

As we saw with Ralph, such a strategy does not always work. And yet, as the next paper suggests, if we do not look closely at our students’ writing we may miss seeing the bare beginnings of a more complicated thinking trying to emerge.

Mark: The Reality of Life

Mindy took several drafts, but her writing evolved into an essay over the course of half a semester. Ralph’s paper never developed into an essay. An important shift in thinking seems to occur when (or if) students move from writing ready-made conclusions to writing for earned insights; however, writing essays can be frustrating to students who do not enjoy “feeling around the contours of shapes that may never become wholly visible...To those for whom solutions have not as yet become problems, who live under clear moral skies...the essay in its essential incertitude can have little point” (Danto 1990, 22). Take Mark, a student in my Freshman English class. At the end of the semester, when asked to submit a piece of writing from one of his courses that best revealed what kind of thinker he was, he submitted a computer program:

With this program that I have written, you input data into the computer and the computer will give you the answer. I think that this says something about me as a thinker and a learner. I prefer to deal with everything in black and white. I feel that there is a right answer and a wrong answer to every question. There can be no middle ground. The computer operates in the same way. If you have not entered the proper data, a computer is not going to give you an answer half way between right and wrong. The computer will reject your input until you do it
correctly. I think that I function in much the same way as the computer.

For a good portion of the semester, Mark worked on a paper that dealt with a life threatening accident that occurred when he was four years old. He severed all the veins and arteries in his hand when he put it though a glass door. The doctors didn’t know whether he would live, and if he did, whether he would regain the use of his hand. Mark tells us that he was "motivated from the inside" and he "never gave up," a trait he attributes to his "stubbornness of nature." He says he has "been a very determined person since then...I never know when to quit." The point he wants to make is that people never know what they have until they come close to losing it. If you (are stubbornly persistent and) work hard, you’ll succeed in overcoming adversity and reaching your goals, and if by chance you don’t succeed, you can rest easy knowing that you tried (and knowing that you "deserved" to make it). His focus reflects part of the "ready-made" mythology of our culture about work and success, and Mark accepted it uncritically.

I have often thought that, as teachers, we do not always witness the effects that our courses have on our students’ thinking and writing. A semester is often not long enough for some students to move from writing whose only purpose is to communicate ready-made truths in grammatically correct sentences to writing that first discovers and then interrogates its own assumptions. However, if we look closely at our students’ drafts, and if we listen to what our students have to say about their writing, we may begin to discern evidence that change is occurring. The writing will appear less certain and self-assured, less seamless, possibly inconsistent and even
contradictory. Although Mark's final draft is not yet an essay, it suggests that he is beginning to pry around the edges of his tightly constructed theories. In one part of his draft he says:

If you are as stubborn as I am, you are more likely to work hard and accomplish a goal. Yet, if you are so stubborn in your attempt at that goal that you neglect the possibility of failure, you are no longer focused. You can gain a lot if you are a stubborn, relentless person, but you also stand to lose quite a bit because of your stubbornness.

For the first time, Mark admits that "being stubborn and relentless" might have its good and bad points, and that maybe, people need to consider "the possibility of failure." (He never does say what it is that a person could "lose quite a bit of" through his or her stubbornness). However, after telling us about not making "the all state team as a senior," (despite his hard work and the fact that he "deserved to make it") he adds, "I am just a person who does not know when to give up. I guess that would make me either stubborn or stupid. I have found that there is a very fine line between the two." Here, then, is another hint of grey emerging through the black and white canvas of Mark's world view. And yet, I wonder. Does Mark actually believe that there is "a fine line" between stubbornness and stupidity? Or is he is merely "giving the teacher what she wants" by attempting to respond to questions that I have raised during our conferences on previous drafts? I asked him if hard work always leads to success, and if failure always means that a person hasn't worked hard enough. Could he imagine a situation where it might be wise for a person to admit that more hard work would be futile? Later in this draft, he writes:

I believe that most people have adversities to overcome in life. For some, it is a physical handicap, or for others, it could be the geographic
location of where they live and its effects on their lives. Some people feel limited to a certain social position because of the way they were raised. I realize that quitting or not trying at all, could be the easiest thing to do at times. If everyone gave up, and no one ever tried, nothing would ever get done.

The only situation Mark seems to be able to imagine in which someone might acknowledge his or her limitations is one where the person gives up or quits. (And "quitter," of course, may be just about the worse epitaph you can call a young male in this society). To Mark, everyone has adversities, and he makes no distinction between degree of adversity. Quitting leads to a situation where "nothing would ever get done." Now it appears that Mark is right back where he started. But, maybe not. Here is what he says a few sentences later: "The ability to know when to quit is a positive quality of an individual. One does not always succeed at everything one attempts. It is important to work hard and learn from our experiences... " Mark does not reveal how he has arrived at this new conclusion. Like stubbornness, he seems to be suggesting that quitting can be both good and bad. However, he quickly replaces one ready-made truth with another: What is important, is that we "learn from our experiences." Quitting, is okay if you have worked hard enough to learn something. Nonetheless, it is still important to work hard because "on any occasion there is the chance that everything will work out."

In this draft Mark hasn’t actually modified his original ideas as much as he has added to them. The resulting mix is messy, and yet the ambiguity and contradiction in his paper may be an indication that Mark is beginning to complicate his thinking, although he is not reflexive. For people, like Mark, who admit they are more
comfortable in a world of certainty, reflexivity—the examination of unarticulated assumptions and motives—is difficult. When confronted with new ideas, black and white thinkers seem to have two options: they can either adopt the ideas wholly and uncritically or reject them outright as "not-fitting". The reason I believe Mark's paper reveals a movement toward essayism is that Mark has not chosen either of these options. Instead, he tries to incorporate a new idea (that quitting can have a positive side and stubbornness may have a negative side) into his current belief structure by simply adding to what is already there. He doesn't engage this idea or examine his own beliefs in relation to it. He just attempts to implement the only strategy for change that he is familiar with: replace a (wrong) idea with a (right) idea. In this instance, however, he is not convinced his old idea is wrong and this new idea is right. He is left with little alternative other than to include both ideas regardless of their ill fit.

In offering my reading of these student papers, I have measured (and am continuing to measure) their work against my own subjective (personal, professional, social and cultural) frames of reference as a white, middle class, middle-aged, feminist, composition teacher. As such, my perspective is interested and situated, born of who I am as well as my practical experience with students and my theoretical meanderings with texts. Of course these readings are subjective. How could they not be? However, as I suggested earlier, the teacher's subjectivity (like the ethnographer's or essayist's) is her most important instrument of observation and interpretation. And yet, as with all tools, the subjective instrument is capable of seeing some things and
not others; it has its limitations, and these limitations need to be themselves reflexively uncovered, recognized and understood. In the next chapter, where I talk about essayistic reading, I will have more to say about teachers' reading student texts.

**Concluding Thoughts on a Pedagogy for Essayism**

Essayism is not so much the discovery of new ideas as it is the "creative discovery of new rational relations" between phenomena (Harrison 1992, 15). As such it involves the ability to make connections. Steven Jay Gould recently noted,

> My talent is making connections. That's why I am an essayist...I can sit down on just about any subject and think of twenty things that relate to it and they are not hokey connections...It took me years to realize that was a skill. I could never understand why everybody just didn't do that...Most people *don't* do it. They just don't see the connections (Shejerjian 1990, 5).

To be able to make connections or discover "new rational relations," between ideas, experiences, texts and so forth, students need to approach their subjects of study openly, tentatively, and most importantly, they need to approach them more than once. Students need to know that their first encounters with texts (their own or others), are just that--first encounters. They are exploratory forays. Reflexivity is a response that does not usually occur in a first encounter.

The kind of essayism I talk about in this chapter and the next two chapters requires that students learn to adopt a stance of suspended closure, and this requires a pedagogy that allows time for inquiry, dialogue, and revision. Practically speaking, I believe this translates into a course in which students write fewer papers and read fewer texts, but experience multiple cycles of writing, talking and reading for each paper and each text. What is more, students would always have the option of re-
visiting their earlier work and re-examining (and revising) it in light of the knowledge they have gained from later work. I think one reason many students never learn "to see the connections" (and examine them) is because they haven't been given the opportunity to immerse long enough in any one idea to do so. Making connections, as we shall see more clearly in the next chapter, is an important first step for making sense.

Paul Connolly suggested years ago that "the essay...is as much a state of mind and a way of life as a literary genre. The essayist is an explorer, an appraiser, a composer; and a course in essay writing is more importantly a course in living...In the process of composition, it is men and women who grow composed" (1981, 4). I'm not so sure I would say a course in essay writing is a course in living, but I might suggest that a course in essay writing can teach a particular stance and approach to living. When composition involves a process of reflexive inquiry, we may become indeed become composed (or uncomposed).
NOTES FOR CHAPTER III

1. In his book To Think (1990), Frank Smith suggests that the activities of thinking, remembering, comprehending (understanding), learning and imagining take place simultaneously; they are all part of the same mental function, indistinguishable from one another and occurring all the time. For Smith, however, "imagination is the dynamo of the brain, the source of all our intellectual energy and creativeness" (54). Smith argues that as long as our imagination is in charge, we think, remember, understand and learn easily and effectively. However when something overrides the imagination's control, "the brain loses its integrity (in both senses of the word), it is thrown out of gear and every facet of thinking is shattered" (54). When Smith speaks then of the capacity of writing for "extending the imagination of the writer," he means that writing works to extend thinking and learning.

2. The practice of feminist consciousness raising also involves reflexivity, but in this case the woman is often responding to a hostile other. When a woman begins to perceive or sense "contradictions" between the way the other (male, patriarchal society) represents her and the way she represents herself to herself, she may initially feel "betwixt and between" with no way to resolve the contradiction. Sandra Lee Bartky describes this liminal state as the divided consciousness, "the consciousness of being radically alienated from her world and often divided against herself..." (1975, 437). A raised consciousness is one that undergoes a transformation during/after dialogue with other women who are experiencing similar contradictions and during/after a reflexive examination. A raised consciousness is no longer divided. It now sees itself and defines itself in new ways.

3. An aside: Perhaps one reason there is not more critical or reflexive thinking in schools is because of the tendency for teachers to try to cover too much ground in too small a time, which often prevents students from developing in-depth knowledge. Without in-depth knowledge students cannot be critical or reflexive. Writing, as I suggested in the beginning of this chapter, can help students gain deeper understandings of their subjects provided that students are given the time to immerse.

4. See William Zeiger, "The Exploratory Essay: Enfranchising the Spirit of Inquiry in College Composition" for an interesting historical discussion on the essay as a vehicle for exploration and discovery. In suggesting that the essay is always an analytical form, I mean to distinguish it from straight description or narration on the one hand, and linear, premise-claim chains of reasoning on the other. The essayist explores her subject, both rendering and examining it, in order to (tentatively) understand it. I realize that such a claim is likely to draw protest from many quarters. As we will see, everyone seems to have a slightly different definition of the essay. I also think an argument can be made for the possibility of reading "like an essayist." In this instance, it is not the text, but the reader's approach or stance to understanding the text, that gives a piece of writing its "essayistic" qualities. I explore this idea in
chapter IV.

5. Emig's choice of terms to describe her self-sponsored, personal writing is unfortunate. Her use of the term reflexive bears little resemblance to my sense of reflexive or reflective.

6. Harrison expounds more fully on this thesis by analyzing the novels of Joseph Conrad, Robert Musil and Luigi Pirandello. He suggests that their work is more essayistic than novelistic, and essayism, a process of thinking that precedes decision, "ultimately requires novelistic form," because the novel "can portray the living conditions in which thought is entangled" (4).

7. I have found that it is easier to teach students how "to essay," when the situation is complex or messy. I find that they are then more likely to complicate situations of seeming simplicity. For example, I encourage students to write about situations that confuse them, that they haven't already figured out where they stand. I use difficult, academic texts (texts, that are obviously "other") to teach essayistic reading. Once students learn to adopt an essayistic approach to understanding these kinds of texts, they begin to apply it to texts they might have previously seen as easily accessible or seemingly simple, like a Raymond Carver short story.

8. Smith helps to complicate my understanding of one of the most prevalent responses students make to texts they read (their peers and others): "You can relate to it." I now see this response as a comment on the comprehensibility of the text or situation. When students make this comment, they seem to be suggesting that they can already relate the theory in their heads to what they see in the text(-world). So, no further effort is required. In a sense, Mindy could not understand Lucille because she could not relate to her. Lucille was an "other." Only when she was able to connect her own experience of working in the nursing home to Lucille's behavior, did she begin to modify the theory in her head. Philosopher Donald Davidson's notions of how people interpret new information through the use of prior and passing theories, which I talk about in the next chapter, are applicable here as well.
CHAPTER IV

READING AND REFLEXIVITY: RESPONDING TO TEXTS

We reach an understanding with our object and appropriate it into our own self-understanding when we have learned from it and taken account of its views in formulating and refining our position. This kind of consensus represents a "fusion of horizons" in a two-fold sense: on the one hand, we understand the object from the point of view of our assumptions and situation; on the other, our final perspective reflects the education we have received through our encounter with the object - Georgia Warnke, Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason, 1987.

In the last chapter I intimiated that essayism is a stance, a way of openly and reflexively approaching and negotiating ideas, that could be initiated by readers as well as writers. In this chapter I want to further explore essayism from the reader’s perspective. My emphasis is on a specific kind of dialogic and reflexive reading that is not primarily literary or aesthetic (although it is not precluded from also being literary or aesthetic). I will be talking about reading as a form of inquiry, a way of approaching the ideas in (complex or "other") texts, whether they be literary or academic.

In a piece written several years ago for The New York Times Book Review, Harold Brodkey suggested that reading is a "most dangerous game." Reading puts the reader at risk, and if "the reader is not at risk, he is not reading" (1985, 44). Reading is risky business because it "leads to personal metamorphosis, sometimes irreversible, sometimes temporary... A good book leads to alterations in one’s sensibility and often

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becomes a premise in one's beliefs" (44). This dangerous, transformative capacity of reading is possible because of the intimacy involved, "the prolonged (or intense) exposure of one mind to another" (1). Brodkey has in mind here a kind of literary (highbrow) reading, and yet, what he says about "cultured" reading applies equally well (maybe better) to the kind of dialogic and reflexive reading I have in mind when I think of reading "essayistically."

Brodkey's description of reading as an intimate and long term encounter with another begins to sound much like the ethnographer's extended foray into the field. In each situation, during the dialectical process of trying to comprehend or understand another, our own beliefs and assumptions are disclosed, and may themselves become the object of interpretation, critique and even "metamorphosis." It is this risk of alteration to one's view of the world that makes this kind of reading "dangerous," but also valuable. If the reader is not at risk, his or her current understanding and (self-)awareness remain safely immune to further complication or illumination.

The kind of essayistic, ethnographic venture I am talking about here--really, a form of hermeneutic inquiry into texts--is not a way of reading (or writing) that many students have experienced before coming to college, but I believe it's a way of reading students need to learn. To read essayistically means to approach a text with the conscious intention of engaging in genuine dialogue with its ideas, a dialogue that may put the reader "at risk" because it is can easily become a reflexive dialogue. This notion of risky and reflexive reading takes us back to the Frank Smith's concepts of comprehension and learning that I talked about in the previous chapter. I understand
Brodkey to mean that comprehension--the ability to relate what's already in our head to what we encounter in a text--does not constitute reading (in terms of Brodkey's normative ideal of reading). Rather reading (that puts the reader at risk) involves learning--the modification (or risk of modification) of what's in our head as a result of our encounters with a text. Both Brodkey and Smith see risk and modification as always leading to something better (obviously a debatable contention); in my terms, this "better" would be a more complicated understanding.

To write essayistically, it is helpful (maybe essential) if one can read essayistically. Rather than teaching the essay as "a series of model modes," Recchio (1989) suggests that "it would be more empowering to students were we to engage them through the essay in the dialogue of discourse, teaching the essay as a means, an approach to interacting with written texts, the texts of the students own language, and the texts of their experience" (280). As a form, the essay itself seeks to elicit this dialogue of discourse. Its specific qualities--e.g., tentativeness, suspension of closure, resistance to dogma--invite participation. The facts are not expected to speak for themselves; it is up to writers and readers to "transmute [them] into personal meaning" (Oates 1991, xxii). And yet one does not have to be writing an essay or reading an essay to be writing and reading essayistically. It is possible to read any kind of text "essayistically" in this dialogic manner, as long as readers are open to re-examining their own presuppositions in light of their engagement with others. The process of "transmutation" or understanding is not a one-shot, linear move, but an ongoing dialectical process between reader/writer and text that can eventually lead to what
Gadamer calls "a fusion of horizons," an enlargement of one's original perspective.

Kurt Spellmeyer (1989) notes that students' first readings produce a "disjunction"

...between the world as our students thought it should be and the world as others have represented it...the strangeness of this unfamiliar point of view compels readers to look back at the events of their own lives, but once their understanding of these events begin to change as a result of surveying them from a new perspective, they find the text has opened up commensurately (270-271).

Spellmeyer's explanation of reading begins to sound much like the process of consciousness raising which begins with the perception of "contradictions." In each case, a dialectical encounter with "strangeness" initiates a reflexive examination of the self which leads to further dialogue (with the text or other people). In (the ideal version of) essayistic reading and writing, readers and writers put themselves at risk by opening themselves to the multiple and contrasting perspectives of others. At the same time, however, they reflexively monitor their own beliefs and reactions to the process lest they: (1) lose their integrity by inadvertently "going native," by succumbing to the persuasiveness of being born again wholly, fully and uncritically; (2) attempt to objectify, dominate or deny the autonomy of the other. For example, in the last chapter, Susan and Mark succumb to the first danger: the uncritical acceptance of the culture's ready-made beliefs. Susan is in danger of following the custom of women changing their names simply because "it is the thing to do." Mark unconsciously subscribes to the myth "work hard and you'll succeed." Mindy and Ralph, on the other hand, risk objectifying the other. Mindy's first drafts make no attempt to try to understand Lucille's perspective; but when she scrutinizes her own reactions to the conditions at the nursing home, she comes to see Lucille in a more
complex way. Ralph does not examine his perspective about male and female relationships; rather he privileges it, precluding any possibility of dialogue with Steve and Sheila.

In essayistic reading, readers need to be both subject and object of their reading (they read themselves as they read the text) which ensures that their encounter with ideas will be dialogic and bi-directional rather than unidirectional. As such, essayistic reading is a sophisticated process that requires some degree of agency and confidence. Otherwise, readers cannot easily open themselves to another or withstand their own critical scrutiny. In essayistic reading, as in hermeneutic inquiry, "openness to the possible truth of a text or someone's claims...involve[s] an openness to the possible challenge these present to one's prejudices" (Warnke 1987, 97). Such a challenge can not only be difficult for students to negotiate, it can be especially hard for teachers reading student texts.

My conception of what it means to read essayistically shares many of the characteristics of the kinds of reading that David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky advocate in Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts (1986) and in their reader, Ways of Reading (1987; 1990; 1993). Their work has been instrumental in contributing to my thinking and teaching of reading to composition students. We both view reading as an ongoing and reflexive transaction between readers and texts, and we teach reading as a method of intellectual inquiry. Perhaps the distinction I would make between their practice of "strong, aggressive, labor-intensive reading" (1993, 5), and what I am calling essayistic reading is one of approach and stance. Whereas I have characterized
essayistic reading and writing as open and tentative, Bartholomae and Petrosky present reading and writing as "a struggle" in which a student has "to appropriate or be appropriated by a specialized discourse" (1986, 8). (Needless to say, this is not the stance of the ethnographer seeking entry to a new culture). Bartholomae and Petrosky’s methods of reading are specifically designed to afford (basic writing) students "access to the language and methods of the academy" (1986, 9). I think essayistic reading has a wider application. It is an approach that may be used by students to read academic texts, their peer’s texts, or their own developing drafts. It may also be used by teachers reading students’ texts.

Ironically, I might say that as a teacher, I have used Bartholomae and Petrosky’s methods to "appropriate" their methods, but not their methodology of learning. My "re-making" of Bartholomae and Petrosky’s methods into my sense of essayism is an illustration of a "thief and flier" response in the sense that Susan Jarrett intended: as a strategy that female readers use when reading texts that feel like a "discourse not intended for her" (Lewis and Simon 1986). One reason I prefer an essayistic approach to texts is that it suggests the possibility of a "both/and" stance. Bartholomae and Petrosky’s "appropriate or be appropriated" methods feels uncomfortably agonistic and "either/or." However, I realize, and I have argued elsewhere (Qualley 1994, forthcoming), that "both/and" is a sophisticated stance that students may only begin to assume after having travelling through many "either/or" positions. It may be that Bartholomae and Petrosky’s approach provides a necessary corrective to the "banking method of education" that is typical of much high school
Rhonda Leathers Dively (1993) has recently suggested a similar reading pedagogy that she has used to encourage students to explore and interrogate their unexamined religious beliefs. She asks students to read texts that show how their authors have earned their religious insights through intellectual engagement with their beliefs, rather than merely adopting somebody else’s ready-made conclusions (in born-again fashion). Dively argues that:

To facilitate the interrogation [of their beliefs] we should encourage students to theorize about their own subjectivity as the product of multiple interpellations rendered by various discourses affiliations. By doing so we can help broaden or complicate their understanding of themselves...Once students reach this level of self-awareness, they will be better prepared to address the complexity and conflict in their own writing about religious experiences and a host of other issues (101).

Thus, Dively, Bartholomae and I each suggest that we are teaching an intellectual stance and approach to texts that students can use elsewhere, both in the academy and in their own personal lives.

In the rest of the chapter, I will attempt to flesh out a fuller sense of my concept of essayistic reading by discussing students’ responses to the texts they are reading as well as their reflections on the texts they themselves have written. Finally, by examining my own (teacher’s) reading of students’ texts, I hope to further reveal some of the complexities of this process.

**Essayistic Reading: Open, Dialogic, Reflexive, Tentative**

Ostensibly, in the minds of many of our students and a great portion of the public, the purpose of a college education is to learn information that will cause a
person to become "educated." Most people (outside as well as some inside the university) assume that much of this education will occur through the reading of texts. However, many texts that students encounter can not be easily understood if students merely attempt to absorb or memorize their contents. They must be read actively and reflexively if students are to make sense of them. Students need to stake their claim by remaking these texts within the context of their own ideas and experiences.

Hermeneutic theory suggests that understanding is rooted in pre-understanding (foremeanings), which is to say that what we can understand is determined by what we already understand. (Or, to put it in Frank Smith's terms, what we can learn is determined by what and how we already comprehend or perceive the world). This idea has been used to support theories of how knowledge is acquired in many fields (including the pedagogical dictum, "begin where the student is at"). In literary theory, it forms the rationale for such different arguments as E. D. Hirsch's theory of cultural literacy and Stanley Fish's notion of the interpretive community.

To make sense of (to understand or interpret) a particular text, readers (individually or as members of a particular group) draw upon their tacit knowledge (Polanyi) as well as their more explicit theories and hypotheses about how the world works. However, readers may not be aware of the kinds of pre-understandings they bring to a text. It is during the process of reading, or "through the dialogical encounter with the otherness of text," that both the text's meaning and the reader's "foremeanings and prejudgments" are disclosed and themselves become open to interpretation and reflection. A hermeneutic account of reading "is reflexive because
as it discloses the text, it concurrently discloses the interpretive standpoints of the inquirer" (DiCenso 1990, 148).

Because understanding is thus conditioned or constrained by readers' pre-understandings or "prejudices", a text can never be fully absorbed or "disclosed" by any one reader or any one reading. In the following excerpt from an end-of-the-semester reflection on her work, Liz, an upper level composition student, uses Paulo Freire's theories to describe how to read Paulo Freire's text dialogically and reflexively:

[Freire's] type of writing requires the reader to think more in-depth than most writing demands. The reader must go away and come back to the writing as often as necessary in order to bring his own information to it, such as personal experience. This will help in ultimately understanding the work. A person with a banking education would not be able to handle such material...because according to Freire, this type of person has no thoughts [of his own] and therefore no ability to think creatively... (Qualley 1993, 111).

Liz makes the important point that understanding a complex text like Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* involves multiple readings. Readers have to "go away and come back to the writing as often as necessary..." Understanding does not magically emerge full blown during a first or solitary encounter with a text; rather, understanding is an ongoing process, occurring gradually by degrees. This kind of reading is dialogic or conversational. In Liz's words, the reader "must bring his own information to [the text] such as personal experience." In Bakhtin's words, the ideas and language of others only "become 'one's own' when the speaker [reader] populates it with his own intention, his own accent...adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (1981, 293). Only when a person populates the ideas of others with his or
her own knowledge and experience does the "externally authoritative" word become "internally persuasive. Bakhtin says at this point the individual become "author" of his or her own perspective. (Thief and flier by another name?). I would say it is at this point that the individual reaches a new level of understanding, one that has been enlarged, complicated or transformed. In order to engage in this kind of reading, students will need to rid themselves of the myth that "good" readers read quickly and only need to read the text once. (And teachers will need to allow time for the reading conversation to unfold).

Students need time to achieve an "internally persuasive" understanding of a text. The kind of reading I am talking about occurs gradually over time. For instance, when students are first learning to read essayistically, they might read a text, write informal written responses, talk about their reading with others, write more responses, read other texts and use them to go back and frame the original text. This is the kind of intellectual immersion I think students need to experience; if students are going to generate earned insights, I believe it will be under these conditions.

To read essayistically, then, the reader’s judgements must remain tentative, open to the possibility of elaboration, modification or revision through further dialogue and ongoing reflection on the text and/or other’s reactions to the text. Tentative, however, does not mean non-conclusive as Jean’s reflection on her work suggests:

I always felt I had to make a final decision, [but] I never really had the chance to think through my thoughts. This became most obvious to me when I worked through my feelings about Hedda Nussbaum and the question of her culpability... Through my re-seeing of the events of Hedda’s life and her psychological state at the time, I was able to come closer to a conclusion, though this conclusion is not really final since
my thoughts are in a constant state of reshaping by my experiences and my environment. (Emphasis added)

In order to learn to read essayistically, some students may also need to "unlearn" a critical approach to reading that many of them have only recently come to adopt (or mimic). Here, the text is seen as an antagonist that students must confront, critique and master. Students prematurely pronounce judgement and can close themselves off to further inquiry. In her end of the semester reflection, Carla alludes to the limitations in this way of reading that speaks with too much certainty too quickly.

Another thing I've learned to do when reading is not to jump to conclusions. In "The Feminization of Love," I disagreed with Cancion's sentence: "It is especially striking how the differences between men's and women's styles of love reinforce men's power over women." As soon as I read that sentence I thought, "How can she say that? She must be a wimp with an obnoxious, overbearing Italian macho man for a husband." I immediately defamed her before I read on. It clouded an open mind, and I carried around a bias for the remainder of the reading.

Many students adopt this hyper-critical and closed stance in reaction to their prior uncritical methods of reading, where they would read only to imbibe information or as one student said, "to get absorbed in the characters so I can escape life." They switch from simply absorbing "authoritative discourse" or the "otherness of text" to immediately confronting, even attacking, this otherness (shoot first and ask questions later). This move can be a temporary, developmental over swing on the part of the student learner who is simply trying to move away from accepting the authority of texts unquestionably. Both approaches, though--uncritical acceptance or offensive attack--are antithetical to the spirit of essayism. In the first approach, the self surrenders to the other; in the second, the other is assimilated by the self. Neither
approach is dialogic or reflexive. As Wayne Booth notes, the truly "critical mind does not know in advance which side it will come out on" (qtd. in Gage 1986, 22). The truly essayistic mind will more than likely not come out on a "side" at all; rather it will come out with a more complex understanding of all the sides, including (hopefully) its own. The following discussion of one student's response to Paulo Freire's chapter on "The Banking Concept of Education" suggests how essayistic reading can complicate and extend a reader's understanding of a text and herself.

Kay: "I Sometimes Look at the World As Being Separate From Me."

Kay was a first semester student in my Freshman English course. Her encounter with Paulo Freire's text occurred about two thirds of the way through the semester when she was becoming more comfortable with the "rituals" of my class. The reading ritual involved a process where students would read and mark a text for lines and passages they found interesting, significant or confusing. They would then discuss the passages they had marked with other students in small groups. After re-reading the text, students examined their ideas further by writing informal responses several pages in length. In these written responses, students might elect to elaborate on their initial response; they might examine their own experiences and beliefs that led them to see the text in a certain way; they might compare their reactions to other group members and try to account for the various "interpretations;" they might make connections between this text and other texts they had read. I responded with written comments on their papers. Students could elect to continue this "dialogue" by writing additional responses throughout the semester.
Prior to reading Freire’s chapter, the class had read, responded to and discussed essays by Jane Tompkins, Richard Rodriguez, Richard Wright, Joyce Carol Oates and Walker Percy. None of these texts, though, prepared them for Freire’s discourse. Like many students, Kay’s first encounter with Paulo’s Freire’s chapter on the banking concept of education from *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Bartholomae 1990) left her with a "feeling" that she "could not quite grasp." However, after a field trip to see the Boston symphony she turns to the last page of her text and writes: "I sometimes look at the world as being separate from me." In her response, Kay notes that "Freire’s chapter finally made sense to me because of a little homeless child on a Boston sidewalk." She goes on:

> We came by an older man who was rattling a cup and saying, "Change please. Change please..." But we all walked by consoling any guilt we had by thinking that he wanted the money to buy alcohol or drugs. However, directly after him, a little boy rattled the change in his cup...My heart dropped as he said, "Change please, Ma’am?" Yet we all walked by...

Kay’s encounter with this child provides the concrete experience she needs for gaining access into Freire’s abstractions and difficult discourse. It also provides her with a perspective, a place to position herself, so that she can begin a dialogue with Freire’s ideas. If she is first grounded in her own experience, then she is more likely to be able to locate herself in Freire’s text without being swallowed by it in the process. In David Bartholomae’s terms, this experience affords her the opportunity to "speak." But this utterance will evolve into a reflexive dialogue as Kay begins to use Freire’s ideas to examine and "complicate" her prior knowledge and experience with "the homeless."
I have seen homeless people before, yet, as Freire stated, I passively accepted pieces "from the world outside [my] mind." I lived in "ivory tower isolation." I knew all the statistics of the homeless. I saw them on television and read about them in newspaper and books, yet never linked my "fragmented view[s] of reality" together. I did not realize that homeless people were human like myself..."Man is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; man is a spectator, not a recreator..."[SIC] In a way the problem of the homeless was background material...At least until I looked into that little boy's eyes, then it became part of my conscious experience...

Kay's way of integrating Freire's words into her own text suggests that she is neither passively absorbing his ideas, nor is she imposing her views onto his text. Rather, she is engaged in a process of trying to "understand"--both Freire's essay and her own experience. Understanding in Gadamer's sense always means coming to see something in a new way--"understanding differently." Thus, we might think of essayism as a process of understanding that involves finding a common ground (Spellmeyer), making connections (Gould, qtd. in Shekerjian), and discovering new rational relations (Harrison) between one's own horizon and the horizon of the other (Gadamer). Once a link has been established, readers can travel back and forth along it, simultaneously reading the text and reading the self, furthering their inquiry into both realms. Kay's subjectivity will become an essential tool for her to use in the assessment of Freire's (complex) claims and in the construction of her own understanding of these claims. First, she "rewrites" Freire's text in her own language by replacing the generic, nameless "student" of Freire's text with herself:

Freire says that as a student, I was oppressed and my mind was "filled" with "contents which [were] detached from reality." He also said that the "teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized and predictable." Freire blames the education system and the teachers for my false perception of the reality of the homeless...
By putting Freire’s ideas into a familiar framework (her own experience) she is in a better position to test their credibility and determine how closely his theories (the objective facts of the situation) "fit" her world view (her subjective frame of reference).

I remember specifically writing down the numbers of the homeless in the United States and how [these numbers] have changed throughout the years. Then I memorized the numbers in preparation for my test, ready to spit them back to my teacher.

And, yes, what Freire says about students in general holds "true" of her experience in particular. As a student, she too is "filled" with "content which is detached from reality." It’s at this point that many students would (prematurely) curtail their inquiry. They end their encounter before they can use the relationship they have established with the text to begin a reflexive dialogue, one that could deepen their perspectives. However, Kay does not stop her inquiry here. The next part of her response begins to suggest why this kind of reading is risky. Kay realizes that not only are the teachers and educational system responsible for the "objectification of the homeless," so too is she:

Freire would say that the statistics [on the homeless] were too "critically objective" and that I should look at the statistics subjectively as something that can be changed. He would also remind me that the reality of the homeless was "formed by men’s actions" and thus, I a human, could in part be blamed for the homeless. He would say that I need more "critical intervention" with the homeless to understand the reality of homeless humans and how they affect the world. Then and only then, might I say, "I sometimes look at the world as being part of me."

Kay’s understanding of Freire’s text centers on her realization that as long as she views the world (the other) as something outside of her, separate, "different," cut
off from her "consciousness," she contributes to the "objectification" of such "problems" as the homeless. It is important to see how this kind of reading is a bi-directional process. Kay populates Freire's text with her experience of the homeless child; but, as we have seen, her knowledge and experience of the homeless have also been complicated and illuminated by Freire's theories.

In her end-of-the-semester reflection, written a month after her encounter with Freire, Kay writes that reading with its reflexive component is "fun." And yet, this kind of reading may only be fun, as Brodkey suggests, for the stalwart, the hardy. Essayistic reading is risky because it has the capacity to alter consciousness, and once individuals become (self-)aware, they cannot easily or simply go back to the way they were. Anthropologists Barbara Myerhoff and Jay Ruby explain:

We can not return to our former easy terms with a world that carried on quite well without our administrations. We may find ourselves like Humpty-Dumpty, shattered wrecks unable to recapture a smooth, seamless innocence, or like the paralyzed centipede who never walked again once he was able to consider the difficulty in manipulating all those legs. [However,] once we take account of our role in our own productions, we may be led into new possibilities that compensate for the loss (1982, 2).

Fortunately, Kay's reading of Freire does not leave her "paralyzed" or a "shattered wreck," but energized as she is led into seeing "new possibilities." In her reflection, she uses the insight she has gained about "seeing the world as part of herself" to make connections with several of the texts the class had read earlier in the semester. She notes that, like Richard Rodriguez, her past education was based on "imitation" and "regurgitating what the teacher says." Then, drawing from Walker Percy's essay, "The Loss of the Creature," she continues:
I must salvage the meaning that I get from my education, not what my whole educational package says I must learn...I am surprised, for example, when my psychology teacher speaks of the same parasympathetic nervous system that my zoology teacher spoke of...I have trouble connecting what I learn to real life...I feel as if I am cheating myself of an education...

Kay doesn’t want to cheat herself like Rodriguez and Marya, the character in Joyce Carol Oates fictional work, "Theft."

As Freire in "The Banking Concept of Education" said, "Man is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; man is a spectator, not a recreator." [SIC] Rodriguez and Marya are spectators separated from others. They believe the only important thing in life is their structured and predictable education...I must learn from each experience by not only taking advantage of it, but by reflecting, questioning and relating that experience to other experiences.

Kay is reading these texts essayistically. She is reading as an inquirer, open to new possibilities and ready to re-examine her own assumptions and experiences in light of her encounters with the ideas of others. She does not master the texts in any all encompassing sense, but instead, uses them as theories to complicate and enlarge her understanding of her own experience. And her experience is what makes the abstractions of these texts accessible.

Kay has had to find some point of commonality to begin a dialogue with these texts. Even though our aim as educators may be for students to eventually understand others (texts, persons, cultures, etc.) on the other’s terms (as much as this is possible), I believe in order to get to this point, individuals have to first establish a "common ground" (to use Spellmeyer’s term) between the other and themselves. To establish a common ground, the individual often initially attempts to understand the other in terms of some feature of the individual’s own experience. Philosopher Donald Davidson’s
concept of "interpretive charity" suggests that when we encounter "something to interpret, we interpret so as to maximize agreement, so as to credit the other speaker or the writer with beliefs as much like our own as possible" (Dasenbrock 1991, 13). It may seem that interpretive charity implies we are tied to our beliefs and ways of seeing, that we are prisoners of our specific "interpretive communities" (as Stanley Fish might argue)\(^5\), or stuck in a hermeneutic circle. That is, we can only understand what we already understand. Not so. Davidson says that we only begin the process of interpretation by assuming commonality and agreement (interpretive charity) "precisely because that enables us to find and make sense of disagreement" (Dasenbrock 1991, 13). In the process of trying to understand an other, as we have seen, we may start to question and modify our own beliefs. When we discover the "anomalous"—things that don’t quite fit our "prior theories," we may be forced to construct what Davidson calls "'a passing theory,' a modified version of the prior theory adjusted to fit what we have learned about the other" (Dasenbrock 1991, 13). Thus Kay, in response to her engagement with Freire’s text, questions and alters her prior theory about education as a process in which one is cut off, separated, from the facts one is learning about. She develops a passing theory in which she herself is implicated in the process of learning. Whether this passing theory is simply temporary, constructed for the occasion of reading this text, or if it becomes a more permanent part of Kay’s philosophy remains to be seen.

I do not think the process of understanding can commence if one can only see the other as being fundamentally different, because there would be no way (or even
any incentive) to begin a conversation. When the fundamentally different other is a text, students will often make comments such as "I couldn’t get into it," or "It was boring." (Translation: I am not like this text; I have no interest in reading this text; I have made no attempt to try to understand what this text had to say).

Obviously, the claim that we first must attempt to understand an other as we understand ourselves seems to go against much of what our postmodern sensibilities tell us about respecting difference and maintaining the integrity of the other. In fact, Iris Young (1986) and Gregory Clark (1994) argue just the opposite point when they both propose a concept of community based on difference. According to Clark, such a community works not by "identifying one’s self with another, but by measuring and considering the consequences of the distance that divides self from another" (69). I have argued elsewhere (Qualley, 1994 forthcoming), however, that what Clark proposes may be the eventual aim, the endpoint of the process, but it is not the way to commence trying to understand differing others.

Nonetheless, at the same time, if we are to learn—that is, to modify the theory in our head as a result of our encounters with others--our interpretations cannot be simply self-confirming. Our encounters with others should lead us to critically examine and reflect on our prior theories and assumptions, otherwise we can only comprehend what we already know. We cannot learn anything new.

Rob: Interpretive Charity Run Amok (?)

In her discussion of Gadamer’s hermeneutical philosophy, Georgia Warnke (1987) asks "Is there a difference between a situated perspective that illuminates the
meaning of an object and one that distorts it?" (75). I believe a perspective that distorts the meaning would be a perspective that did not take the text into account at all. As Lorraine Code (1991) notes, taking subjectivity into account should not "entail abandoning objectivity" (41). Each is needed to constrain the other. To illustrate how interpretive charity can run amok if unchecked by dialogue with others and a reflexive monitoring of one's "prejudices," let me briefly contrast Kay's response to Freire's text with another freshman student's response.

When Rob announces at the outset of his first response that anyone who reads Freire's essay "can sit down and interpret it anyway they desire," we know that an authentic and (self-) critical dialogue is not likely to be forthcoming. If each reader is ascribed with carte blanche authority to interpret the text, then reading is purely subjective, and dialogue that could enlarge understanding becomes superfluous. Rob's way into this text is to connect Freire's teacher-student partnership with the brother-pledge relationship in his fraternity. "My own personal evaluation [of the essay] drives me toward my experience pledging Theta Chi." It is important to note here that just as I tend to draw from those experiences and theories that I am currently trying to understand, and just as Kay used a recent experience of encountering a homeless child to help her make sense of Freire's text, Rob may also be simply using what is in the forefront of his mind to help him connect to Freire's text. The problem is that he may be more concerned with trying to make sense of the brotherhood than with really engaging with Freire's text. Although I want to encourage students to use their reading to help them make sense of their present situations, I don't want students to end their
excursions with a purely idiosyncratic reading.

Rob explains that "whole idea behind the fraternity atmosphere breeds manhood. It's whole purpose is to produce better men through relationships with your fellow man." (I can't help but wonder to what extent Freire's use of "men" and the masculine pronoun throughout his essay has contributed to Rich's interpretation).

Just as the teacher and student are co-investigators in liberatory education, Rob notes that "in the same way that the brotherhood teaches the pledgehood, the pledges teach the brothers...Through the pledge process, we expand the ideals of the fraternity giving it another dimension." And just as Freire's problem-posing teacher "presents the material to the students for their consideration, and re-considers his earlier considerations as the students express their own," Rob explains that both the brothers and pledges benefit from "the understanding and utilization of the democratic process in meetings." Rob "maximizes agreement" between the text and his own world view when he turns Freire's revolutionary method into a manifestation of the (American) democratic process (the same process, of course, exhibited by the fraternity).

With a grand total of 59 active brothers and 24 pledges, innumerable ideas arise in these meetings, bringing out different dimensions on how to best operate the fraternity. In no way do the brothers' suggestions outweigh the pledges. True, a majority rule does come into effect, but not before every idea has been torn apart, embraced, criticized and then finally voted on. Through this type of dialogue, the knowledge that best suits the fraternity is brought out.

Rob's concept of democratic dialogue--a rule designed to let everybody have their say--is vastly different than Freire's transformative notion of a dialogue that leads to
understanding. For Rob, the dialogue in fraternity meetings seems to be more like a procedure that allows people to gain access to the floor so they can air their views and argue for what they already think. Even though Rob says every idea is "embraced," the aim is consensus. Unlike Kay, Rob is not engaged in an authentic dialogue with Freire's text or with his own experience of the fraternity; he is merely using one to relate to the other. When Freire says, "The pursuit of full humanity, however, cannot be carried out in isolation or individualism but only in fellowship and solidarity," Rob responds that "this quote pretty much sums up the fraternity...The fraternity does indeed provide a unique opportunity for individual personal development but it is still superseded by the concept of brotherhood." Rob is arguing for a particular version of reality, not exploring one.

Interpretive charity runs amok because Rob's inquiry has ended prematurely; he maximizes agreement without also looking for points of disagreement--the ways in which Freire's text does not "sum up the fraternity." At this point, I should emphasize that students may not ever go beyond simply "relating" to a text on the basis of their own experience without the intervention of a teacher or peer. The fact that Rob curtails his inquiry prematurely, is not his shortcoming as much as it may be the fault of a pedagogy (or teacher) that does not nudge him to continue. Examining the differences between positions is a critical habit that, as I have already suggested, has to be taught rather than simply acquired. As Bartholomae and Petrosky note, reading "against the grain" is "the most difficult work for students to do" precisely because it involves traveling against their natural currents (1993, 12).
And so, while a reader's subjectivities and prejudices are what makes understanding possible, the reader must always be open to the possibility of that his or her prior theory will be changed or challenged. That is what Freire means by authentic learning. That is what Brodkey means by risk. In this reading, Rob has achieved a kind of partial comprehension because he has been able to relate his ideas about the fraternity to specific ideas in the text. Since he is still trapped inside the shadow of his own gaze, however, he does not learn from Freire's theories or manage to complicate his own understanding about the fraternity. Without reflexivity—the critical examination of his own perspective—he does not discern the differences between Freire's philosophy and his fraternity. (For example, I notice he doesn't consider his privileged pledge status in the fraternity in light of Freire's suggestion that "the oppressed, who by identifying with charismatic leaders, come to feel that they themselves are active and effective"). And, it is the distinctions, rather than the similarities, that expand understanding. In answer to Warnke's question, Rob's "situated perspective" distorts rather than illuminates because he doesn't complete the process. Like the blind men, he only touches the elephant, he never really sees it fully.

In the next example, we will see how Chad, another student, uses his perspective to illuminate the meaning of both Alice Walker's essay, "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens," and his own experience by attending to differences as well as similarities.

**Chad: Prompted By Alice**

In order to begin to understand Alice Walker's essay, Chad, whose "Head and
"Heart" essay we looked at in Chapter II, must find a way to connect his own experience of being white and male with the experience of being Black and female in this culture. Early in his paper, Chad writes that like the African American women in Walker's essay, he too was oppressed: "In my family I was treated like a second rate person. From an early age I was told I was dumb and stupid, then pushed to the side. I felt as if I didn't have the right to exist." Without knowing the particulars, this point of comparison might seem presumptuous at the very least. Even knowing that Chad did, in fact, grow up with an abusive, alcoholic father, we might still feel uneasy, as if the Black women's oppression is about to "get disappeared" or meliorated before it can be comprehended. Unlike Rob, however, at the same time that he is seeking common ground, Chad is continually monitoring the differences between his experience and the experience of the African American women. He is careful to note that similarity does not constitute sameness:

My oppression was different than the Blacks. I am white and male which allows me greater access to the opportunities of our culture...

I was tracked into lower level with the Blacks who couldn't write or speak correctly. We were the kids who would never go to college. But I was different from them. I was white...

I got into college where the upper class were. I had to work hard to fight my low self esteem all the way. But I didn't have to fight prejudice. I stepped in with the whites and was one of them...

When I lived in North Carolina, the unemployment lines were filled with what whites called "lazy Blacks." I never heard anyone call me lazy and white when I was in the same unemployment lines...

Chad's purpose, however, is not to compare his oppression with the African American women in Walker's essay. What interests him is idea of the "spirit," the "notion of
song," that Walker talks about:

Unlike the women in Walker’s story my sex and skin color did not
block me from the tools to express my creativity or my spirituality. But
like them, I was blocked. For a long time my spirit was held captive by
others and then by my own oppression. Rarely was I able to develop
myself or explore and express my spirituality. But it was there...

But Chad doesn’t know how his own spirit was maintained or how he knew (without
knowing) his spirituality was there. What kept the notion of song alive in him, a white
male? If Chad can begin to grasp how the African American women kept their spirits
alive despite the brutality of their lives, then maybe he can begin to understand his
own experience of oppression. Tentatively, Chad explores what it would be like to be
an African American woman. Here, he adopts the learner’s stance, as he opens
himself to the experience of the "other."

I wonder what it would be like if I were a Black woman? In the run
down shacks of North Carolina, I’d fit in. There would be plenty of
Blacks there. I’d properly bear several children that I couldn’t support.
Then I’d teach them to respect themselves and send them out to a world
where they would receive little respect. Painted on a door of a small
store in North Carolina, I read "No Blacks or dogs." What would my
children think of themselves if they were to read this...But what about
in New England? I wouldn’t live in a shack, but I also wouldn’t be able
to go to a store without people looking at me as if I were out of
place...In and among thousands of whites, I’d stick out.

As he considers the effects of discrimination on African American women, his
dialectical encounter into the realm of the other yields a reflexive kickback for
himself, a sobering reminder of his own privilege. In the next sentence he adds, "but
as a white male I’d blend in." In order to understand the experience of African
American women, Chad must not only attempt to cross racial boundaries, he must also
consider gender and sexual distinctions. He continues his exploratory dialogue:
What would the white men think of me? I've heard from many men they would like to sleep with a Black woman. If I were a Black woman among men who wanted to sleep with me because I was Black, how would that feel? Would I feel like an item, like on a menu? I'd be a commodity like Walker's grandmother. Maybe the men would talk to me as if I were special--no, probably different. I'd feel out of place...Would my spirit be strong enough for me to find my place instead of having to be where and what they thought I should be?

Going back to his own situation, Chad notes that his spirit "hasn't always been strong enough to find its own place." Although Chad is white and male, he has experienced both sexual abuse and class oppression. As he considers his own experience, he comes to see that like the African American women, his "spirit" or "drive to be" was kept alive. And yet he is different. Given the privileges afforded his race and sex, what has kept his spirit alive?

I learned long ago that if I want[ed] anything I had to bow to the powerful males. I felt as if I were in the wrong world...My spirit waited much like Walker's spirit waited... Walker's mother and mother's mother kept alive what was most important, the notion of song, or as I see it, the drive to be. Somehow my drive was never taken. Through beatings, rape (by a white male) and prolonged alcohol usage my spirit was kept alive; broken, at times, but never lost. *In those ways, I'm like the Black woman. But I'm different in that I'm a white male and I don't know what kept my spirit alive.* (Emphasis added).

Chad's oppression is less visible and overt than the kinds of discrimination experienced by African American women. But it is this distinction that, interestingly, enables him to begin to understand what all forms of oppression have in common--the loss of self and agency. At this point, the horizons separating Chad's experience and the experience of the African American women begin to fuse, or at least momentarily blur.

Can anyone see that I am? I'm lost without knowing how to be found.

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I'm dead. I'm Black and female in a white male's world. But I'm really white and male. No one calls me nigger or (fill in one of many degrading names our culture has for women) so I'm supposed to know who and where I am. I'm supposed to take jobs of power and know I desire them. I'm not supposed to question my own right to exist. But I do. My oppression often left me without any self. I would become whatever someone wanted me to be, at work and in bed. Do I sound like a black woman? Do I sound like a white male?

With a dramatic shift of voice, Chad's final paragraphs look through or past difference to focus on what might be termed the common life force, the spirit that fights to exist within every human:

Did you have to fight your self oppression? Maybe the fight helped keep us alive. Maybe whatever this thing spirit is kept us alive. Take my body and my children. Take my ability to sing. But you can't take me. I remember and soon so will you. So say this thing named spirit, named Walker, named black, named white, named male, named female, named life.

I would argue that Chad has earned this insight. He has been engaged in a process that has earned him a deeper understanding of both Walker's essay and his own experience. Unlike many students who first try to erase racial, class and gender differences by saying things like, "Hey, we're all human beings here," Chad has not tried to arrive at this position without first having travelled.

Like Kay's reading of Freire's text, and like Mindy's essay about the nursing home and Susan's essay about changing her name that we looked at in Chapter III, Chad's essayistic reading of Walker's text doesn't really produce a conclusion with which we can agree or disagree; rather his reading has elicited a way of looking at Walker's essay (as well as his own experience) that we might want to consider, think about. We understand how he has arrived at this provisional insight because we have
been privy to the process of its formulation.

So far in this chapter, we have looked at student's written responses to their reading of other people's texts. Now, I want to consider a student's response to re-reading her own texts.

Anna: Education as "Consciousness of Consciousness"

Although I ask students to reflect on the drafts of the individual essays they write through written meta-commentaries, I want to direct my comments in this section to students' responses to the body of texts they have produced over time, in this case, a semester's composition course. At the end of each semester, I ask my students to read all of their papers and responses as a single text. The purpose of such a request is overtly reflective: I want students to examine their work for patterns or themes and to theorize what their collected work says about them as readers, writers, thinkers and learners. I am particularly interested in the ways the students will use the ideas gained from their reading to frame and talk about their own understandings of themselves. Such framing suggests the way that students' "horizons" have "fused" with these texts over time.

As Anna, a first semester freshmen student, reviews her work, she writes, "I can see examples of where I have developed into an active reader, a conscious writer, a perpetual thinker and a connecting learner." Her twelve page reflection illustrates how she actively, consciously and perpetually makes connections as she traces the development of her understanding of what it means to be "educated" through her essays and responses. She frames this retrospective reading of her work with ideas
gained from the essays she has read, especially Paulo Freire’s chapter, "The Banking
Concept of Education." For instance, after re-reading her first paper, a case study of
herself as a reader and writer, she notes: "I was beginning to become aware of my
actions and thoughts, as well as the reasons behind them. Freire describes this
awareness as ‘consciousness of consciousness’, and I was beginning the eternal
process of a problem-posing method of education..." What Anna was beginning to be
aware of was that even though "my grades said that I was learning in school... I
realize[d] that I wasn’t being educated." When she looks at her papers written over
the semester together, they reveal her ongoing quest for a new definition of education.
She discovers in hindsight that each response and paper she has written seems to have
further enlarged her understanding of what education means.

In her response to Richard Rodriguez’s autobiographical chapter on his
schooling, she begins to tentatively piece together a new sense of what education is.
She writes in her reflection:

After reading Rodriguez’s essay I felt unsettled. I did not agree with the
general concept of this style of education, but I was not sure what I
thought was the correct style of education...I came to the conclusion that
Rodriguez learned while he was in school, but he was not becoming
educated. Education must not only be logic and reason, but must
include feelings and heritage as well.

As she examines her work from her perspective at the end of the semester, she sees
that "this was not the end to my process of defining education." She next looks at her
response to Joyce Carol Oates’ fictional excerpt about a Marya, young woman
obsessed with her grades, and notices how her idea about education has undergone
further complication. Here is Anna’s reading of Anna reading:
After identifying Marya’s education (or lack of), I looked at myself. I identified with Marya through my beliefs that school is the main priority...and my personal development is addressed only when time permits. I felt while reading about Marya I was a walking Marya brought to life...As I read my voice into Marya’s words, we asked together what significance grades held.

Anna notes that the essay she wrote following her response to Oates’ text illustrated how "I write to sort things out that exist in a jumbled state in my mind...The essay addressed my concerns about whether or not I am working for an education and how I could determine the answer to my question." Her essay yields the new thought that perhaps education is (or should be) a "life long-process" that "extends past the formal structure of school systems." She then uses this idea to look at her own educational experience: "My essay forced me to evaluate my education and the time I have spent in college."

Anna writes in her reflection that although "Rodriguez sparked my interest in determining what an education was [and] Oates helped me decide what some of the criteria were," it was Paulo Freire’s chapter that "enabled me to identify the different aspects of education posed by Oates and Rodriguez. By connecting the ideas presented by each, I can synthesize...and evaluate my education thus far." Each piece of writing that she examines seems to have built on and subsumed (rather than replaced) her previous understanding. She realizes she has been involved in a kind of learning that, in James Britton’s words, "consists of a process of making finer and finer distinctions" (qtd. in Graham 1991, 77), and in my words, leads to the development of a more complicated understanding. Anna’s reflection has uncovered a Deweyian truth: that each definition of education results in a temporary "consummation" of her thinking,
not a "cessation" of her inquiry. Anna explains that the "essays that I have written and read in the past will help me read and write essays in the future. I am becoming actively aware and involved in my thinking process." Thus, her encounters with the ideas of others have invited her to do more than simply "acknowledge that I have an opinion about a subject." She has also become reflexive: "I now look for the reasons that shape my opinions and my ideas about the subject."

I believe that students can learn a great deal about themselves as readers, writers, thinkers and learners when they have an opportunity to examine the written texts they have produced over a semester's composition course. After covering the curriculum of the course, they now uncover the significance of their transaction with it. Anna finds patterns and makes connections that deepen her understanding of her experience in Freshmen Composition. What is more, she has earned her insight that "I will never be fully educated because I will always be in the process of education."

The notion of life-long learning is no longer a ready-made belief. She has claimed it for herself. Just as the retrospective reading of my own work that I discussed in Chapter I results in a unique, personal, idiosyncratic understanding, so does Anna's reading here. We have each constructed a coherence of how we got here—where here is but a temporary resting spot in the journey we both are still making.

I have been suggesting that essayistic reading can help students stake their own claim to texts, especially difficult texts. The understandings Kay, Rob, Chad and Anna have reached are partial (in two senses), provisional, approximate. Graham Good (1988) describes the essayistic transaction as a of moment temporary
illumination: "Self and object define each other, but momentarily. The self will go on to other definitions through other objects; the objects (whether places, works of art or issues will find other definitions in other selves" (5). What happens, though, when the object is a student text and the reader is a teacher?

Teachers and Essayistic Reading

Students are well aware that their texts are likely "to find other definitions in other selves." The fact that so many students admit to the practice of "giving the teacher what she wants" suggests that they believe teacher's readings of their texts are sometimes purely subjective. All the more reason, it seems to me, that teachers should be able to explain how they arrived at the reading they did.

Teachers are in positions of power in relation to their students and prone to superimposing their own "ideal" version of what a text should say (and how it should say it) onto what a student text actually does say. (Knoblauch and Brannon 1984). It is very important then that they be aware of the prejudices that they bring to their reading. As Brenda Deen Schildgen suggests, teachers, "must be conscious of their own convictions about writing, able to scrutinize the limits and possibilities of these attitudes, and willing to concede that these convictions are open to question, correction and adaptation..." (1993, 36). To read students' texts well--sensitively, fairly, fully--I believe it is useful for teachers to read them reflexively, both for what they say and how they are written.

When teachers encounter words that don't quite fit, sentence patterns they don't recognize, or ideas that have not been fully fleshed out, it might be helpful for them to
recall their own memories of schools and of themselves as novice writers and new learners. For example, it is Mike Rose’s ability to read his students’ texts and lives essayistically—dialogically and reflexively—that makes Lives On the Boundary (a text that I would argue is an extended essay itself) such compelling work. Rose not only gains a more complicated insight into students’ struggles on the margins of academic life, he also reaps a fuller understanding of the nature of his own literacy development. I expect that it is because he can see a connection between the kinds of academic problems his students face and his own history of failure as a student that he is able to read their work so carefully.

It’s not always easy, however, to make the connection that will begin the dialogue with a text. Some texts pose more risk for some readers. This is true for teachers as well as students; however, Lisa Delpit reminds us that teachers as persons with power have a greater responsibility to try to understand the other’s perspective. So let me not shirk my own responsibility and by way of offering an illustration, return to my reading of the paper, "Who Wears the Pants?" that we looked at in Chapter III. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the slippery, but, I believe, necessary role of subjectivity in essayistic reading.

Teachers Reading Students’ Texts: Rereading Who Wears the Pants?

When anthropologist Alan Peshkin (1988) talks about the need for researchers to identify and monitor their "subjective I’s" during the research process, he is talking about the researcher’s "foreconceptions" or "prejudices." Teachers also need to be aware of how their "subjective I’s," their foreconceptions and prejudices, come into
play during their reading of student texts.

My role as a teacher and a researcher affects the degree to which I was/am able to open to Ralph's text. In other words, this engagement is not a free or chance encounter between equals (as few encounters between teachers and students are). I bring certain assumptions and expectations about the conventions of writing (style, length, language, diction, grammar, etc.) to this text that I am not likely to be easily persuaded to modify. These are conscious foreconceptions. For the most part, I know what they are before I begin to read Ralph's paper.

My foreconceptions also come into play when I am responding to the content of Ralph's paper, which was about Ralph's confusion and frustration with his friend Steve and Steve's girlfriend Sheila. Ralph was upset that Steve had stopped spending time with the guys, and he believed that Sheila was to blame for this situation. According to Ralph, she had taken to "wearing the pants" in the relationship, leaving Steve defenseless, emasculated.

When I first received his paper in class, I did not really read his paper "essayistically." I read it critically. My own agenda as a teacher concerned with finding ways to help students become essay writers (like me?) took precedence over my attempts to understand and learn from the perspective reflected in his paper. And while these two positions are not unrelated--I need to understand the Ralph's point of view in order to help him become a more effective essay writer--my purpose in this encounter is not first and foremost to deepen my own understanding.

Donald Murray, Donald Graves and other proponents of writing process and
response theories of teaching have argued that to be effective teachers, teachers, themselves, need to be learners. They suggest that the teacher’s job is to help their students teach them what they (the students) have to say. I have come to realize from my own experience of reading student texts, however, that teachers can’t just be learners; otherwise, their own learning and understanding might take precedence over the learning and understanding of their students. On the other hand, if teachers want to become more reflective and effective teachers, they have to be open to the lessons their students can teach them about their (the teachers’) own methods of reading.

To read Ralph’s paper essayistically, I have to be willing to put my own concerns on hold (at least temporarily) and open myself to the "otherness" of Ralph’s text. In this case, the otherness in Ralph’s text goes beyond simple "student" otherness (e.g., naive, underdeveloped or incorrect language and content) to an otherness that I am eager to resist because it chafes my sensibilities as a woman. I know that if I attempt to engage this paper openly, tentatively, and reflexively that I might uncover my own prejudices toward men, information that could make me a more conscious reader and thus more effective teacher in the long run. But why am I reluctant to open myself to the perspective contained in this paper? To what extent are my own gender biases operating here?

Anne Malone, a colleague of mine, presented a paper at the CCCC in Nashville (1994) that demonstrated how the meaning of a story (as well as the story itself) changes when the sex of the characters is changed. How would I have read Ralph’s paper if the narrator had been a female writing about her female friend’s relationship
with a male? Here is part of Ralph's essay with Steve and Sheila's positions reversed:

Those men, as nice as they are, just won't let my friends breathe. I mean what's so bad about the girls having a night to ourselves at the ballpark? Don't guys like nights to themselves once in awhile? I've heard them say they do but rarely does it happen. They're simply too busy hounding us...

Sheila couldn't do this, Sheila couldn't do that. She couldn't go here; She couldn't go there; and it's all because he said so. How does he think he can control her like that...

...instead of confronting Steve when they have a conflict of interest, she keeps her mouth shut, and as a result we never see her...God knows we begged her to confront him. She is so reluctant that I would say she's scared...Why Steve can't see that he's crowding her absolutely mystifies me. Perhaps that is just the way some men are, but that certainly doesn't justify it...

Sheila simply seems to have lost her confidence, assertiveness and the ability to tactfully stand up for herself...Sheila feels as though she must act responsible and proper in front of him because there have been times when she hasn't, and he was furious...

When Sheila does confront him about something, one of two things happen. One, he gets his way (normally the case) and Sheila is once again reduced to nothing, and the other is that she gets her way, but the two end up mad at each other...

It may sound like we're sticking our noses in where they don't belong, but Sheila is a good friend, so we have all the right to involve ourselves to a certain extent. All we want is to help Sheila assert herself so she can have a little bit more space. She's told us several times that she'd love to have a little bit more room to do what she wants and not have to worry about the consequences...

The stance represented in this version of the paper is no more essayistic than the original. The imaginary female writer does not probe her own perspectives or acknowledge how her own frame of reference works to shape her interpretation. The
writer here also seems unable or unwilling to move beyond her ready-made conclusions. This writer’s inability or refusal to reflexively examine her own assumptions and how she came to hold these assumptions prevents her from viewing the situation from multiple perspectives and therefore limits her ability to engage essayistically with the subject. But something has changed.

By reversing the positions of the key players, we have got a different story. To me, this one speaks of silencing, of fear, of overwhelming control, oppression and violence. As a female reader, I am more sympathetic to this story because this is a tale that confirms an understanding I already have about many relationships between men and women. Without much effort, I not only understand why this writer is upset, I believe she is justified in feeling this way. I was not sympathetic to Ralph’s position, nor did I feel he was justified in his complaints. In Ralph’s paper, Steve is made to seem the poor, hen-pecked male, victim of an overbearing, unreasonable woman. In the female’s paper, however, Sheila appears to be a real victim of male dominance and control. My concern as a teacher that this writer open herself to understanding the other (in this case the "oppressor’s" perspective) is overshadowed by my feminist concern for the writer and the woman she’s writing about. In both versions of these papers, then, my subjectivity directs my reading. It determines what I focus on, what it means, and how I will respond. Reader subjectivity is, of course, a given in reader response theories of reading literary texts; however, as I am trying to suggest, a reader’s subjectivity is more complicated when the reader is a teacher reading a student text.
Regardless of my sympathies, however, my pedagogical response as the teacher-reader of student papers, as I explained in Chapter III, is to introduce a counter-discourse. However, the counter-discourse I would propose is different for each essay. In the last chapter, I mentioned that after I received a draft of Ralph’s paper in class, I urged him to make use of some of the readings we had been examining in class. I had hoped that the literature we had read theorizing the differences between male and female relational needs and desires might enable him to consider Steve and Sheila’s relationship from a broader perspective and to see Sheila more sympathetically. What happened was that Ralph interpreted these texts so as to "maximize agreement" with his own view. He read "relationship" to simply mean male-female relationship and, thus, was able to continue to adhere to his original position. So much for my counter-discourse.

In the female version of this paper, my (hypothetical) response would also be to introduce another view. Here, however, I don’t think I would urge the writer seek "common ground" with Steve, the male "other," or suggest she attempt to understand Steve’s view from a broader perspective. I would not push her to examine and write about how she has come to the conclusions she has; nor would I suggest that she question the validity of her conclusions. Whereas Ralph’s stance toward his subject appeared myopic and prematurely certain to me, the certainty contained in the female writer’s stance that the situation between Sheila and Steve is a problem seems like a perceptive observation. Thus, I would not ask her to interrogate her own perspective; but I would try to get her to complicate her understanding about Sheila. I would
suggest that she examine Sheila’s reluctance to speak up for herself. My counter
discourse, then, might include other readings about women who stay in relationships in
which they are silenced or abused.

In each case, the writers of both versions of this paper appear no closer to
understanding the actions of their friends by the end of their papers. Writing has not
enabled them to see their problems more clearly. As the teacher, I want to help them
become unstuck, not by having them latch on to some simplistic answer ("that’s just
the way women/men are"), but by inviting them to use reading and writing as a
method for further inquiry. I want them to earn their insights about the various ways
men and women are positioned in this culture. And yet, the ways I devise to do this
are different for each paper because of my different responses to the situations they
describe. I suggest that Ralph become unstuck by trying to understand Sheila’s
position in the hopes that this will cause him to re-evaluate the role of the male in this
culture. What does it mean to "wear the pants?" I suggest that the female writer
become unstuck not by trying to understand Steve’s position, but by further examining
Sheila’s reluctance to stand up to Steve so that she may begin to deepen her
understanding about how such a potentially abusive situation could occur (and does
occur) in this culture. It could seem that I am privileging my own sex, or worse,
"imposing" my feminism on my students. Brenda Dean Schildgen cautions that "the
danger of subjectivism in this process is, needless to say, overwhelming, and the
opportunism of imposing selfish or self-immersed demands on the text is likewise
pervasive" (1993, 35). The question I must now ask myself is this: is my subjectivity
interfering with my ability to read these texts fairly (or at least in a way that is helpful to the students)?

Timothy Crusius suggests that once individuals have identified their foreconceptions, the next step in hermeneutic inquiry is to "distinguish...between enabling and disabling prejudices" (1991, 89). I believe it is our unconscious prejudices that have the most potential to become "disabling." That is why my reading needs to be reflexive. I must attempt to identify and interrogate the assumptions and beliefs I am bringing to my reading of student texts. Looking at my reactions to these two papers, I see that my response is influenced by my beliefs about the power relations between males and females. (I may be privileging my sex as well because I still see women at a disadvantage in these encounters).

As I mentioned before, neither version of this paper is essayistic, but neither is essayistic for different reasons. I suggested earlier in this chapter that two different stances were antithetical to the spirit of essayism: uncritical acceptance and hypocritical attack. In one approach the self surrenders to the other; in the other approach, the other is assimilated by the self. Ralph seemed to be moving toward the latter stance in his judgmental objectification of Sheila. My response was directed toward helping him to examine his own position, rather than privilege it or impose it on his subjects. The female writer, upset as she appears to be, still seems in danger of submitting to the situation and simply accepting her own and Sheila's powerlessness to change it. Thus, my response is directed toward enlarging her understanding of why some women might behave as Sheila does. Thus, my reading of these papers is not
simply based on my bias for the female perspective (although I can’t deny that is part of it); rather, it is informed by my diagnosis of each writer’s failure to essay.

Lest it sound like I am advocating an additional pedagogical burden for already overworked teachers when I suggest that teachers need to continually monitor the assumptions they bring to their readings of student texts, let me explain. By periodically paying attention to our responses to certain student texts, especially the one’s that elicit strong reactions from us, negative or positive, I believe we can change the way we read all of our student work. I chose to re-read Ralph’s paper because it evoked such a strong reaction from me. By identifying and looking closely at the ways my "gendered-I’s" were operating in my response to this text, I am now more likely to be aware of their influence on my reading of other texts. In some cases, a single, significant reflexive encounter has the capacity to alter the way we see ourselves and our worlds. As Barbara Myerhoff and Jay Ruby note, the experience of "heightened awareness or vertigo" that reflexivity generates "may be exhilarating or frightening or both, but it is generally irreversible" (1982, 1-2).

When I turn my reading of student texts into a reflexive inquiry, I find that I not only deepen and complicate my own understanding of my pedagogy, I am more responsive to my students. Because I am consciously seeking to identify and examine my own foreconceptions and prejudices I am likely to remain open to papers like Ralph’s, papers that have the potential to turn me into a "reluctant" or "resisting" reader (a stance I don’t think teachers can afford to unconsciously assume). My prejudices are not fixed assumptions. They evolve, deepen, recede, and even disappear...
(although new ones take their place). As Herbert Spiegelberg noted, "the only cure for subjectivity is reflexivity, which is 'more and better subjectivity, more discriminating, and more self-critical subjectivity..." (qtd. in Babcock 1980, 11). While it is difficult to turn my critical gaze inward, to open myself to my own self-scrutiny, questioning my own (what already feels like a too tenuous) authority, leaving myself vulnerable to doubt, I have, however, come to realize that unless the teacher is at risk, perhaps she is not really teaching.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER IV

1. To engage oneself in "risky" reading, notes John McCarthy, one "must be disposed to intellectual exertion and the times are not always favorable to that disposition" (1989, 56). Indeed, evidence for the anti-intellectual preferences of today’s reading public abounds. As I write during the week of December 6, 1993, Rush Limbaugh’s See, I Told You So and Howard Stern’s Private Parts compete for the top of the New York Times Best Seller list. No doubt these books put the reader at risk, but certainly not in the ways Brodkey, McCarthy and other theorists have in mind. But be the times what they are, and our students who they are, we can nonetheless still teach reading and writing as a form of intellectual exertion and risk taking.

2. All of these essays except the one by Richard Wright were from David Bartholomae’s and Anthony Petrosky’s Ways of Reading (2d ed.) Boston: Bedford Books, 1990: They included Jane Tompkins, "Indians: Textualism, Morality and the Problem of History;" Richard Rodriguez, "The Achievement of Desire;" Walker Percy, "The Loss of the Creature;" Joyce Carol Oates. "Theft" (From Marya, A Life). Richard Wright’s excerpt was from his autobiographical novel, Blackboy: Record of Childhood and Youth. I use the Bartholomae and Petrosky anthology, but not their sequencing or assignments.

3. Of course, we shouldn’t blame students for their premature closure on inquiry. Often, the demands of the course to cover a specific quantity of material is what prevents students from uncovering new insights or finding more depth and complexity in familiar ideas. For this reason, I have argued that we need to structure our courses for depth rather than breadth. Students would do just as much reading and writing but would read fewer texts and write fewer papers.

4. In their end-of-the-semester reflections, students were asked to select passages and ideas from one or more of the readings to use to frame themselves as readers, writers, thinkers and learners.

5. Davidson, according to Reed Way Dassenbrock, takes issue with Fish’s point that as members of different interpretive communities, we cannot know what someone else means, only what we take them to mean. (We can only know the text that we read, not the one the writer has written). Davidson says that this claim assumes that we in fact do know what the other means:

To say that someone’s beliefs are unknowably different from our own is to imply that we know what these beliefs are and therefore know them to be different…once we grant that we can mean different things by the same words...[we must also grant that] we can also mean the same thing by different words...What it means is that the world contains different speakers and interpreters, who sometimes use the same words, and
sometimes not, who sometimes hold the same beliefs, and sometimes not (Dasenbrock 1991, 11).

The point being, as Dasenbrock notes, that it's not our membership in different interpretive communities, but our different interpretations. For one thing, we belong to many interpretive communities simultaneously, any one or some which may exert a stronger influence on our reading or interpretation at any given time. For instance, when I went back to review some of Fish's work that I had read in 1985, I found that I had made sense of the text by drawing from the ideas of Walter Kintsch on macrostructures, work that I was involved in trying to understand at the time. As I suggested in chapter II, I tend to draw from my newest ancestors in my efforts to make sense, because in doing so, I also determine how closely related I am (or want to be) to these ancestors. Another way of putting this, is that I foreground those interpretive communities in which I am currently trying to become a part (or in which I am trying to determine if I want to or should become a member). Students do the same thing. One reason Kay makes a connection between Freire and the homeless child is because these events coincided.

6. It is important that I make clear that I am comparing students' written responses, not Kay and Rob themselves. I am merely trying to illustrate the differences between a response that shows evidence of essayistic reading and one that does not (yet).

7. For a description of the ways I use to get students to read and reflect on their own developing drafts see my essay, "Using Reading in the Writing Classroom," in Nuts and Bolts: A Practical Guide to Teaching College Composition (1991), edited by Thomas Newkirk.

8. Lorraine Code (1991; 1993) has asked if the sex of the knower is epistemologically significant. I am not exactly answering that question here; however, I think it will be evident to readers that changing the sex of the people in this paper, changes the meaning of the paper as well as our response to it. And for teachers, that is pedagogically significant.
CHAPTER V

COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY AND REFLEXIVITY

In taking seriously the interpretive insights of the other...we can begin to develop our own. Our own understanding can become richer and more differentiated to the extent that we try to understand the point of other interpretations, come to understand our own in relation to them, try to accommodate within our own interpretations the insights we think those other interpretations may possess, and work to preserve our own interpretations from the lacunae we find in others.


In the last two chapters, I examined essayistic writing and essayistic reading as a dialogic and reflexive approach to texts, an approach that, I argued, could enlarge, challenge or transform students’ understandings of their subjects and themselves. In this chapter I want to further illustrate how reflexivity can lead to the development of more complex and complicated perspectives by describing a collaborative inquiry project that uses and builds on these essayistic approaches to texts. The essayism that I have been considering thus far has focused on a single transaction between a writer or a reader and a text. Collaborative inquiry increases the number of transactions as students attempt to negotiate several multiple (and often conflicting) perspectives at once: They must be open to and engage various experts and authorities on their topic as well as each other’s evolving perspectives. What is more, collaborative inquiry entails genuine dialogic encounters with flesh and blood beings who are capable of "talking back."

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The collaborative inquiry project, which occurs in the last four and one half weeks of my fifteen week long composition course, requires small groups of two or three students to work closely together investigating, discussing, reading and writing about an issue, problem or concern of their choice. These self-selected groups decide on a subject for inquiry, conduct research and interviews, and spend a great deal of time in class and outside of class thinking, talking and writing about their information. Individually, students keep a personal journal to reflect on their topic and their group’s processes of collaboration. Twice a week they draw from their journal to write "reflective memos" to other members of the group, and these memos become the basis for further dialogue within the group. Students use their conversations with others to arrive at their own (hopefully more complicated, but not necessarily resolved) understanding of their topic, an understanding which shares some aspects of the group’s perspective, but which has been individually and subjectively processed and "claimed." Eventually, students produce separate research essays on their common topic, but co-author a foreword to their collection of papers which discusses why the group chose their topic and examines the similarities and differences in their positions.¹

These projects are not designed to produce consensus (although they can), but rather the goal is to uncover both similarities and differences in individual’s ways of thinking and writing about their topics. Collaborative inquiry often makes manifest the largely invisible and unconscious processes of thinking and inquiry. By working closely with others for an extended period of time, students can actually see how their
ideas develop and change over time. For example, in the following journal entry, Carrie not only notices the different perspectives that emerge in her group, but more importantly, we see how she has come to understand and value these differences:

We all had our own ideas and conceptions coming into our talk, yet as we talked, they seemed to bend, stretch and grow under the weight of the other’s words [as well as] our thoughts about these words. At first I noticed this in listening to Liz and in truth was annoyed. I thought, "How can she change her mind like that? Didn’t she just say..." That’s where I stopped. I realized that it was not a fault as I had wanted to believe, but that it was someone trying to amalgamate all of her present thoughts and that she was merely trying to articulate them...I think through having to learn to communicate your ideas and feelings that you can’t help but come to appreciate the person more...Unless there is some great gulf (so great that people cannot, or shall I say will not, consider the thoughts of others), you can’t help but come to...respect a person for the fact she stands for something and is basically a thinking person with ideas and feelings.

Carrie’s first reaction to Liz’s changing her mind is that it is a “fault;” only when she grants Liz her own subjecthood can she then begin to see Liz’s actions as intelligible and intelligent. Once she acknowledges that Liz is a "thinking person with ideas and feelings," and that these ideas and feelings may be different from her own (recall Gerald’s realization in Chapter III that Spanish es diferente), she can engage in what Maria Lugones (1987) describes as “‘world-travelling’.” To oversimplify, world-travelling is a process of mentally shifting between different cultures or realities in such a way as to acknowledge and affirm the possibility of pluralist perspectives.2

Lugones, a Latin-American woman, notes that people "outside of the mainstream...become ‘world-travellers’ as a matter of necessity and survival" (11). Because they need or desire access to the center, outsiders have "acquired flexibility" in moving from worlds where they feel at home to worlds where they may not feel at
ease. However, world-travelling can be "willfully exercised" by anyone, including those comfortably situated in the mainstream who are interested in cross-cultural understanding. I find Lugones' concept of world-travelling useful for thinking about ways of engaging new ideas through reading and writing. Collaborative inquiry, like essayistic reading and writing, works best when students do not try to "conquer" or "assimilate" the other (or master the text), but, instead, are themselves receptive, and open to surprise. Lugones characterizes this stance as "playful." This playful attitude is also reflexive because it involves "openness to self construction or reconstruction and to construction or reconstruction of the 'worlds' we inhabit..." (17). In world-travelling, the reader, the writer, the inquirer are all open to being changed through their encounters with others.

What prevents individuals from "going native" or losing themselves in another world is reflexivity—the continual backward glance, the monitoring of their old beliefs from their new position. This reflexiveness ensures the encounter is dialectical or bi-directional. The process of collaboration allows Carlos, another student, the opportunity to travel to his partner's world and then to examine his own world from her position. Near the end of their self-styled project on how men and women choose mates, he offers these reflections in his journal:

I can't get [my partner] to agree to what I think and believe; but I can get her to appreciate it. She's helped me to [also] be this way just by working with her...Oh Christ! I'm turning into a woman! It's a conspiracy!...[But] that's what collaboration means: accepting and appreciating another writer/person for what they are and what they value...I'm learning that my value to other people intellectually is not to put them in a position to defend themselves. I'm listening to others. I'm thinking about how my thoughts are interpreted by them...(Chiseri-

Carlos playfully jokes about losing his old self ("I'm turning into a woman!"), but what he has lost is his need to have other people agree with him by putting "them in a position to defend themselves." Like Carrie, he has come to see the other as a "subject," one to listen and learn from, rather than master or assimilate. Collaboration-travelling to his partner's world--has afforded him the opportunity to re-see his previous actions in a new, enlarged way. "[B]y travelling to someone's 'world' we can understand what it is like to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes. Only when we have travelled to each other's 'worlds' are we fully subjects to each other" (Lugones 17). However, world-travelling and collaborative inquiry, like essayistic reading and writing, is not without its risks and difficulties.

Lugones rightly cautions that "there are some worlds we enter at our own risk...out of necessity and which would be foolish to enter playfully..." (17). She has in mind those worlds that would deny our subjecthood by trying to overpower or disempower us. This is the risk the outsider faces in trying to enter the dominant or privileged mainstream. However, world-travelling can also be threatening and difficult to persons too comfortably and uncritically situated in their present positions. Lugones notes that people can be too much "at ease" in their own worlds to want to risk travelling to other worlds. This is the risk that the insider faces, the person already occupying a position of power, privilege or comfort.

Jamie, another student, points to the discomfort the insider faces when he travels to other worlds. Here, he questions whether he should "put his beliefs on
hold" (Delpit 1988, 297) in order to enter into the other’s world. He writes:

The most difficult moments occurred when their thoughts seemed stupid, irrelevant or useless to me. What should I do? Reject the thoughts? Work with what I perceived to be inferior [ideas]?...If I see them as wrong, I have to say so, no matter who it hurts...But...when a group member "took" my thought and changed it beyond recognition, I felt used, abused and lost...A thought is your property. I didn’t like having [them] take it over, change it and spurt it back to me. The biggest weakness is that collaboration requires effort, self sacrifice and trust...Do you realize what I’ve done? I’ve gone into the very minds of Phil and Chas to hear what they think. They trusted me with themselves. I don’t ever want to go through this again.

Jamie finds this venture in collaborating disturbing and unsettling. It is important to realize that I have not asked Jamie to travel to worlds vastly different from his own.

He is in a self-selected group with two other males writing about a topic (the university’s general education requirement) that he and his group have chosen themselves. Nonetheless, Jamie exhibits an agonistic stance toward collaboration which, as Lugones points out, is "inimical to travelling across ‘worlds’" (15). He is not able to entertain multiple perspectives because of his sense of rigid, moral rules that only apply one way. He is uncomfortable when group members take his thoughts and change them "beyond recognition;" and yet if their ideas are "wrong," he, of course, feels obliged to say so. He is hampered by his belief that thoughts are the privately owned "property" of individuals (and thus, world-travelling seems a form of trespass) and by the perception that "effort, self-sacrifice and trust" are "weaknesses." For Jamie, difference seems to imply that one idea must be inferior to another. And in this case, he sees his partner’s ideas as inferior--"stupid, irrelevant, useless." He has no choice but to adopt an "either/or," a "them/us," stance. There is none of the
openness or "playfulness" in his stance that Lugones talks about. As we saw earlier with Ralph (who wrote the essay about Steve and Sheila), such a fixed and non-reflexive stance negates the possibility of the "both/and" approach characteristic of essayism and world-travelling.

To read or write essayistically, as well as to collaborate or to world-travel involves approaching a text or situation with the conscious intention of engaging in genuine dialogue, one that is initially open to all positions. As another student observed,

You have to be willing to listen to what your partners and interviewees are saying and allow yourself to be influenced by it. If a person doesn’t do this, they are not allowing themselves to re-educate themselves...New ideas cannot be developed and the person remains exactly where she started.

But re-education through these kinds of dialectical encounters with others--people or texts--means recognizing the partial, approximate and interpretive nature of our understanding--which is easy to say, but often harder to do. Openness to the possibility of construction and re-construction of views and indeed, of ourselves, as we saw in the last two chapters, is risky. These collaborative inquiry projects reveal even more clearly just what is at stake.

In the rest of this chapter I want to take a closer look at the dynamics of one collaborative group as the participants explore questions of racism and diversity at the university in their journals and memos to each other. The reflexive kickback that can occur from collaborating with others is what makes this kind of inquiry deeply meaningful, but it is also what makes it difficult and at times, deeply disturbing.
However, I believe these collaborative projects, which encompass the kinds of essayistic writing and reading I have discussed in the previous chapters, afford one of the few opportunities for students to engage in an educational experience as what Kurt Spellmeyer calls "the deep-level of life-world politics" (1993, 278). These projects offer students a reflexive experience that allow them to enlarge and move beyond the limits of their personal knowledge while drawing on it at the same time.

The Process of Collaborative Inquiry: Choosing a Topic

Avery, Serena and Emily are first semester students in my honors Freshmen English class. Emily was valedictorian of her public high school graduating class. Although she comes from a working class community less than 15 miles from the university, she lives on campus. Avery had been a "day" student on scholarship and work-study to a prestigious private boarding school in the area. He continues to live at home and commutes to the university. Serena is from another northeastern state. For this project, Serena and Emily chose to work with each other, while Avery did not express a preference, saying that he would "work with anyone." Throughout the semester, Avery has been a quiet, almost shy member of class.³

In order to better understand and appreciate the complexity of the group's collaboration, I feel it's important for readers to know more about Avery, apart from how he represents himself in his journals, memos and research essay. Avery's writing during this project conveys a certainty, strength and assertiveness that one might associate with an academic, "masculine" voice or persona, a voice that belies how he presents in person. Avery is a tall, slim person with glasses and shoulder-length,
brown hair, which he often keeps out of his face with a stretchy, wide headband. He sometimes wears (possibly home made) chains of small, brightly colored beads around his neck that contrast with the dark colors of his loose-fitting over shirts and black pants. He speaks with a light, falsetto voice, and when he finds something amusing, he often puts his fingers over his mouth as he giggles. Avery describes himself as a "trans-gendered" person, a fact that neither I nor his group were privy to until some months after the project concluded.4

Drawing from the memos and journals of these students, I will attempt to show the complexity of this open, reflexive method of inquiry by highlighting specific features of the group’s collaboration and then framing them in different ways. While no single theory can adequately explain the group’s interaction, I believe the use of multiple frameworks can enrich our understanding.

Emily and Avery’s initial ideas for topics immediately reveal how far apart these students are at the start of the project. While Emily’s suggestions are reminiscent of safe, generic high school research paper topics—-are private schools better than public schools, what purpose do guidance counselors serve and why do reporters report what they do—-Avery, on the other hand, wants the group to investigate topics that are more political and incendiary. He suggests they examine: "various criteria which contribute to a rape culture by learning more about the work of the University’s Sexual Harassment and Rape Prevention Program or issues of diversity or racism on campus." Avery wants to consider a topic that involves minority populations because he feels "people learn the most from those least like themselves." However, people
only learn "from those least like themselves" when they are willing to engage in authentic dialogue, open themselves to other positions and become reflexive about their own positions. As we will see, Avery does not really want to learn from those "least like himself;" understandably, he wants to educate those least like himself.

After the first group meeting, Serena and Avery are both keen to pursue the problem of the lack of diversity on campus, but Emily is not. Although she knows it's an "important issue," and she knows that she "will become more involved with the more research we do," for now, her "heart's just not into it." The topic's potential for divisiveness leaves her feeling vulnerable. In her journal she admits to being worried that "our differences on the subject will result in big problems." She is "anxious" because the controversial topic will cause "arguments and disagreements [which] will get in the way of work." Unlike the others who only use their journal to record notes from their interviews and respond to their readings, Emily sorts through her feelings and uncertainties in her journal before she writes her memos to the group. At the end of the project, she will have generated 25 pages of exploratory and cathartic writing in addition to the 44 pages of double column research notes. In contrast, Serena and Avery do not keep a separate journal aside from their double entry notes on their reading and interviews (33 and 35 pages respectively).

In her first memo to the group, Emily explains why she was reluctant to pursue this topic and why she feels like an "oddball":

I didn't know enough to contribute anything important to the conversation. I felt so ignorant. That is not to say that I'm not aware a problem exists, it was just that I was completely lost about some of the words and names that were casually dropped. I had no clue as to what
political correctness means, and when Avery mentioned the presidential candidate he voted for, I realized how sheltered I am. I had never heard of this woman! I know these are reasons I should want to do our research project on these subjects because this is how I can learn about them, but for now my ignorance only scares me away.

Psychologist Beverly Tatum (1992) found that the multiple (and often conflicting) perspectives about race that emerged among students in her psychology of racism courses could be understood as a "collision of developmental processes" (9). In an article that examines students' attitudes and resistance to race-related subject matter, Tatum suggests that William Cross's model of Black identity development and Janet Helms's White racial identity development theory can be useful for helping students to understand each other's positions as well as their own reactions to racial issues. Helms identifies six stages in her model of White identity development that involve "the abandonment of racism and the development of a non-racist identity" (Tatum 13). I can use parts of her model here to help us better appreciate the difficulty these students face when they attempt to engage in dialogue (reflexive or otherwise) from vastly different knowledge and experiential positions.

When this project commences, Emily exhibits many of the characteristics of people who are in Helm's "contact" position. At this level, people show little "awareness of cultural and institutional racism and of one's own White privilege" (Tatum 13). Because of their limited experience with people of color, many people at the "contact" level base their knowledge of African-Americans on cultural stereotypes perpetuated by the media. Emily has enough intelligence and education not to allow herself to be easily taken in by the more obvious stereotypes, to realize that many
individuals in (other parts of) this country are racist and that her own experience with "Blacks" are limited. However, she isn’t as aware of the cultural and institutional forces that perpetuate racism, nor has she considered her own White privilege. In an early journal entry, she muses to herself:

But what do I know? I’m very naive. I’m white; [I’m] from a white family; [I] live in a predominantly white state...I know Black people—friends of our family are Black...I never realized before that people are prejudiced in New Hampshire. I was too busy living in my own little happy world where our neighbors were Black and [other] friends of the family included one Black man married to a white woman with kids...Maybe that’s why I am not excited to do this project. I know a problem exists, but because I, myself have no problem with Blacks, I pretend it isn’t as bad as it really is.

Serena’s first memo also suggests that she too is situated in the "contact" position at the start of the project. While she has an awareness of some of the terms and issues surrounding the discussion of diversity, her understanding is based more on hearsay and popular opinion than the earned insight of informed experience or knowledge. "Everyone," she says, "is "somewhat racist... Why should I have to pay for the mistakes my ancestors made? (I could be shot for saying this but) I believe they truly didn’t think they were doing anything wrong." Although she doesn’t want the group to think "I don’t comprehend the seriousness and permanent damage done to the African American culture, as a culture, they need a better self-image. Affirmative Action just created tension between minorities and whites [and] welfare programs create dependence rather than independence." However, Serena, who, has just recently asked to be moved to the international students’ dorm, wants to pursue the group’s topic to understand more: "I have so many questions. What can we do? What
is this subliminal racism that exists in our culture and how can I identify it?" The knowledge gained through their collaborative investigation coupled with their willingness to reflexively examine their own beliefs and assumptions will help Serena and Emily to move beyond the "contact" stage during this project.

At the start of their inquiry, Avery seems to display characteristics of Helm's "Pseudo-independent" position. As Tatum describes it,

the White person often tries to disavow his or her own Whiteness through active affiliation with Blacks...The individual experiences a sense of alienation from other Whites who have not yet begun to examine their own racism...Uncomfortable with his or her own Whiteness, yet unable to truly be anything else, the individual may be searching for a new, more comfortable way to be White (16). 7

While Avery does not exactly disavow his whiteness, he sometimes wears it like a scarlet letter since it is the part of himself that he associates with the oppressor. He uses his first memo to the group "to sound off in general about my feelings on race, politics and society." His three page exposition begins with a quote from Sister Souljah which supports his idea that "racism is synonymous with white supremacy." He introduces the equation, "race (white skin) + power = racism," that will serve as a focal point for much of the group's later discussions. Avery speaks passionately and eloquently about the long history of oppression in our society--from slavery to the plight of young Black men dying in the inner city to the "truth" represented by rap music. As if in answer to Serena's memo comment that the white people in the past didn't believe what they were doing was wrong, Avery writes:

I for one feel ashamed at the masses of white people for caring so little about the injustices WE have perpetrated in the name of Christianity, "progress," and "civilized" society...How many more riots and how
much more violence do we have to see before changes actually occur...Sister Souljah is angry and radical...her goal is not to comfort liberal whites and tell them what a good job they are doing...

Avery seems to find it easier to talk about racial discrimination rather than discrimination on the basis of sexual/gender orientation; however, he frequently includes other forms of discrimination in his discussion of racism. For example, he ends his first memo by noting that

racial minorities are not the only victims of violence on campus. Sexual minorities experience it as well, though it is rarely talked about due to the moral judgements which so often are visited upon these groups...[R]acism really stands as the standard by which to judge all discrimination...all other forms of institutionalized discrimination originate [from it].

From the start, then, these students’ different kinds of experience and levels of knowledge about racism and prejudice, as well as their ways of speaking about this knowledge and experience will affect the dynamics of the group’s inquiry and complicate their abilities to engage openly with each other and reflexively with themselves.

The Process of Collaborative Inquiry: The Complexities of Adopting an Essavistic Stance

Unlike Emily, who hopes to "learn" more, and Serena, who has "so many questions," Avery’s interest in pursuing this topic is not related to his ignorance or confusion. He has specific ideas about what racism is, why it is a problem and what can be done to solve it. For the most part, the information the group learns will not be new (or "other") territory for him. Since the positions presented in the readings and interviews will affirm and confirm his own world view, Avery finds it harder to be
critically reflexive. He may add to his knowledge, but he won't challenge or transform it in this project.

In many ways, Avery already owns the position the women are seeking to understand. Since he is much better read and informed, his role in the group becomes one of shepherding the others, sometimes quite emphatically, toward a specific understanding of racism. He becomes a self-appointed devil's advocate within the group. However, this kind of strong, vigilant stance does not always invite shared, open, exploratory inquiry. At times, the women will find Avery's knowledge and observations enlightening. Serena notes that "Some of Avery's research really woke me up when it comes to subliminal racism" and Emily writes that "Avery really made me stop and think. I had never noticed how "black" is used in our society only to describe "bad" things. Is this a factor in our hidden prejudices?" At other times, they resent his unyielding passion. In Community: Reflections on a Tragic Ideal, Glenn Tinder writes that if people are "to enjoy equality" they must "be addressed and listened to in matters of the greatest moment. I am not accorded dignity by someone who feeds me but does not care what I think...the decisive signs of respect are serious listening and speaking" (1980, 70). At times, it appears Avery is actually attempting to "feed" the others from his knowledge stores. His memos, often scorching diatribes that seem directed to a larger audience than this group, are thick with examples of the injustices done to minorities. After the group's second meeting, where the women had expressed their discomfort with violence as a means of solving racial discrimination, Avery responds to their concerns in his next memo to the group:
I’ve been thinking about violence as a solution to the race problem in America. Theoretically, I am categorically opposed to it. I detest violence as the way to alleviate an oppressive situation. But the truth is that white people have always been violent...

After detailing two pages of examples of white oppression toward African-Americans from slavery to Howard’s Beach and Rodney King, Avery says that he does not believe that white people are "inherently bad, but rather...our collective people’s actions have been bad, in fact they have been egregious." Then, in a style reminiscent of the orator or evangelical preacher, he asks:

So does it make sense for us to advocate non-violence while we as whites have perpetrated the MOST violent history in the entire world? Both of you have said that non-violence is the answer for change in the future. I ask you to remember the vantage point from which we speak. Try to put yourself in the shoes of a young Black teenager in the inner city...I still want to say that I favor non-violence and self-defense...but it is easy for me to say that because I am white and have not been on the receiving end of four hundred years of institutionalized racism...

It might seem that Avery is encouraging an essayistic reading of the situation when he suggests that Emily and Serena attempt to open themselves to the "other’s" point of view by putting themselves "in the shoes of a young Black teenager." It might seem that he is being reflexive when he notes that his perspective is influenced by his own privileged position of being white. However, Avery already knows beforehand which side he is committed to. The reflexive mind does not. Moreover, his manner of delivery is not indicative of an essayistic or "learner’s stance." There is nothing tentative, open or exploratory about it. I do not mean to suggest that Avery is incapable of being open or reflexive, only that he finds it difficult to be so (as we all do) about those positions he is already so knowledgeable about and in which he is
passionately invested. As Avery sees it,

there is NO American Dream. It along with white, male, heterosexual superiority, are among the biggest myths to be perpetuated in the history of this violent country. It is not possible for everyone in this country to get a fair, equitable piece of the economic, political pie and never has been...almost all the people who have power in this country...have never experienced institutionalized discrimination and therefore buy into the myth of meritocracy, the idea that if you work hard enough you can make it in this country. FALSE LIES! It should be called the American nightmare.

These three students' perceptions of the culture and society seem directly related to their experience in it. From Avery's position on the social margins, it seems evident that all people are not equal, and that no amount of hard work will change that. Avery's experience, however, has not been Emily and Serena's experience. They now acknowledge that racism exists, but believe that the answers can be found within the system. Both women see education as the cure--people simply need to be made aware of their "hidden prejudices." Since, this project has helped them to begin to uncover some of their own false assumptions, they believe all people would benefit from the kinds of experience and knowledge they have gained.

Avery suggests at one point that "the country is fucked up beyond belief and would be better off it all fell apart." In response, Serena writes that she was "very offended," and this view was "unfair. I challenge anyone to find a better and more fair justice system in the world. While our system is not perfect, I feel it is the best around." Serena responds to Avery's comment (and especially his language and tone) as a personal attack. When individuals feel threatened, coerced, or simply unheard, they oftentimes adopt a defensive posture that not only shields them from the views of
others, it also closes them to their own views. Since their energy is directed toward protecting their beliefs, they resist bending back on themselves and examining them. There is a difference, I believe, between Serena’s defensiveness and Avery’s defensiveness. Maria Lugones might say that Serena is too much at ease in her world (of white, heterosexual, middle class privilege) to risk travelling to the hurt and pain of Avery’s world. She is defending a ready-made belief about the American culture, not an insight that she herself has earned through examined experience. On the other hand, Avery’s perspective has been formulated from grounded theory, arising out of his own experience and fortified with knowledge. It is not likely he would find it easy to question a position he has struggled long and hard to reach, one he associates with strength, and one, he is just now beginning to voice to others.

It would be easy to depict Avery’s single-mindedness in this project as simply close-mindedness; however, such an interpretation would greatly distort the complexity of Avery’s position. Avery’s knowledge and conviction about discrimination and prejudice arise out of a knowledge and experiential authority these women simply do not have. However, during this project, he only alludes to the experiential source of his hurt and rage, speaking of his own oppression in the most general, vague terms in his memos to the group: "I have been on the receiving end of prejudice and discriminatory harassment more times than I care to remember and I want to get across to you that such verbal abuse hurts." He wants them to know that his knowledge of oppression is legitimated by his experience, but he is intentionally ambiguous because he is not comfortable enough to share the specifics. Although
Serena and Emily know that Avery is "different" in some way, and although they have witnessed other people make innuendos and snide comments directly to him or within hearing distance, they do not speak about this difference to him or in their memos or journals. By ignoring or denying his difference, Serena and Emily often read his anger and pain as simply "rudeness" or "unreasonableness."

At a meeting that takes place in the study lounge of Emily's dorm about midway through the project, the group argue again about the racism equation (race(white skin) + power = racism). Avery, perhaps frustrated by his attempts to get the women to digest an understanding of racism they cannot (yet, if ever) swallow, asks, "How many times do I have to tell you?" And yet, that's the point. Avery can't tell them. Kurt Spellmeyer (1993), drawing on the work of Scott Momaday, notes that words don't have a meaning until they are embodied into the life-text of a person, "until they take on the power to explain the reader's circumstances to himself" (268). As we will see shortly, Serena and Emily are gradually folding in some of these new ideas and information about racism into their own "life-texts," but perhaps not at the rate or in the manner that Avery would like. The meaning of "race (white skin) + power = racism" has not yet become an earned insight for Emily or Serena in the way that it has for Avery.

In Emily's memo response, we begin to sense the complexity and difficulty involved in just trying to get an open dialogue started in groups where different ways of thinking, speaking (and experiencing) exist, but where members attempt to operate according to rules that pretend that they don't:
You can tell me as many times as you want, but I don’t have to agree with you. I extend the courtesy of listening to what you have to say... [but] where does it say that your opinion is better than mine?... If I disagree without trying to see your point, you have the right to express your anger. There’s nothing wrong with us disagreeing. We just have to respect everyone’s opinions.

Since Emily is unable to use her personal knowledge to understand and gauge the "truth" of Avery’s "words," she may see Avery’s perspective as simply "his opinion," and from a relativist position, "everyone has a right to their opinion." Too often, however, respecting people’s opinions can masquerade as an excuse for not engaging in dialogue, for not trying to understand different perspectives. If we see the other as fundamentally different, that often implies (at least for our students) that nothing further can be or need be said and almost ensures a retreat into relativism: "Everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion." End of dialogue. However, thanks to Avery, this dialogue will not end. "Should we respect the opinions of the KKK? The Nazis and neo-Nazis?" he asks.

In any case, genuine listening, which entails putting one’s "beliefs on hold" (Delpit) and travelling to the world of the other, is not a simple, unproblematic activity. If Avery thinks that Emily and Serena don’t agree with his ideas because of lack of information, he will simply try to provide them with more "facts." If he feels they just don’t "get" what he is saying, then he will repeat the same points (more loudly) or in a different way. Of course neither strategy will allow the women to "hear" any better. If Emily feels that Avery "chooses" not to listen because he doesn’t acknowledge her right to her "opinion," she will see him as unfair at best and impolite or bullying at worst.8 Avery’s "delivery" and manner of speaking seem unreasonable
(and more importantly, discourteous) to the women. Emily writes in her journal that Avery "was downright rude! ... The thing is, yelling doesn’t get your point across. If you yell at someone it’s going to make them less inclined to listen." Later, in her memo, Emily reminds the group to "keep our tempers in check and our voices at speaking level, especially when we are in a study lounge where people are trying to study." And Serena writes that the group "got entirely out of hand. Because of our yelling and arguing, we accomplished nothing...in the future we need to criticize less and listen more."

Avery responds to their appeals for civility, by suggesting that "it is a bourgeois, elitist, intellectualist attitude to think that discussion has to always be quiet, scholarly and rational...I like things to get fiery, incendiary or controversial. If we start raising our voices, then that proves we are making strong headway." He reminds the group that their topic is a "sensitive, controversial, incendiary issue" and it is only "natural" that they will get "angry or impassioned about certain points." Since racism is "an extremely irrational institution," it is "imperative that white people start having the kind of conversation that we did to attain a consciousness of race relations...when people get angry, they tend to be honest about their true feelings." What is more, Avery tells the group that anger is part of his family’s communication style:

If I raise my voice or get angry or impassioned, that is not a personal indictment of you or your views. All of us have different life experiences and communication styles that affect our ways of being in the world...In our family, when we have a pressing concern we do not quietly talk things out; we yell and get angry...

However, as both Adrienne Rich (1979) and Magda Lewis and Roger Simon
(1986) have pointed out, women can be silenced and alienated by what seems like a "discourse not intended for her." Avery does not realize that many (white, middle class) women have been socialized to feel that anger is not natural or honest, that it is a form of personal attack, and therefore, always to be avoided or prevented. Emily and Serena cannot listen to Avery's arguments when he "gets really upset and starts yelling and swearing:" they can only hear his anger. However, later in the quiet, private space of her journal, as Emily considers what Avery has said about anger, she contemplates her own experience and begins to understand why she doesn't feel the same way:

My parents [are] divorced. My mother, with whom I have a better relationship with, always wanted to talk about problems or differences in a calm, civilized manner. Even when disciplining me, she seldom raised her voice, and I can probably count on one hand the number of times in my 18 years she actually yelled. My father, on the other hand, is the exact opposite. We have never been very close, and he loves to scream at me for stupid reasons. I guess I associate loud voices and lost tempers with all my father's negative traits. I never thought that some people would actually use screaming to communicate, and not to bully. Avery really opened my eyes.

As Emily examines her own beliefs about anger and becomes more conscious of the situated nature of these beliefs, she begins to move beyond simple relativism. Instead of simply acknowledging that everyone is entitled to an opinion, she inquires into why she and Avery hold the particular opinions they do. By seeking to first understand where each of them "are coming from," she is in a better position to be able to defer or suspend judgement of their differences. It is at this point that the opportunity for authentic dialogue—one that could lead to a more complex understanding of both her own and Avery's perspectives—becomes possible. However, this dialogue would
require all members of the group to temporarily defer their own convictions as they explore the perspectives of the others; in a group where members perceive themselves situated unevenly, such a possibility, as we will see in the next section, is unlikely.

The Process of Collaborative Inquiry: Ethical Agency

Drawing from the work of moral philosophers Nel Noddings, Helen Wyschogrod and Alasdair MacIntyre, Gregory Clark has recently offered a conception of a reading and writing community in which the aim would be for participants to learn "how the beliefs and purposes of others can call their own into question" (1994, 73). In this kind of community, "the relational and epistemological practice of confronting differences" would take precedence over the development of the subject and technical expertise of its individual members (73). For such a community to work, it becomes necessary to redefine agency in such a way that it's enactment will not deny or silence the positions and perspectives of differing others. Clark suggests that each member of the community learn to practice an attitude of "ethical deference" toward others. Ethical deference means that people agree to put their own beliefs on hold so that they can more fully consider the ideas or attempt to understand the experiences of another. For instance, in the following memo composed from Emily's earlier journal entry, Emily has temporarily put her beliefs on hold in order to try to understand Avery's position.

Avery explained to me that in his family, they get their point across by yelling and raising their voices. That helped me to see where he was coming from. I'm not saying that I won't cringe if we start a screaming match again. Just because I now understand that loud voices don't have to be negative, doesn't mean that I'm getting used to using them to
make a point.

Putting her beliefs on hold doesn't mean forsaking them, nor does understanding imply agreement. Clark is careful to note, that openness to others need not and should not require that individuals permanently deny their own difference or revoke their own agency. Rather, deference and agency have to be thought of as "alternating attitudes, practiced interdependently" (67). Although Clark is not entirely clear in his discussion of these concepts, he seems to be arguing for a fuller, dynamic concept of agency, one that includes an attitude of ethical deference to others, rather than describing two separate stances. "Agency is constructed and reconstructed continually from the insights that emerge in a provisionally deferential exchange with differing others" (68). And he notes that when agency and deference are "enacted separately as absolute principles, both deny the coequality of difference" (67).

I believe Clark's notion of agency that commences with an attitude of "ethical deference" toward others, must also be a reflexive agency. In response to their open (or deferential) encounters with differing others, ethical agents need to monitor their own beliefs and assertions, identifying and examining how they came to hold these beliefs and make these assertions. Feminist philosopher Victoria Davion (1991) argues that such a process is necessary because it not only contributes to the development of integrity, it also allows for the possibility of radical change without the loss of integrity. Elizabeth Minnich (1990) goes further by suggesting that "the effort to find out how and why our thinking carries the past with it is part of an on-going philosophical critique essential to freedom, and to democracy..."(29). Emily begins this
reflexive process when she measures the facts of the situation—Avery’s response to anger—against her own subjective frame of reference—her family history. She not only learns about Avery, she discovers that she equates anger with her father, "who loves to scream at me for stupid reasons." Although she hasn’t come to full consciousness of the implication of this realization, she nevertheless has made the initial connection that can lead to further insight.10

This concept of ethical agency then, which includes deference to others and reflexive examination of one’s own position, has much in common with the essayistic approach to texts that I talk about in Chapters III and IV. Both stances suggest a process of inquiry and a method for engaging others that is open, tentative, and exploratory. Lest I make this process sound easy or as simple as "just say no," let me further complicate the notion of deference by returning to Avery.

This project has enabled Avery to assert a kind of agency by not deferring to others, but by expressing his anger and disapproval. In his final reflection on this project, he writes:

I am struck by the anger which flares up in my writing so often. I like that part of me because I equate it with power, with successfully getting my point across to others. This project has helped me to become proud of my militant edge...My identity is beginning to emerge from a nebulous, pale, listless state into something with more color, shape, texture and definition...In the past I have been so quiet, reserved and passive. It truly feels liberating when I blatantly tell someone what I'm thinking and how I feel.

This project is not simply another assignment for Avery. As I mentioned earlier, it literally represents his coming to voice. The voice he comes to is an angry voice, but one that he associates with strength. It may not be the voice of an agency
that bends back on itself and questions its own assumptions-- yet; but I believe it's a necessary precursor to it. Avery's anger is much more complex than simply being part of a family communication pattern. His anger is deeply intertwined with his own developing self-esteem and sense of self. On the one hand it represents his personal hurt; on the other it is an expression of his moral indignation.

Barbara Houston (1992) asks what kind of ethic would best serve people who are "marginalized, exploited...stereotyped and marked as Other...?" Would it be Clark's ethic that begins with deference? Only if such an ethic also includes the expression and practice of blame. Houston argues that blaming can help us clarify our political and social identities...It functions not only instrumentally to get things done, to educate, to teach others what is wrong, to remind others of their agency...blaming is nothing less than a strong expression of our confidence in our moral agency, our integrity and our sense of self-in-community (142).

Furthermore, to forego or withheld blame would be "to leave myself without recourse when I am wronged...I [would] have no way to declare my boundaries, assert my rights defend myself when I am treated unfairly or hurt" (133). Avery does not withhold or renounce blame. On the contrary, he casts a wide net, and his blame falls on the entire white race.

White people have never stopped to try to put themselves in the place of racial and sexual minorities. They are so entrenched in the power structure that it is impossible for them to realize that there ARE people suffering because of their discrimination...things just keep on deteriorating and most white people are totally oblivious to this and totally unwilling to admit their own PRIVILEGE and RACISM.

In light of his view that white people are too "entrenched in the power structure" to see that "people are suffering," Avery might see Clark's notion of ethical deference as
simply a further attempt by those in power to continue to silence him and the topic of racism of which he speaks. Why should he defer to their views? Why should he continue to listen to "false lies?" His self-designated purpose in this project is to get the mainstream to listen to the part of the story that has not been told, the part he feels those in power have not been willing to listen to, much less understand, the part that "continues to go largely unspoken and unchallenged."

Perhaps ethical agency involves knowing when to defer and when to express disapproval. At one point during the meeting in Emily's study lounge, another student present calls one of his professors "a homo," and Avery is offended that Emily, their "host," does not speak up or cast blame where blame is due. He writes in his memo:

That's exactly the kind of homophobic hatred that needs to be reckoned with. Your response that you did not know him well, and that you cannot control what he says, are feeble, weak and pitiful excuses. Maybe you don't realize how painful it is to be singled out and attacked again and again for being different, and how that cuts away at your self esteem.

For the most part, Emily and Serena are not consciously aware of what it might feel like to be attacked again and again, and so, of course, they cannot imagine "what it's like." Emily writes in her journal that "it's great that Avery's against racism and prejudice, but I think he takes things we say a little too personally. He becomes indignant and shuts his mind off (which is when he turns his voice on full blast)..." But after not being heard for so long, "full-blast" is the only way Avery feels he can make his point.

The sexual minority liberation movement has a slogan: "Silence = Death..." Words are a potent force against hateful and offensive speech. That's why neither you nor I should remain silent when something is
said that unjustly denigrates an individual or group.

All three students would agree that words are a potent force; but they would disagree about the method people should use to deliver their words. For Avery, quiet, calm rationality is not sufficient to communicate the depth and scope of the injustices done to minorities. It is time to blame by shouting "out loud from every mountain."

Toward the end of the project, he writes,

I don't think these painful events should be silenced. I think they need to be shouted out loud from every mountain ... If you want to get something done you need to let the world know in no uncertain terms, that you are a force to be RECKONED with... We, meaning all people, cannot let racist, sexist, homophobic comments and behavior go unchallenged. It is imperative that we let the perpetrators know loud and clear that what they are saying is offensive and will not be tolerated. It is no longer a free exchange of protected speech.

If the discourse is no longer open or free, the hermeneutic circle has been ruptured; dialogue based on a "deferential exchange with differing others" (Clark 68) is no longer possible. In this situation, people do not have a right to their opinion if that opinion expresses racist, sexist or homophobic beliefs, which means that Avery feels he is under no obligation to defer to these others--even temporarily--or attempt to understand their attitudes.

According to the equation, "race (white skin) + power = racism," people without power (presumably people of color) cannot be racist, no matter what they say (something that Emily and Serena are not able to accept). However, what happens when a person of color makes a classist or homophobic comment? When Avery and Serena visit a meeting of the African American Students Organization, Serena writes that some of the male students in attendance made "blatantly rude and caustic remarks
directed toward Avery. I don’t know if it hurt his feelings, but it certainly offended me. It often seems to me that Avery thinks of the Black race as infallible. I hope this told him that everyone has the potential to be rude." Avery, however, does not speak up or let the "perpetrators" of these comments "know that what they are saying is offensive and will not be tolerated." Nor does he write about this incident in his memos to the group. Here, it might seem that Avery does defer to "differing others," others who are as much if not more marginalized on campus than him. It is possible that he is very much aware of the privilege afforded by his skin color, and being involved in his own identity struggles might have made him sensitive to the needs of these students to assert themselves. We might also recall that Avery seems to have much in common with whites who are at the "pseudo independent stage" of the racial identity model. As Tatum notes, the person at this level has not yet become reconciled to his own whiteness, and may accept the suspicion or criticism of Blacks without argument. On the other hand, it is just as likely that Avery’s silence is not the deference of ethical agency, but rather the silence that comes from a lack of agency. Since the African American students do not seem to be responding to his whiteness, but to his gender identity, perhaps he has fallen back on the traditional female (victim’s) response of silence when confronted by a group of males making taunts.

At any rate, this incident as well as the one in the study lounge serve to complicate the notion of ethical agency. On what basis do we defer? On what basis do we express disapproval or outrage? It may be that the ability and desire to open oneself to another’s ideas or to question or express disapproval of another’s ideas, as
well as the ability to interrogate one’s own beliefs and actions, is greatly affected by how one is positioned to begin with. What all of these students seemed to have overlooked, though, is that people do not occupy the same location all the time. Sometimes they inhabit more than one position at once. People constantly shift location in response to others and themselves.

**The Process of Collaborative Inquiry: Understanding Difference Through Connection**

In his final reflection on the project (unfortunately not written to the other group members), Avery identifies the kinds of experiences that have given rise to his beliefs and actions during this project. Although he is not yet ready to critically examine these attitudes, beliefs and assumptions, we can see how Avery draws on his own experience of oppression to try to understand the experience of other minorities. His "anger, frustration and rage," along with his own "social isolation" are "tools" that he can use to empathize with the pain and isolation other minorities feel.

From the first grade on, I was the object of ridicule, offensive taunts and cruel "jokes." It was during these incidents that I first began to truly contemplate the ramifications of being "different." Later on, this awareness became more politically based and I learned about the power of self-respect, speaking out and kinship with others who are oppressed and have the ability to empathize...The ironic point is that I want to remember the severity of this pain. Not because I enjoyed it or because I want to play the victim or martyr, but because I need to carry the pain so I will never lose the feelings that accompany it--anger frustration, even rage.¹² The social isolation I experienced and continue to experience is a powerful tool I can use to understand and empathize with a number of groups...being different also... keeps the issue of diversity and being sensitive to people who don’t fit into the "mainstream" on the front burner.

However, being "different," as we have seen, does not always help Avery be sensitive
(or deferent) to Emily and Serena. Although Avery says that "being different...keeps the issue of diversity alive," the reason Avery finds it easier to be sensitive to minorities seems to be because they are the people he feels to be most like himself, not least like himself. Because he identifies with their experience, he may be more open to trying to understand their situation than he is the mainstream white population, who he discounts as "different"--"thick" and "oblivious," and incapable of understanding the situations minorities face. But this assessment seems unfair to Emily and Serena, who have demonstrated their willingness to listen when he shares the circumstances (e.g., his family's conversational style) that have given rise to his beliefs.

Emily and Serena also apply a similar strategy to the one Avery employs in that they use their own experience (as women, as children, etc) to try to comprehend and empathize with the lives of others. Drawing from Wyschogrod's discussion of empathy, Clark cautions that empathy--trying to understand another on one's own terms--"is an interpretation that eclipses, at least partially, the full reality of another's difference" (66). I would argue, however, that as long as students acknowledge that "full mutual understanding is impossible" (Clark 66), the strategy of trying to understand the other on one's own terms is extremely useful in helping them begin to make sense. When Emily and Serena make connections between their lives and the lives of minorities, they are always quick to note that their experience may be similar, but it is never the same. Here, for example, is how Emily justifies her use of this tactic in her journal:
We discussed how we can try to understand what Blacks and other minorities go through by looking at situations in our lives when we’ve been judged...How can I even attempt to compare my experiences with those of people who are oppressed? They’ve been through so much more than I have! Then I thought, hey, maybe that’s the whole point. If you can think of an experience that was difficult or hard for you, and you know you can’t begin to compare it to what a Black person must experience, then it gives you a better understanding of what he/she did go through and it makes you realize how terrible it must be. One experience I thought of was how store clerks always watched my teenage friends and I like a hawk when we entered their store; because [we were] adolescents, they expected us to shop-lift. This always offended me. I’ve never stolen anything in my life. Then I thought of the stories I’ve heard of Blacks who experienced the same attitudes. The difference is people were suspicious of me because of my age. People are suspicious of Blacks because of their skin color. I will grow up but Blacks will never grow out of their skin.

As we saw with Chad’s reading of Alice Walker’s essay in chapter IV, once Emily has established a connection, she can then note the differences between her experience and the experience of minorities, such as the important distinction that the discrimination she experienced in her youth was isolated and temporary. Seeking connection and then noting differences is a two step process. The second part of the process is necessary to ensure that the other (in this case, the experience of minorities) is not erased (overpowered) or assimilated (disempowered). Noting differences also leads to reflexivity—the examining of one’s own experience in light of the other’s. I believe the distinctions between ideas and perspectives can only be discovered through connection. If students are unable or unwilling to construct a connection between their lifeworlds and the lifeworlds of others, they are not likely to concern themselves with trying to understand the differences between them and the reasons that have given rise to the differences.
In contrast to Avery, however, neither Serena or Emily began the project from a position in which they were heavily invested. Generally, they find it easier to look at their own assumptions about racial minorities because their assumptions are mostly composed of hand-me-down notions and ready-made ideas rather than knowledge they, themselves, have spent time and energy constructing. In their journals (written in double entry format with notes from their sources in one column and their thoughts on the information in the adjacent column), we can further see how the women use their own experience to attempt to understand the situations minorities encounter. In this entry from Emily’s journal, Emily first looks for an experience in her own life that will give her a sense of this "subtle" or indirect racism. Once she has come up with an example, she then notes the differences.

Source
Ann Lima says "it’s called subtle racism...It’s not acceptable to lynch people anymore. I’m not afraid for my physical safety, but the more subtle type is worse. I’d rather be slapped in the face, I’d rather know the person is prejudiced than to have them say they are not when they really are."

Emily’s Response
I can apply this to my own life--of course it’s not the same because I am white. I hate when I meet people and I can’t read their actions. They’re nice to you but in the back of their mind, you’re sure they’ll talk about you as soon as you’re out of earshot...Being white, I know a lot of other people who I feel comfortable with, so as soon as I leave the person I don’t really care if they are two-faced...but minorities on campus may not have this option.

Although Emily has identified a difference between her experience and the experience of minorities, she has not really begun to examine what this difference might mean for herself. It’s important to note that reflexivity is process that we engage in by degrees, like peeling the layers from an onion.
Serena is able to peel away more layers from her onion. She goes beyond merely identifying difference. To really be able to understand and make sense of a sensitive and complex subject like racism, a reader has to be willing to examine her own assumptions as well as the text's ideas. By examining her own racism, Serena is in a much better position to identify the racism in the society at large, as well as how she, herself, may unconsciously be contributing to it. She is also more likely to see the complexity of racism. (She comes to see that racism is not a black and white issue).

**Source**
College Republican poster: "Smash Apartheid on Campus. Resist special privileges based on race" This was an effort to compare special privileges for Black students on campus with special privileges afforded whites in South Africa.

**Serena's response**
I thought to myself, "This makes a good point. There really is no difference." Then I realized they are like night and day. The whites in South Africa have oppressed the Blacks for many, many years. The Blacks in this country have never had this kind of power...I don’t know why I sided with the racist point of view at first. Maybe it was easier to see my race as the oppressed in this situation instead of as the oppressor.

(From the *New York Times*) "National figures like Mike Tyson, Marion Barry, and Dr. Leonard Jeffries are disgraceful and cannot be excused and that as role models, their behavior can bring shame to their race."

**I definitely take notice when a black person or minority messes up because often times people (myself included) apply it to the whole race and therefore think less of the race. Why is this? Why am I able to separate Jeffrey Dalmer from the rest of the white race and not Mike Tyson from the rest of his?"

As the project progresses, Serena continues to question her assumptions. After the group's interview with the head of Affirmative Action, she writes "I thought I knew everything about Affirmative Action...[but] I found myself embarrassed by my
lack of understanding." After meeting with Ms. Fuentes, the Assistant Director of the Office of Multi-cultural Affairs, Serena writes that "I was ashamed for not knowing more about his [Malcolm X's] life...I was embarrassed for not having more of an interest to begin with. Once again I caught a glimpse of the racist side of myself."

When Ms. Fuentes asks Serena how she defines racism, Serena explains why she disagrees that "Blacks cannot be racist" because they have no power. Serena argues that "Blacks possess physical power. Walking alone at night in the city, I do not have control." However, Serena re-examines her position when Ms. Fuentes offers a counter-argument that "really made sense":

If I am attacked by a group of Black men because they are more powerful than me, that is not racism. This is because, after [being] caught, they will be arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced by whites (most likely) and be subject to their prejudices. Whereas if I am attacked by a group of white men, they will not receive the same degree of punishment (most likely). I never saw it in this light before. I have since thought a lot about the equation and now I wonder how anything gets done for Blacks in this country. How can bills, legislation and programs get enacted when no one in power can truly relate to the problems of minorities (because they have never been a minority)?

Serena is easily able to reconsider her previous assertions in light of Ms. Fuentes' example, delivered calmly and rationally. We can also begin to see indication of Serena's new, politicized consciousness emerging, as she begins to develop a deeper understanding of the relationship between racism and power.

Not all of Serena's encounters with others take place in such a supportive environment. When Serena and Avery attend the meeting of the African American Students Organization, both are immediately aware of their "outsider" status. For Avery, however, feeling like an outsider is perhaps a fact of life; for Serena, the
experience is new and extremely uncomfortable. As the only white woman in the
group of twenty-five (mostly male) Black students, Serena says in her memo that

No one spoke to us and we were pretty much ignored... I learned a lot
about the kind of person I am. I am a product of white culture. I like
"white" music. I like the "white" English form of speaking. I don't
know whether this is right or wrong... When a representative of the
Greek Council came to answer some quick questions, the group spoke
in perfect "white" English to the white woman. When she left, they
went back to "Yo, home boy, what's up." Is that good or bad? Why
can't I speak two languages like they can? Why don't I want to?

The kinds of questions Serena raises here are complex and not ones that she will be
able to answer during the course of this project. But for me, the teacher, this is one of
the purposes of reflexive inquiry: to pose "hard questions" that defy ready-made or
simple solutions, for it is the questions not the answers that complicate and deepen our
understanding of our subjects and ourselves.

However, when Avery gives Serena a copy of the video, Jungle Fever, we
begin to see that reflexive inquiry has its limits, and these limits are different for
different individuals. Serena writes that "this video was "one of the worst movies I
have ever seen in my life. This seemed to upset Avery, but I don't care. I really didn't
like the movie" (and I don't think I disliked it for racist reasons either)." While Serena
was able to make a gallant attempt to examine her own hidden prejudices at the
African American Students meeting, she cannot open herself and, therefore, think
reflexively about "bad" language (swearing).

Every other word was Fuck. Avery seems to think that this is a true
representation of the Black culture and Italian culture that make up the
main characters. I agree the language was appropriate in the scenes with
drugs and uneducated white people...but not for the main characters.
The black couple were educated and spoke like that. What is Spike Lee
trying to say? It seems (and I could be wrong) that he is putting down his own race.

Although Serena has observed that the African American students at the meeting she and Avery attended knew "two languages" -- she witnessed them slipping in and out of Black and standard English with ease -- she is, nonetheless, not prepared to even consider the possibility that "educated" people would use "bad" or improper language.

Serena is also offended by a conversation between Black women in the movie that "ripped apart the morals and values of white women. I don't appreciate the assumption that all white women are after sex with Black men just because they are curious. If the reverse were said about Black women in a predominantly white movie there would be an awful uproar." Serena bristles at having her race negatively and unfairly stereotyped (which in her mind, is no less discriminatory than the reverse situation). Had she been able to bend back on herself and examine her anger, she might have come to a deeper understanding of what minorities experience every day.

Educator Lisa Delpit, however, makes it poignantly clear how difficult and threatening it is to engage in this kind of reflexivity, "turning yourself inside out, giving up your own sense of who you are and being willing to see yourself in the unflattering light of another's angry gaze (1988, 297).

**The Product of Collaborative Inquiry: Enlarged and Complicated Understanding**

By the end of the project, Serena, Emily and Avery have learned a great deal about racism on campus from their interviews, reading and discussions. Each of these
students gain knowledge, but they do not gain the same understanding of what that knowledge means. Serena and Emily, for instance, come to realize that they are themselves "prejudiced." Serena writes that "when I began, I had a somewhat righteous attitude regarding prejudice and racism... I discovered that I am not as perfect as I had originally thought...This project has begun the process of positive change...I can see a transformation occurring."

Whereas Serena is energized by her enhanced awareness, Emily remains more cautious and unsure. Emily’s thinking is still in flux; she is unclear about what it is that she has learned, although she knows that learning has occurred, and she is unsure what it is that she can now say that she knows. Yes, she has absorbed a lot of information about the plight of minority students on campus, but she is uncertain what it means for her. What makes reflexive inquiry different from an ordinary research assignment, and as these excerpts from Emily’s final reflections suggest, is that the understanding that emerges is not usually simple, clear or complete. But what is also different about reflexive inquiry is that the inquiry is not likely to end when the project does.

Every time I read something or every time we discussed something, I learned more facts, but I became confused as to where I personally stood on the issues...

Saying that I believed everyone holds hidden prejudices included me, but did not single me out. When I wrote my essay, I finally stated that I am prejudiced. But I am still not comfortable admitting this...

Realizing how and why I am prejudiced is a big step in my emotional and mental development, and I was not prepared to take that step. I was already preoccupied with adjusting to college life, and trying to sort out my prejudiced feelings only complicated my adjustment...
I am not ready to evaluate where I stand in my own life. In a way, my inability to examine my own feelings on our topic allowed me to understand how important it is for people to recognize their prejudices...

I know I learned a lot--not just about political correctness or racial tensions in the U.N.H. campus--but about my own beliefs and ideals. I think this project would have been a waste of time if it had not made me think about things I already thought I knew...

Although Avery does not (re-)confront his beliefs about racism during this project, he does begin to see his methods of communication with others in a more complicated way:

I seem to veer toward the militant ends of various movements. Maybe it's because of the unusual situation I find myself living in. Often extreme conditions demand extreme solutions. But I also realize some of the dangers involved in these kinds of absolutist politics. Sometimes the oppressed can become so enraged and dictatorial that they begin to resemble their oppressor...

* * *

I have suggested that learning always involves some modification to what we know and believe as a result of our encounters with others. At its simplest level learning may simply involve adding to what we know and believe. But learning can also mean complicating, deepening and transforming the way we see others and the way we see ourselves. For this latter kind of learning to occur, I believe learners must become reflexive—that is, in response to their encounters with others, they must identify and examine their own assumptions. These collaborative inquiry projects reveal how reading and writing—especially essayistic reading and writing—can assist this reflexive process. As I said earlier, essayism is a way of engaging ideas that is open, exploratory and tentative. It refers not so much to the form, but to the stance
and approach a writer or reader adopts toward her subject and audience. The essayist, measures the objective facts of the situation against some subjective frame of reference. When Emily says that she learned more "facts," but became "confused" as to where she "personally stood on the issues," she reveals that she is involved in a reflexive (and messy) process of interrogating and re-interpreting her own frames of reference. In the collaboratively written foreword to their three essays, the students write that they "have wrestled with the definitions of racism and diversity [and]...are still not in agreement...But we do have a clearer understanding of the life experiences that have shaped our individual attitudes." I have argued throughout this study that the "understanding" of one's own life experiences--and that includes personal as well as cultural--is an important aim of education in general and composition and literacy studies in particular.

The Written Products of Collaborative Inquiry

In the papers they write for this project, both Emily and Serena combine their own insights about themselves with their research findings and write what may be considered "personal" research essays. Drawing from their research and their own experience, they reveal how they have arrived at their current understandings on their topic.

Serena's paper entitled "Minorities at the University of New Hampshire" focuses on her own changing awareness of the kinds of "subtle" and "symbolic" racism, minority students face. In her lead, she frames the problem in terms of her own experience.
When I came to the University of New Hampshire I often thought about the lack of minority students on campus. Until recently, I never gave thought to the minority students already here. I never considered what they must go through.

The next three paragraphs define the two forms of racism, and then she goes on to illustrate these forms of racism with further examples from her own experience. She writes about how she first considered a group of African American men who frequently sat together in the dining hall with suspicion. Then after reading several articles she realized, "They have found an escape from the isolation of 'subtle racism'. They have united and seized one of the few opportunities they have to truly let go and act as they want." As further evidence, she describes her feelings as the only white woman at the African American students organization and makes a connection between her feelings of being the outsider with how the men in the dining hall must feel.

I have never felt more awkward in my life. I felt very alone and self conscious the minute I walked in... The difference between my uncomfortable situation and the daily life of the Black men at [the dining hall] is similar but also very different, While my feelings of "not fitting in" lasted a little more than an hour, the Black men are only able to escape these feelings for an hour.

Next, she offers another example, of passing a Native American woman on her way to class. She writes, "Afraid of overcompensating, afraid of whatever, I usually look at my shoes as we pass." After framing her actions once again with her research, she notes, "I have decided this [behavior] is a classic example of subtle racism. Now when I pass I say 'hello', but I still feel awkward." Reflecting on her actions, she then raises one of those "hard questions" that further complicates the situation: "How is it
possible at the University of New Hampshire to get enough interaction so that the awk

wardness is no longer present?" The last half of the paper details the difficulties facing the University in their attempts to create more diversity on campus and at the same time to provide for the needs of minority students. Serena closes her five page essay with herself again:

Since starting this project I have learned much about my attitude regarding racism. I found that I do have a prejudiced side and have begun the process of questioning it. While I still have a lot to learn about the hardships minorities face and how I can change things, I now have a base to work with. Everyone deserves the kind of enlightenment that this project has afforded me.

Serena's paper reveals how her own understanding has been changed. We have witnessed her struggle to make sense and have been privy to her process of coming to understand racism and prejudice at "the deep level of life-world experience" (Spellmeyer).

Emily also focuses on the discovery of her own prejudice in her paper entitled "But I'm Not Prejudiced!" Like Serena, she begins the paper with her arrival on campus:

...If I dropped my tray in the middle of the lunch line, few people would know, and more importantly no one would care. I was just another face in the crowd; nothing drew attention to me. I never imagined what it would be like for the small number of minority students attending U.N.H....With freshmen naivety, I believed because I had not heard of any racial incidents or hate crimes on campus, that meant that racial tension did not exist at U.N.H. If people aren't hostile toward minorities here, I reasoned, U.N.H. must provide minorities with an excellent learning environment. I was wrong...

Unlike Serena, however, Emily's focus in her paper is not specifically on her own understanding. The "I" in the title is not meant to simply be a singular "I." After
citing evidence that the campus community offers a "chilly climate" for minority students because of ignorance and white students' own hidden beliefs, she introduces the idea that everyone is prejudiced. She begins by using herself as an example, but then quickly moves to talking about the problem in more general terms. As she mentioned in her reflection, it is less threatening to say "all."

When I first began to learn about the problem of racism on campus, it was easy for me to pretend I was not involved. "I'm not prejudiced," I would tell myself...But I am prejudiced, just as all people are. We all carry preconceived notions about minorities within ourselves; the question is whether we realize they are there. It's those people who recognize their prejudices, confront them and try to understand them that help to make the campus a better place.

In the rest of the essay, Emily will use her own experience without referring to it directly. Whereas Serena illustrates specific concepts with examples from her own life, Emily will draw from the wellspring of her own epiphanies during the project to form generalizations or "personal truths" about the nature of prejudice--but she does not specifically focus on the revelations themselves. For instance, having read her journal and memos, we can see how the following "insight" has emerged from her examination of her experience and her own realizations about herself: "People are not born with prejudices. Prejudices are attitudes that are learned as the individual grows and develops, and may manifest themselves in subtle ways, so that the person who claims 'But I'm not prejudiced', actually is and just hasn't recognized the fact." To illustrate these hidden prejudices, Emily constructs a hypothetical example instead of using a real incident that she wrote about in her journal. In her journal she talked about an experience in which a man kept asking her to dance. She told him no
because she wasn’t interested and she already had a boyfriend. When she relayed this story to her friends later, she writes that "I found myself always mentioning that the man was Black. Why should it have mattered?...I must have subconsciously felt it was important. I guess that just shows that I do carry hidden prejudices." However, in her essay, Emily does not write about this incident. Instead, she writes:

The strongest example I have found to show people how prejudices emerge is when white people label minorities when they speak of them. Instead of saying, "A man at the office," people tend to say, "A Black man at my office." If a white person wanted to speak about another white person whom they knew, they would not say, "You know Lisa, my white friend."

The points Emily offers to support her contention that everyone harbors hidden prejudices are supported by her research, but arise from her own discoveries about herself during this project. For example, it comes as no surprise that Emily is "convinced that education is a key factor in alleviating racial tension on campus," since she has just witnessed how her own "education" about the plight of minorities on campus during this project has revealed her own hidden assumptions. Interestingly, however, she ends her paper with an argument that seems to contradict her own experience of working on this project. Emily concludes that college is an ideal time for students to examine assumptions and beliefs they have previously taken for granted:

People who are freshmen in college are separating themselves from their parents and community...They are beginning to develop their own ideals and their own philosophies about life...If their university educates them about the racial problems on campus, they might be able to recognize their own prejudices and examine them...It is far better to admit "Yes, I’m prejudiced," and work at understanding how the prejudiced feeling developed and evolved than to insist you are not
prejudiced. Ignoring the problem will not make it go away...

She makes this argument, despite the fact that she originally balked at pursuing a potentially contentious topic where "feelings would get in the way of work;" she makes this argument even though she complains her own realizations have come at a bad time ("I was already preoccupied with adjusting to college life and trying to sort out my prejudiced feelings only complicated my adjustment"); and she makes this argument, knowing that her own realizations of being prejudiced were difficult for her to admit ("I was not prepared to examine and discard the ideals I had formed while growing up"), and painful to acknowledge (At one point, she wonders, if she is on "a moral level comparable to that of bigots and KKK members"). While Emily’s apparent change of position may represent memory’s capacity for melioration or the student’s penchant for upbeat and tidy conclusions, this new perspective may simply reflect the tentative nature of essayistic insights. These insights are not fixed perspectives. With further reflection and knowledge, individuals often come to understand things differently.

Whereas Emily’s and Serena’s papers focus on what can be done to identify and correct prejudice at the individual level, Avery, noting that racism is institutionalized discrimination, concentrates on the educational institution itself. His paper, entitled "The Quest for Diversity at UNH: Ways to Combat Bigotry and Discrimination," offers evidence to contradict the idea that colleges and universities today are "great, liberal, open-minded institutions where students receive a well-rounded education..."
Emily and Serena are a visible presence in their writing. When we read their papers, we immediately know that what we are reading is a perspective; it is the view from a very specific somewhere. Avery, however, writes a more traditional research paper, one that marshals evidence from a variety of sources to support an already established contention. Since he, the writer, is less visible in the writing, the fact that he is presenting a position is less apparent. Avery opens his paper with a string of incidents cited from various reputable publications that depict discrimination and racial hatred on college campuses. His next paragraph then begins:

You may think the preceding examples of racial hatred on college campuses happened twenty or thirty years ago. In fact, all of them took place during the last few years... some form of racial discrimination and racist incidents have been reported at more than 300 colleges in the last five years... *These numbers are disturbing* and speak to the mind set prevalent in many embittered white students...(emphasis added).

When Avery says "these numbers are disturbing" he is telling the reader how he or she should respond to the evidence he is presenting. An essayistic approach might note that he, the writer, is disturbed by these numbers and explain why. It would then be up to readers to decide for themselves how they should interpret the information.

If we recall what I suggested earlier, that Avery's purpose in this project is to make (white) people aware of the injustices done to African Americans and other minorities, then we should be able to see why he might desire to present his perspective as unmediated truth. This topic is not an issue he is tentative about in the least way. For the most part, even the emotion-laden language of his memos disappear in his paper. Just as he did not talk specifically about his own history with Serena and Emily, he may not want to "bias" his case in the paper by opening himself to
criticism that he is *only* talking from personal experience or that his view is simply "his opinion." He seems to want readers to see that (regardless of his own experience on these matters) the facts are there, and people need to know what they are. The problem is that his interpretation of the facts sometimes gets intermingled with the hard evidence he presents. For example, at one point he states the following opinion as a clear fact (no evidence required): "The Eurocentric point of view is a major contributing factor to the racist brainwashing and conditioning which whites experience in American society."

It is difficult to adopt an attitude of ethical deference to differing others or an essayistic approach toward your subject if you believe you already know what the truth of that subject is, and if you believe you have a duty to inform or persuade others. While informing and persuading are legitimate reasons for writing, they are not the reasons one chooses to essay or pursue inquiry. In his reflection on the project Avery emphasized that people have a moral responsibility to make the "truth" known:

White people have a *duty* to remind other white people, particularly those in "high" places that the American dream is a myth being perpetuated to oppress people of color, and to remind them that not one shred of equality has ever existed in this troubled land. Maybe if we are consistent enough in our aiming of words, we will hit a target. Hopefully this hit will break off the protective shield of someone and cause them [sic] to finally stop and THINK.

The way Avery has chosen to "hit" the audience for his paper "and cause them to finally stop and THINK" is not through the sharing of his own experience or even his experience of the facts (a stance that the women might have found more
"persuasive"). Avery seems to want people to THINK in specific ways and to "get an education about race relations" by accepting his conclusions, rather than inquiring into the evidence themselves. He writes that "unless whites take the initiative to get an education about race relations on campus and in our society, they will never understand what it is like to be a person of color and all the injustices which accompanies it."

In contrast to the strident and divisive discourse that sometimes occurred during the group's collaboration and writing, Avery ends his paper with an uplifting, but no less certain appeal for everyone to unite around their differences:

Often facing something as enormous as institutionalized and socialized discrimination seems insurmountable. To combat this, we must all remember the indomitable spirit and strength which is present in every human soul, and we must constantly strive to cherish all of the unique, beautiful gifts that the diverse members of the human family bring into the world. If we remember and respect these tenets, there is no limit to the depth of our power.

Avery's paper is the least essayistic of these three papers, and Emily's paper is less essayistic than Serena's. Serena's paper is not more essayistic simply because she used more personal examples; rather it is essayistic because she has shown the reader how she came to her own provisional understanding. Her paper details her process of reaching a "conviction," and it reveals more clearly than the others, that her conviction is tentative. She reminds us that her knowledge is not complete when she writes, "I still have a lot to learn..." In the co-authored foreword to their essays, when the students introduce their different perspectives on the racism equation, Serena's response is again tentative: "Serena is still questioning this theory and has come to no
sure-fire conclusions, however, she does have a better understanding of how difficult it is for any minority to succeed in the infrastructure without representation from their race." Here too, Serena explains how she moved from her initial position of certainty ("Serena firmly believed it was possible for anyone to be racist...") to her current position of "still questioning" by describing her discussion with Ms. Fuentes.

Emily's paper contains moments of essayistic writing as she reveals how her research has changed her own thinking. She concludes that "it's far better to admit 'Yes, I am prejudiced,' and work at understanding how the prejudiced feeling developed and evolved than to insist that you are not prejudiced." Her closing position is much less tentative than Serena's, as she writes that she "is convinced that education is a key factor... (emphasis added)", and she details just what she thinks the university needs to do and why.

Victoria Davion notes that "one can tell as least as much about a person's character by looking at how she arrived at her beliefs as by looking at which beliefs or values she views as unconditional at any particular moment" (1990, 183). The arguments and evidence Avery presents are not used to show readers why he holds and how he came to hold his beliefs, but rather to persuade readers why they should adopt this position. And in order to be effectively convincing to others, Avery must sound certain himself—or must he? Is Avery's certainty more convincing that Serena's tentativeness?\footnote{16}

One difference between an argument and an essay is that in an argument the writer has done all the thinking and all the reasoning. He leaves little work for the
reader to do other than to simply agree or disagree. The essay has been called an "egalitarian" form (Zeiger 1989) because it presents information in such a way that the reader participates in the reasoning process and comes to her own conclusions. The reader does not simply accept or deny the (ready-made) conclusions of someone else. She takes what the writer has provided and then uses this information to earn her own insights. Elizabeth Minnich reminds us that "to achieve a truly egalitarian pluralism conceptually and politically, it is necessary for all groups to achieve self-knowledge, developed from within rather than imposed from without" (179). While it is true that reasons (if they are indeed good reasons) should be reasons for everyone, as a teacher, I have found that sometimes somebody else's good reasons are not enough to persuade my students. They need a method that allows them to discover and construct their own good reasons in response and connection to others.

**Final thoughts**

I want to close this chapter with a long quote from Elizabeth Minnich that I believe suggests why our students (and ourselves) have difficulty engaging in the kinds of dialogue, so necessary for collaborative inquiry, essayism and world-travelling.

Over and over I have found [students] retreating to a position of relativism when they fear that there is about to be a conflict over moral positions...I have come to believe that such retreats from discussion of moral differences are "caused" not be the relativism with which students are so often charged, but by moral absolutism. The dominant tradition has not helped young people learn how to converse together about the most important values they hold; it has taught them that these values must be absolutely right or they are not values at all. So when students encounter serious differences, they are startled, troubled, frightened. And rather than fight with their friends over who is absolutely right,
they prefer to say, in effect, I hold my absolute values, you hold yours. *Both* absolutism and radical relativism make it possible, even necessary, to avoid serious engagement with differences. If we want people to cease being absolutists or relativists, we need to open to them the challenge of exploring the rich complexity of differences understood from the beginning as being in transactional relation to each other. We will not get past the problem of relativism by retreating to the good old established certainties; when we do that, we simply ensure that those who want to get along with people who are not already just like them will have nowhere to go but relativism (1990, 167).

Minnich warns against "retreating to the good old established certainties." However, I would also caution that we do not make the mistake of simply forging ahead into new certainties, no matter how "right" or moral our position seems. As Spellmeyer notes, "any knowledge which might be useful must give people something 'deeper' than one gospel or another" (281). And while Avery's knowledge is impressive, his arguments persuasive, his stance pushes me away. Although he helps me to understand how we could find ourselves in such a potentially unrelenting, unreflective position, I fear such a position dooms us to repeat what we are trying to overcome. And yet, I do not know how to quell the tide of (non-deferent) certainty that sweeps me as well as others along in its wake—unless it be with what I hope by now is a warranted belief in an ongoing, reflexive dialogue.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER V

1. Students submit journals, memos, papers and foreword for evaluation. Half of their grade is based on the "density" of their journals and memos, and the other half is based on their paper and foreword. Thus, the end paper counts for only about 40% of their total grade.

2. World-travelling is not the same as being "between." The World-traveller occupies more than one position or entertains more than one perspective. When a person experiences the sensation of being between, she neither belongs to one world or another. Her previous moorings loosened or disrupted, she is temporarily adrift, suspended in the liminal sea between worlds. Between can be a precursory state to world-travelling, but it can just as easily, as I've already suggested, send the non-reflexive individual back to safe, familiar shores or else push them to land at the first, dry port they see.

3. It is important to make clear that what I say about this group is based on my reading of their written texts; and yet my interpretation is informed by a knowledge of these students unavailable to other readers of this study. It is influenced by the students' previous written work, their participation in class and conferences prior to this project, as well as by my observations and our discussions during the four and half weeks they worked together as a group. It is a teacher's reading.

4. Avery describes "trans-gender" as being sexually male, but with a gender or mental construction that is female. Everyone in the group as well as myself felt that Avery's sexual/gender orientation was an important factor in the group's collaboration; however, as I was concerned that readers might overly focus their attention on this fact, both Avery and I decided to leave his sexual/gender identity intentionally ambiguous in the first article about the group, "Collaboration as Reflexive Dialogue," that I wrote with Elizabeth-Chiseri Strater. Avery chose the name "Avery" because it sounded gender-neutral to him. Although he found my use of the pronoun "he" to describe him as problematic, he could not think of any alternative.

Both women had known by his appearance, voice and mannerisms that he was "different." Emily had just assumed that he was Gay. Serena had heard from another woman in the class that he was neuter, without gender, but she said she didn't really know.

In his journals, memos and discussion with other group members, Avery often alluded to his experience of being "oppressed," of having been the victim of cruel taunts and hurtful names; it was obvious that he related to the group's topic of discrimination much more deeply and experientially than the two women, but he did not share why he did with his partners until some months after the project concluded. When I met with him to ask him how he wanted to be characterized, he told me who and what he was and wanted me to share this information with Serena and Emily.
5. Unfortunately, I was not aware of the literature on racial identity development or Tatum’s article when the students were pursuing their project, so I do not know how knowledge of this theory might have influenced their collaboration. I use these ideas now as a tool of analysis for examining how the students’ different awareness levels might have influenced their ability to reflexively engage their topic. Since Avery, Serena and Emily are white, I have mostly drawn from the portion’s of Tatum’s essay that examines white identity development based on the model proposed by Janet E. Helm’s edited work: (1990), Black and white racial identity: Theory research and practice. Westport CT: Greenwood Press.

6. Because there are only about 50 African American students out of student body population of 12,000, it is small surprise that many students at the University of New Hampshire lack experience and knowledge of people of color.

7. It is interesting to note that Avery’s best friend was an African-American woman who actually attended one of the group’s conferences with me. After the group interviewed Isabella Fuentes, a Latina woman who was the assistant director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, Avery began working in the office. The semester following Freshman English he enrolled in a special introductory section of Women’s Studies that focused on African-American women. One explanation for Avery’s frequent exasperation with the other members’ lack of knowledge and experience of racism, might be how Avery is positioned at this point in his life. In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that racial identity developmental level by itself explains the complexity of this group’s collaboration.

8. Although Avery has a great deal of knowledge about the topic of racism, that knowledge is not getting through to Serena and Emily. My point is that all the knowledge in the world isn’t going to help Emily understand. All the good reasons Avery offers are not going to be good reasons for Emily. When truth is aimed at you like a weapon, it will not set you free.

9. In her reflection on the project, Emily notes how important her journal was for allowing her to examine her own thoughts and feelings. During the groups meetings she says "I was often too busy defending myself and my ideals to try to understand why I felt the way I did. My journal...was the only place I felt safe and comfortable voicing my opinions."

10. A pedagogical note. Emily’s realization about her discomfort with her father’s anger is just the kind of insight that leads one to essay, to explore and inquire further. Under ordinary classroom circumstances, I would have encouraged Emily to write more, to "write to discover." I may have provided her with literature (fiction and non-fiction) that she could use to frame her experience against. I believe that this kind of insight requires the capacity to delay conviction; at least initially it requires the openness and tentativeness of an essayistic stance. Whether Emily returns to this thought at another time remains to be seen.
11. I am reminded by Barbara Houston that both Emily and Serena, as women, may in fact have been attacked, devalued and silenced many times in their lives, but have not obtained full consciousness of their situation yet. They experience Avery's anger as a kind of attack, and yet they explain it away as simple rudeness. Furthermore, Emily and Serena have probably been socialized (more than they realize) to defer (politely) to males, even though Avery's masculinity may be in question. Both these women, nonetheless would see themselves as agents. Emily (our ex-valedictorian) has been educated to believe (perhaps falsely) that, female or not, she does have "the right to her opinion." She is confident and sure of her ability to engage in rational discussion and argument with others. As long as everyone plays by the rules and the talk doesn't get out of hand, it is easy for her to defer, perhaps too easy to yield the floor to others, without feeling herself threatened or without feeling the need to express disapproval.

Regarding the student in the study lounge, Emily writes in her journal that she didn't say anything to the student "because even though the word [homo] made me cringe and feel uncomfortable...I knew by saying something in front of the others it would make Roy defensive and I didn't even know him, so I didn't want someone I don't know to feel that they can't speak in front of me." Emily writes that if Roy had been a person "I was friendly with, I would have said something right away." She does however talk to Roy after the rest of the group leaves. She politely and calmly tells him: "Roy, my friends and I were uncomfortable when you used the term 'homo.'" Is Emily deferring to a male? Is she expressing blame?

12. When the group met with the Assistant Director of the Multi-cultural Students Organization, a Latina woman, Avery asked her how she handled "the rage." Emily writes in her journal, that she assumed Avery meant "the rage of having people treat you different as a minority." As reported by Emily, the woman said rage was the only response. "there was no other way; it made her a stronger person, and she saw it as a challenge." Avery seems to have been influenced by her response.

13. I'm not sure how Clark (through Wyschogrod) is interpreting Noddings' concept of empathy. Clark describes Noddings' concept of empathy as "an attempt to receive another's reality as one's own" (66). And yet he then criticizes it from Wyschogrod's position as an interpretation "that directs me to understand the other in my own terms" (66). I don't see how the latter assumption follows from --in fact it seems to contradict--the initial description of empathy. I don't see "an attempt to receive" as an attempt to interpret, but as an attempt to not interpret, to defer interpretation.

14. Part of the reason for the tone and style of Avery's paper may have to do with the fact that this project involved research. Despite the fact, that I emphasize that the research essay is not like the traditional ("T-less") high school term paper, many students still seem bound by this tradition.
15. My point is not to suggest that one rhetorical stance is better than another, merely that inquiry is best served by the open and tentative stance of essayism. As I mentioned before, my purpose for this assignment was for students to select a topic for inquiry and to use reading and writing to inquire. The fact that Avery began this project from an extremely knowledgeable position made it difficult for him to adopt this approach.

16. I need to emphasize again that I am talking about persuasion from a rhetorical perspective and not on epistemological grounds. My point concerns his stance toward his audience and subject, not his arguments. Avery offers many good reasons that should be persuasive. However, his stance does not always invite assent; it coerces it.
CHAPTER VI

SOME TENTATIVES FOR A REFLEXIVE PEDAGOGY

Anyone with an active mind lives on tentatives rather than tenets.
- Robert Frost

When I know, I seek not to know.
- Donald M. Murray

Reflexivity describes the feeling of heightened self-awareness or consciousness that occurs in response to a dialectical encounter with an other. In the process of trying to make sense or understand an other--person, idea or text--we may (re-)discover aspects of ourself, our situation or our world. I have suggested that reflexivity is important for learning, especially when learning requires us to also engage in "unlearning." Unlearning is a process in which we access, articulate and re-examine (via an other) our unconscious or tacit knowledge, principles, beliefs or assumptions. I have also suggested that writing and reading, especially essayistic writing and reading, can assist in reflexive inquiry. As I have characterized it, essayism is a way of approaching, probing and thinking about a subject that is open, tentative, dialogic and reflexive. According to William Zeiger (1989), the essay's "egalitarian nature comes from its intention not to attempt to constrain its subject matter or to subdue its audience, but to render as truly as possible the confluence of impressions and reflections which shape one's thought" (244).

In the previous five chapters I have sought to gradually build an understanding
of reflexivity and its relation to essayistic writing and reading without fixing it to a single, precise definition. I have not attempted "to constrain my subject matter." I have constructed it broadly and suggestively, allowing my thinking to spill over at will into the margins of my topic, momentarily meld with contingent ideas and inviting my readers to do the same. In this final chapter, I focus on some of the educational, epistemological and ethical implications of a reflexive pedagogy that uses reading and writing as vehicles for constructing, deepening and challenging students' and teachers' understandings of their subjects and themselves. I begin by reviewing the relationship between reflexivity and reflection and describing what I see as three of the key attributes of a reflexive pedagogy.

**Reflexivity and Reflection**

Interest in reflexivity seems to have emerged most strongly in fields with real, visible others: anthropology (cultural other), feminist theory (sexual other) and philosophical hermeneutics (textual other); whereas reflection, on the other hand, has dominated the discussions of problem solving in the cognitive and developmental sciences. Composition studies has borrowed from each of these disciplines, so it is no surprise that a conflation of these terms frequently occurs. More confusion arises because reflection and reflexivity, as I noted earlier, are not entirely separate processes, but rather different aspects of the same process that can work separately or together.

My focus in this inquiry differs from many cognitive researchers who are looking at how reflection—defined as anything from the writer's backward scanning of
already written text to their deliberation and evaluation of knowledge and rhetorical strategies during planning and drafting—improves the actual written text.¹ For instance, in their research examining the role of reflection during peer planning sessions, Higgins, Flower and Petraglia (1992) define critical reflection as "a particular act of metacognition in which individuals engage in evaluative thinking about their own ideas and processes as they work through an intellectual problem" (49, my emphasis). In response to peer prompts (set questions), writers are encouraged to talk about their plans, ideas and strategies for writing an assigned paper. Students are said to be engaged in reflection when they consider alternative plans, evaluate, or justify their own plans. The emphasis is on organization, examination and critique of potential tactical solutions to the difficult problem of writing.

On the other hand, reflexivity, as I have described it, entails more than the simple monitoring and evaluating of conscious knowledge and already identified strategies. Reflexivity involves the disclosure or articulation of tacit knowledge or unconscious frames of reference. Once this tacit knowledge is identified, then it becomes open to reflection, examination, critique, and evaluation. Tentatively, I might suggest that reflection is a form of deliberation that helps us to solve problems and to figure out the best or most effective solutions for a course of action. As Donald Schon (1983) noted, reflection enables practitioners to become skilled in their craft. Reflexivity, however, is what enables us to find and formulate new problems. As I suggested in Chapter III, reflexivity can lead to the generation of earned insights, but it does so a layer at a time.
Three Features of a Reflexive Pedagogy

The necessity of the other

The engagement with an other is what initiates the reflexive turn to the self, and the continual interplay between self and other keeps self-consciousness from slipping into narcissism or solipsism. In this inquiry, I have often characterized the other in its extreme, "not us" form: my Australia; the peace corps volunteers’ Dominican Republic; Mindy’s Lucille; Ralph’s Sheila; Kay and Rob’s difficult text; Chad’s African American women; and Avery, Emily, and Serena’s minority students at UNH. Each of these encounters with others contains the ingredients for individuals to undergo "the stranger" experience as they begin to discover that their unconscious frames of reference are not sufficient for understanding, let alone evaluating, the situation. Not everyone will respond in a reflexive manner. For some it will take more time, while others may never take the turn. But the conditions for such a response are present.

The other may also be the other within. A single mind can embody many perspectives. Hannah Arendt (1971), for example, talks about the "two-in-one" of Plato’s "soundless dialogue...between me and myself" (185). However, I have emphasized that such an internal dialectic can only be set in motion because substantial interaction with others outside of ourselves has occurred. As Vygotsky notes in his discussion of internal thought, "an interpersonal process is transformed into an interpersonal one" (1978, 57). Likewise, Karen Burke LeFevre has suggested that in order to create or invent, we require "the presence of the other. This ‘other’
may at times be another part of the rhetor herself--an internalized construct that she makes from social experience--or it may be a perceived audience of actual others" (1987, 38). Thus, Donald Murray's description of writing as a conversation between two selves carries the trace and residue of many external conversations.

The act of writing might be described as a conversation between two workmen muttering to each other at the workbench. The self speaks, the other self listens and responds. The self proposes, the other self considers. The self makes, the other self evaluates. The two selves collaborate: a problem is spotted, discussed, defined; solutions are proposed, rejected, suggested, attempted, tested, discarded, accepted (1982, 165).

Writers and artists have long talked about the necessity of having their internal others present for the execution of their work. Sometimes these others are friendly, supportive muses; at other times they are critics, devils, "watchers." At any rate, it is the engagement with an other--whether it appears externally or is manifested internally--that can trigger the reflexive response.

However, we will not become reflexive with every other we meet. As Emily, Serena and Avery suggest in Chapter V, timing is important. Emily writes in her journal that as a new student to the university already experiencing many changes and adjustments, she is not ready or prepared to call up and examine all her long-held beliefs. Avery, just coming to voice, is not likely to want to now turn back to interrogate it's sound. And Serena, who has begun to peel away the layers of her "racist self" balks when confronted with others who appear rude or use impolite language.

In terms of a specific pedagogy, certainly new or complex texts or genres can
serve as an "other" for students and provide them with the opportunity for engaging in "the stranger" experience. For example, many readers will find that their customary, unconscious habits of reading do not help them to make sense of a book like Gloria. Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) with its continual shifting and blurring of genre, language and mode of writing. Anzaldúa's mix of poetry and prose, Spanish and English, and personal, mythic and historical content pose a challenge for readers on this side of the border. It's only as readers begin to grasp the dynamic and plural nature of the other--La Mestiza--that they begin to make sense of the text, and their own ways of reading (and being-in-the-world) are disclosed and held open for inspection.

Teachers can also assume the role of an other to an extent by introducing a counter-discourse or alternative interpretation or perspective. By counter-discourse, I do not mean for the teacher to become a devil's advocate; rather, I mean for the teacher to make available alternative positions on topics students are reading or writing about or to pose questions that may complicate students' thinking. The purpose of the counter discourse is to make the familiar strange. It is a heuristic for inquiry. For instance, I could have pointed Rob to other passages in Freire's text and asked him to consider these passages in light of his contention that his fraternity was an example of Freire's philosophy. When I asked Mark, who was writing about the positive relationship between hard work and success, if he could imagine any situation in which more hard work might have negative effects, I was nudging him to find his own counter-discourse.
Assignments like the collaborative inquiry project I describe in Chapter V, which allow for close and long term engagement with many others, also provide the conditions for a reflexive encounter. For the most part, though, we will need to teach students how to approach and engage these others. We do not want students to unconsciously absorb or be absorbed by others; nor do we want them to simply adopt a hyper-critical stance toward the other.

Agency and stance

The reflexive encounter requires an agent who is capable of openness and "ethical deference" toward others without losing or abandoning him or herself in the process. Such an agent needs to also have enough autonomy, self-trust and esteem to withstand his or her own rigorous self-scrutiny. Obviously, I am describing a rather sophisticated stance, one that few of us can adopt all the time, and one that few of our students will have learned to adopt at all, especially in academic settings. But that's the point. I believe that we should begin to teach students how to adopt this open, tentative approach toward others, and that one way we can do this is by teaching them how to read and write essayistically. Essayism is a stance and approach to texts and situations that is characterized by tentativeness and an open-ended spirit of inquiry.

I also believe that teachers should practice and model this stance for their students. Instead of telling others what is true, we provide students with information; we share how we came to formulate our own positions or how we came to hold the beliefs that we do; and we set up the conditions for students to try these ideas for themselves. As Anne Seller notes, "much of the best teaching is...a matter of
introducing people to ideas which they can play with and use (or ignore) to create and correct their own views" (1988, 174).

When we are told what to think or which stance to adopt, we may respond defensively rather than reflexively. Instead of opening ourselves to the view of the other, we instead seek ways to preserve our own view (often without examining what it is we are trying to safeguard). For example, when Avery tries to tell Serena and Emily that whites (that they themselves) are responsible for past injustices done to African-Americans, the women emphatically resist this idea. Serena argues that "people back then didn't really realize the atrocities they were committing. As wrong as it was, it was considered acceptable." To support her assertion, she reminds the group that "in the essay, the Indians were invisible." Here, Serena is referring to an essay by Jane Tompkins that the class had read earlier in the semester. This essay chronicles Tompkins' attempts to understand the conflicting historical interpretations and first hand accounts of what happened between Europeans and Native Americans in the seventeenth century. Tompkins shows how the various accounts can be explained by examining how their authors were situated. What the writers notice and what counts as epistemologically significant for each of them, varies according to their social, cultural and historical situation; and in many of the accounts, the Indians did not appear to count as "human beings," as a significant part of the wilderness. They were "invisible." In making a connection between Tompkins' essay and the treatment of African Americans during slavery, Serena, to her credit, is attempting to make a sophisticated argument on the grounds of cultural and historical relativism; however,
she could have just as easily used this piece to examine her own situatedness.

Emily also insists that whites should not be held accountable for the past, but she justifies her position in a different way. After discovering that she is only the fourth generation to be born on United States soil, she writes that since her ancestors couldn’t have owned slaves, and were in fact treated harshly themselves, that she certainly cannot be held responsible for the atrocities committed in the past.

My father’s great great grandmother was 100% full blooded Algonquin Indian from Canada...my mother’s great grandmother worked in the mill... as did my father’s great grandmother. I will be the first to admit that they weren’t half as oppressed as the slaves or blacks since, but as Franco-Americans in New England, my ancestors weren’t always treated with respect, especially in the mills. To my knowledge, my ancestors had nothing to do with the slaves...If either of you have heard stories of the Franco-Americans oppressing blacks, please let me know, because it might give me a different outlook on this topic.

Emily’s response can be seen in part as a defensive maneuver against what she and Serena feel are an unjust attack on all white people. Had Avery introduced his argument by sharing why he found it persuasive, Emily and Serena may still not have agreed with him, but perhaps they would have tried to understand his position, instead of seeking ways to refute it and trying to justify their own. This closed stance on the part of all three students prevents the possibility of dialogue on this topic.

The other extreme occurs when individuals uncritically assume the perspective of the other. For example, after I had lived in Australia for a couple of years, my initial defensiveness disappeared as I opened myself more and more to Australian culture; however, I had not yet become fully reflexive about the culture which I left. I noted in a letter home that "I was a book and Australia was writing all over me,"
revising pages and pages from the earlier chapters of my life." But rather than examining one set of beliefs from the position of the other, I was simply replacing them. When I returned home for my first visit, I was no longer the proud advocate of the work ethic. I came back for a month's stay with a mind filled with the words, habits, and perspectives that I had gradually, but unconsciously assimilated. (And true to the spirit of my Grandmother Qualley) I felt obligated to immediately enlighten my family about their American shortcomings which included: too much faith in authority, big business and polyester; too little regard for labor unions and socialized medicine. I thought my family needed to know what was wrong with their lives and what they could do to fix them. Not only was I not yet reflexive, I certainly had not adopted an essayistic approach toward my American audience.

It is important to note that many people come to adopt an essayistic stance and approach to texts and situations gradually. In the process, they may resist the other by seeking to fortify and protect their own positions, or alternatively, they may renounce their beliefs, don the garb of the other, and go native. However, continual dialogue between self and other can help prevent either of these practices from becoming permanent conditions.

Dialogue

As I have tried to make clear, individuals need a way to mediate between self and other so that neither is dis-empowered or overpowered. Since reflexivity is a response to a dialectical encounter with an other, dialogue is essential to this transaction. Genuine dialogue presupposes that participants are open to considering
other positions. The kind of dialogue I have in mind is not the dialogue that
necessarily leads to consensus and agreement, but the kind of dialogue that leads to an
enlarged understanding. This is the kind of dialogue envisioned by hermeneutics. It
is also the kind of dialogue that Maria Lugones equates with world-travelling, and that
I seek from students engaged in collaborative inquiry. Georgia Warnke notes that once
we recognize the interpretive nature of our own understanding, we begin to
"acknowledge not only the possible existence of other interpretations, but also the
importance of considering them and even of trying to learn from them" (1993, 92).
Even though we may not adopt another's interpretation in the end, we may find that
other perspectives help us to illuminate or rethink our own. It is the kind of dialogue
that enables Susan to discover why she is willing to change her name; it allows Mindy
to see how people like Lucille, the hardened, disagreeable nursing assistant, are at least
partially constructed by the situations in which they live and work; dialogue with
Freire's text enables Kay to complicate her understanding of the homeless, and as
Chad literally talks to the African American women in Alice Walker's text, he begins
to gain a much fuller sense of the oppression that both links and separates them. And
it is this kind of dialogue that allows Avery, Serena and Emily to develop a more
complex understanding of racism on campus, an understanding which shares some
features of each others' perspectives, but which has been individually processed and
individually claimed.

Bakhtin tells us that dialogue is the force that drives intellectual and moral
development (Tappan 1991). However, students will need to be taught how to dialogue
across differences. As Elizabeth Minnich reminds us, our students simply do not know how to engage in authentic conversation with differing others without retreating into radical relativism or absolutism. That is why Australian educators Jane Kenway and Helen Modra suggest that "perhaps we would do better to see dialogue as the goal of pedagogy, not the condition for it" (1992, 163). Productive conversations, notes Lorraine Code, "have to be open, moving and hesitant to arbitrary closure; sensitive to revisions of judgment; prepared to leave gaps where no obvious consensus is possible" (1991, 308).

Productive dialogue begins when students make connections. Thus, my first emphasis is to help students find ways to make an initial connection to the ideas we read, write and talk about. Once the connection has been established, the channels are open for exploratory and eventually a more critical dialogue. I encourage dialogue through activities and assignments that are long term and recursive and that allow many opportunities for individuals to engage in ongoing dialogue with texts and with other people's responses to these texts. I use dialogue to prevent closure and affirm the possibility of pluralist perspectives by continually returning to the texts students have already read and the drafts they have already written and by re-opening earlier discussions in light of present discussions. Students write and talk about what they find attractive, confusing or disturbing about different positions they have encountered and then try to account for their reaction. When I have used portfolios, I tend to use them as a tool for reflexive dialogue. Anna's reading of her semester's work is an example of the kind of critical dialogue portfolios can generate.
Epistemological Implications

The importance of subjectivity

As Lorraine Code reminds us, evaluating and constructing complex knowledge claims always requires taking subjectivity into account. And once we take subjectivity into account, we begin to recognize the interpretive nature of our understanding. I do not believe there is such a thing as nonpositional understanding. We understand by continual reference to our own perspective, although we may not always be aware of doing so. Our subjectivity, as I noted in Chapter II, is an instrument of interpretation, one that we use to make sense of the world.

When we find ourselves in familiar situations that we can easily comprehend, we may not pay much attention to this instrument of interpretation. When faced with a new or strange situation or a difficult text, however, we may be forced to attend to our subjectivity if we wish to make sense. We search for some familiar frame that will enable us to understand. As we attempt to measure the facts at hand against our frame of reference, the frame itself becomes discernible and open for examination. We become reflexive if and when we momentarily turn our attention from the "out there" to the "in here," that is, back to these subjective frames--the beliefs, assumptions and theories that have now come into relief.

Philosopher Ann Seller explains that she "pays attention" to her subjectivity "in order to find what Hannah Arendt called ‘the world’," but she also intimates that the conscious monitoring of subjectivity can contribute to the individual’s sense of agency:
It is not that every individual's unexamined and undiscussed experience is true, much less her opinions, but it is only through examining and discussing individuals' experiences that we can do what the realist calls finding truth, what the relativist calls contributing to the construction of reality as opposed to simply being the victims of other people's constructions (1988, 182).

I want my students to become agents of their own education by becoming aware of the role they play in their own learning. As Anna discovers when she looks at her semester’s work in Freshman English: "I have developed into an active reader, a conscious writer, a perpetual thinker and a connecting learner." Thirty years ago in his important book, *Why Children Fail*, John Holt suggested that the difference between good and poor students may have to do with their ability to attend to their own processes of learning:

Part of being a good student is learning to be aware of that state of one's own mind and the degree of one's own understanding. The good student may be one who often says that he does not understand simply because he keeps a constant check on his understanding. The poor student does not watch himself trying to understand, does not know most of the time whether he understands or not (1964, 28-29).

According to Robert Tremmel (1994) part of being a good teacher also involves learning to pay attention, and paying attention is exactly what beginning teachers find difficult to do. Tremmel argues that paying attention, however, is one thing that "teachers [and students] can learn that will have immediate impact on their teaching [and learning] and the way they see themselves as teachers [and learners] (61).

Donald Murray offers a good example of a writer, teacher and learner who has made a reputation for himself by paying attention to his subjectivity and keeping a
constant check on his understanding. In an essay entitled "Knowing Not Knowing" (1994 forthcoming), he writes,

From the beginning it was clear that my answers were speculations—guesses. Informed guesses, but not TRUTHS. What I had to say was based on my evolving understanding of how I wrote at the moment, how published writers I knew or studied wrote, how my current students wrote and my personal interpretations of this information.

Murray writes that he hoped that composition research would "replace" his "subjective speculations with more objective knowing."

Although Murray seems to devalue the importance of what he calls his "subjective speculations" ("I was after all, a practitioner"), I have tried to suggest that we can’t develop a complex understanding of our subjects or ourselves without taking subjectivity into account. Objective research need not replace subjective understanding. Both are needed, but both need to work together. (We know too well the lopsided reality that ensues from "separate but equal" kinds of practices). One area in which the interdependency between subjectivity and objectivity has become increasingly clear is in the field of teacher-research and practical inquiry.

**Teacher-research**

Although it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the theory and practice of teacher-research in any detail, I believe that recent studies in this field (e.g., Fleischer 1994; Tremmel 1994, 1993; Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993; Ray 1993; Phelps 1991) compliment and add additional support to the issues I have raised concerning the importance of subjectivity and reflexivity for developing complex knowledge claims. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) argue that teachers who are
researchers in their own classrooms contribute important kinds of knowledge about teaching through their "systematic subjectivity" (43). According to Ruth Ray (1993), "teacher-research...illustrates on a very practical level how knowledge is constructed personally, locally and globally and how these three inform one another differently in the experience of every researcher" (138). However, Ray notes that "most practitioner inquiry begins and ends with personal knowledge. Personal knowledge is what teachers construct about themselves, their teaching, and their interactions in the classroom" (82). Because teacher-research often entails a teacher asking questions about and systematically trying to explore her own teaching, it provides the occasion for reflexivity. It can reveal how teachers’ subjectivities--their "personalities, beliefs, feelings, and political views effect the learning environment..." (137). I believe teacher-research provides another example of the kinds of reflexive inquiry I have discussed here. Teacher-research empowers teachers to "make sense" of their students and classroom practice in similar ways that my students have tried to make sense of their texts and paper topics. In her work with K-12 teachers, Ray found that these teachers

saw their classroom inquiry as a basis for increased self-understanding and self-esteem that translated directly into better teaching. They also believed that the personal knowledge developed through their teacher-research provided a compelling example for other teachers at the local level to bring about change through classroom inquiry...As practitioners they come to take an authoritative stance on the field of composition, testing, challenging and extending theory by reflecting on and analyzing their own teaching (103-104).

Thus, teacher-research also demonstrates "the power of personal knowledge to effect change in one’s theoretical understanding" (119). Like Ray, I see reflexive inquiry
through reading and writing as a basis for self-understanding and self-esteem that translates into better learning, learning that is bi-directional, learning that enables my students, like these teacher researchers, to become agents of their education.

Understanding by degree

In my inquiry (unlike the previous discussion of teacher-research), I have tried to sidestep epistemological discussions of whether knowledge is objective by definition or whether it also includes subjective experience by talking about "understanding." I have described understanding as both the process and product of the transaction between knower and known. We come to understand gradually, by degree. What is more, our understandings are subject to change with additional knowledge and experience. These understandings can deepen and develop in complexity, or we may refute earlier understandings altogether. All of the students whose essays and responses appear in earlier chapters reveal how understanding is always partial and provisional. As Gadamer notes, understanding means to understand differently. Thus, understanding carries the implication that we have come to view or interpret something in a new way. I suppose that occasionally we might experience understanding as a sudden flash of insight, the eureka moment. More frequently, however, I believe the realization that we understand differently emerges gradually, and we only become aware of it when we make a reflexive turn. (For instance, at what point in this inquiry were you, the reader, aware that you understood reflexivity?).

The impetus for this inquiry, like most inquiries conducted by teachers, arises out of a subjective desire to better understand, a desire that we inquirers do not expect
to assuage fully or completely with any single "been-there-tried-that" effort. For the last twenty-five years, for instance, Murray's "subjective speculations" has been propelled by his need to understand (better, differently) how and why writer's write. Murray's seeks to use his "knowing" to continually push himself into the realm of "not knowing." As he says in A Writer Teaches Writing: "I have learned from writing it, and having written it, I will learn to depart from it" (1985, 5). Ruth Ray writes that her research arose from her "own need to come to terms--personally, intellectually and politically--with composition as a field an my particular place in it" (159).

As the work of teacher inquiry suggests, understanding is gradual, ongoing, and apt to change; it is the process and product of our interdependent subjective experience and objective knowledge.

Ethical Implications

In this inquiry, my focus has not been on how individuals gain technical expertise in reading and writing; rather my interest lies in how reading and writing can assist individuals in making sense and in developing more complex understandings of their subjects and themselves. The kind of understanding that I have been talking about represents more than "epistemological enhancement" (DiCenso 1990) and technical expertise (although both knowledge and technical know-how are necessary). I have intimated that the process of understanding others and ourselves has ethical overtones. I now want to attempt to explain more fully what has led me to this belief by first returning to what Gadamer says about the relationship between understanding and application.
Gadamer's account of understanding borrows from Aristotle's discussion of ethical knowledge as a form of practical knowledge. However, as Georgia Warnke in her discussion of Gadamer points out, ethical knowledge should not be confused with technical knowledge. It is possible to apply technical expertise unconsciously as a means to an end, in which both means and end are known or predetermined in advance. It is not necessary for individuals to subject their skill or knowledge to reflexive questioning--indeed, such a move may prevent the desired outcome. On the other hand, ethical knowledge is situation specific and requires conscious interpretation and application. It is a matter of weighing various options against a normative framework that is itself modified or clarified by the options one chooses through a process of ongoing, reflexive dialogue. For this reason, ethical knowledge "never involve[s] simply the application of a formula...nor can the desired results be determined in advance of the situation" (Warnke 1987, 94).

Much of the public and many of our students, however, see reading and writing as only a form of technical knowledge. For example, Ann, a student in my honors class of Freshman composition, reveals her technical know-how of how to construct an essay:

I had the format down...as if it was a mathematical equation: I'd insert the data and out came the results. When I plugged my information into the form (introduction concluding in a thesis sentence, body paragraphs--each with a topic sentence, examples and explanation--a clincher, and a conclusion) a great essay was produced (Qualley 1993, 104).

Technical knowledge is also the kind of knowledge that Mark is most comfortable with. As we saw in Chapter III, Mark submitted a computer program as an example of
the kind of thinker he was: "...you input data into the computer and the computer will
give you the answer..." Technical knowledge entails knowing how to apply a rule, a
code or a formula to a problem. When a task is unfamiliar or complex, it may also
require some variation of procedure (reflection-in-action as well as reflection-on-action
as Donald Schon’s work on skilled practitioners suggests). Obviously the more
knowledge and experience one acquires, the more one’s technical expertise should
develop. And so much schooling is organized around the idea that simply providing
students with knowledge and an opportunity to practice using it will be enough. I
don’t think it is. Not today. Not for the kind of boundary-shifting world of others in
which we find ourselves living.

When Mindy simply tries to apply a (ready-made) standard to Lucille, she is
not only prevented from understanding "the other," her own code of ethics remains
tacit and immune to examination or critique. She knows how to solve the problem of
Lucille: People like Lucille should not work at the nursing home. People like Lucille
should leave. We need to find ways to keep people like Lucille from ever obtaining
the job in the first place. The problem is not with Mindy’s technical expertise as a
writer or reader. She knows how to solve the problem of writing a paper. In writing
her early drafts, Mindy applies the "means" to writing an acceptable paper that have
always worked for her in the past and that will probably still work for her in many of
her other courses. However, I have asked her to use reading and writing not to solve
the problem of Lucille, but to find the problem, to explore it, examine it, complicate
it. Herein lies some of the difference, I believe, between my inquiry into reflexivity
and the work on reflection that cognitive researchers like Linda Flower and others are doing.

As a point of comparison, I will use the Making Thinking Visible Project directed by Linda Flower (and conducted through The Center of Study of Writing at Berkeley and Carnegie Mellon). Two of the goals of this project are:

- To help students develop a repertoire of strategies for planning and writing.
- To help students to become more reflective about their own writing process and more aware of themselves as thinkers (Norris and Flower 1994, 27-28).

However, given a description of the project and given the history of Linda Flower's work on writing as a problem solving activity, I think the second goal has to be understood in terms of how it contributes to the first. How can reflection help students write better papers? The method the project team devised to realize these goals is a procedure they refer to as "collaborative planning." During collaborative planning, writers talk about their ideas for their papers with a peer "supporter." The writer brings a tentative plan to the session, and the supporter with the aide of series of prompts (called the "Planner's Blackboard") helps to "focus the collaborators on rhetorical issues" such as audience, purpose and main idea (Wallace 1994, 50). Thus, the emphasis is not so much on the writer's understanding of her topic, as much as it is on the development of her technical expertise in communicating it. As David Wallace, one of the members of the project explains,

One of the primary objectives of collaborative planning is to get students to recognize the rhetorical situation and develop plans that transform topic knowledge according to rhetorical concerns...Ultimately the success of collaborative planning depends...on the students' ability
to apply what they learn about themselves as planners and writers in other situations (53-54).

In their technical report, "Collaboration and the Construction of Meaning" (1991), Flower and Higgins include an example of a productive planning session between two students that "shows writers constructing an image of both the text and the task, and it fits a reasonable expectation that quality and constructive, rhetorical thinking should go hand in hand" (36). When I read the transcript of this session (although I do note some genuine exchanges about the writer’s topic), for the most part I see one student prompting another with questions and comments like these: "What’s your discourse problem [the topic for the assignment]?” "So that’s going to be your main focus and key point, right?” "Well, so what are some of the main points you’re going to bring out?” "So what kind of examples are you going to use?” "How about a concluding paragraph?” I’m not suggesting that these questions are not useful, merely that they reveal a different perspective of writing than the one I offer in this study. I am concerned with writing as form of inquiry. In this collaborative planning session, the writer already seems to have the information on hand (or in head), and all the supporter need do is to help him retrieve, flesh out and organize his knowledge.

Flower and Higgins also provide an example of non-productive, low quality session in which the writer does not respond to the supporter’s prompts.

[Janine’s] rambling knowledge-driven process repeatedly overrides the supporter’s tentative prompts for constructing or transforming moves...But Janine is still in the process of exploring her own knowledge and responds by plunging back into incidents and examples she wants to draw on, responding by either topic information or a loose
and baggy key point... (37).

Indeed. As a writer whose processes mirror Janine’s, I can understand her reluctance to prematurely focus on a key point. I would find this session unsatisfactory as well—not because of my rambling processes—but because of the supporter’s attempt to push me into closure too quickly. My idea of a planning session would consist of a peer "other" who could help me discover what I want to say and who could help me find the sense or the pattern between the ideas tumbling around, but as yet unconnected, in my mind.

Despite its attention to reflection, the Making Thinking Visible Project is grounded upon an understanding of composition that I believe derives from the common view of rhetoric—to discover the best available means of persuasion. The purpose of collaborative planning is for writers and supporters to find and "make visible" the best available means to achieve and communicate the writer’s predetermined end or purpose. My purpose, on the other hand, is for readers and writers to approach texts and situations, openly and tentatively, and to identify, construct, examine and possibly challenge their own values, beliefs and theories.

In Fragments of Rationality, Lester Faigley notes that "in a traditional view of the relationship between rhetoric and ethics, ethical values preexist rhetoric. Rhetoric in the traditional view becomes the means to persuade people to be ethical" (1992, 237). However, as Faigley observes, "in a postmodern theory of rhetoric, there is no legitimate preexisting discourse of values for rhetoric to convey" (237), which means we are compelled to reconceive or at least adjust our theory of rhetoric. Drawing from
Jean-Francois Lyotard's work, Faigley describes an alternative view that "relocates ethics in the material practices of reading and writing" (237).

For Lyotard, the phrase is "the basic unit of discourse." The rules for linking various phrases together (I assume for the purpose of making sense) are determined by genre. And for any set of phrases, "many genres of linkage are possible..." (236). The choice of genre entails "an ethical decision." But how do we choose which genre to use when there is no single, external, objective "discourse we can use to validate this choice[?]" (237). Faigley suggests we must make a responsible decision by examining "the implications" of our linkages. To be able to identify and respect difference "requires a momentary delay of those linkages and a questioning of their ethical implications" (239).

Bringing ethics into rhetoric is not a matter of collapsing spectacular diversity into universal truth. Neither is ethics only a matter of a radical questioning of what aspires to be regarded as truth. Lyotard insists that ethics is also the obligation of rhetoric. It is accepting the responsibility for judgment. It is pausing to reflect on the limits of understanding. It is respect for diversity and unassimilated otherness. It is finding spaces to listen (239).

Faigley's reading of Lyotard begins to suggest why the practical knowledge base of composition studies cannot simply be technical expertise. Certainly, as Rosemary Gates (1993) reminds us, composition studies with it's emphasis on composing always entails a process of "putting together." The purpose of most composition texts (like the methods in the Making Thinking Visible Project) has been to teach students how to link ideas effectively (and "correctly"). Even such thoughtful texts as Ann Berthoff's, *Forming, Thinking, Writing: The Composing Imagination*
(1982) (one of the better composition texts in my opinion because it attempts to provide a philosophical rationale for what it says), still only conceives of composition studies as "a matter of seeing and naming relationships, of putting the relationships together, ordering them" (71).

Now however, as Faigley and others have begun to suggest, simply making connections and forging "new rational relations" between ideas is not enough. There are ethical implications in our linkages that we need to attempt to account for. The ways we select to make sense of the words, ideas and situations we encounter matter. Rob links Paulo Freire’s problem posing theory with the philosophy of his fraternity, while Kay links one of Freire’s key ideas to her perception of the homeless. I link Australian work habits to bad business practice and laziness. Emily links Avery’s anger to rudeness. What are the implications of these linkages? As I have emphasized throughout this inquiry, making connections is an important first step in opening a conversation with an other, but it cannot be the last. Our linkages must remain tentative, open to further inquiry. When there is no external, validating discourse that we can agree upon to measure the truth of our linkages (and I would argue even when we think such a discourse exists), then we need to pause (again and again) to examine our connections. Reflexivity enables us to look at the implications of our linkages and to take responsibility for our judgments.

We are now beginning to realize composition’s dual responsibility to help students compose their own understandings as well as to assist them in examining the implications of these compositions. Thanks to efforts from such pioneers as Murray,
Elbow, Macrorie, Emig, Berthoff and many teachers and researchers, our discipline has a great deal of experience in realizing the first responsibility. And currently, we are experimenting with a number of strategies on a number of different levels that will focus attention on the second responsibility. For example, portfolios (when used as a critical tool) encourage individuals to identify and scrutinize the implications of their efforts to make sense. Cultural studies (like earlier media studies’ programs) ask students to examine the (popular) culture’s customary ways of linking ideas and composing itself. As I have tried to suggest, if composition teachers provide opportunities for students to dialectically engage with other perspectives and points of view through reading and writing, they can help students de-familiarize and "make strange" their customary and cultural linkages. Momentarily caught "betwixt and between" without an external reference point, students are then positioned to be able to scrutinize these connections, and hopefully extend, deepen, modify or challenge them.

According to Faigley and Lyotard, the choice of genre matters. In this inquiry I have tried to show, on both cognitive and ethical grounds, why I find essayism a desirable method and the essay a useful genre for enacting composition’s dual purpose. An essayistic stance and approach enables readers and writers to make tentative connections and then to examine the implications of those connections. By my definition, the links established through essayism and by the essay are always provisional and open to further inquiry. The essay is an attempt to link ideas in ways that will make sense--for the moment.

In her recent essay, "Researching Teacher-Research: A Practitioner’s
Retrospective," Cathy Fleischer traces the evolution of her understanding of teacher-research through her practice and her engagements with different theories. She concludes with a paragraph that could have been written for this study. Fleischer describes the tentative, ongoing nature of her inquiry, as well as the vehicle that will best serve her needs— the essay:

Just as my concept of teacher-research has evolved since my first efforts to conduct it some fourteen years ago, my current conception of it is evolving also. As my own conception evolves, so will my practices develop and change. I expect that this course of my future work is unlikely to be any neater or more linear than my work in the past has been. I also expect that when I write up the research I conduct—alone or with others—the literature I compose about it is more likely to be exploratory, as this essay has been, rather than summative. My writing is likely to take shape informally in essays—in attempts—and it is likely to reveal disjunctures in my thinking and my practice, as this essay has done. It is likely to reveal my uncertainties as well as my students (120).

I have also tried to show how my understanding of writing and reading as methods for making sense has evolved and continues to develop. I have suggested that we conceive of writing and reading as not simply a method of inquiry, but specifically, as a method for reflexive inquiry, a method that will allow us to momentarily pause and examine the meanings we have tentatively constructed.
NOTES FOR CHAPTER VI

1. Cynthia Onore (1989) argues that if we are going to think of writing as a form of inquiry, we can not measure improvement by the written text alone. I have suggested throughout this inquiry that writing and reading can lead to gains in learning, the generation of new meanings and the development of a deeper, more complicated understanding. However, a more sophisticated exploration of subject matter may lead to a temporary loss of rhetorical control. At any rate, my focus is on the writer's exploration of subject matter, not textual expertise.

2. It would be interesting to explore this notion of the "other within" more thoroughly from a range of perspectives. I am thinking of James Britton's concept of the spectator, for example, or George Herbert Meade's idea of the internalized other, Freud's triumvirate of ego, superego and id, or even through such beliefs as spiritual possession.


4. I might even use a similar strategy, but not for planning. I would use these kinds of questions as a way to help the writer evaluate his or her completed draft.
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