Finding a voice: Poetry and performance with first graders

Lisa Lenz Bianchi

University of New Hampshire, Durham

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation

Recommended Citation

https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/2061

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact nicole.hentz@unh.edu.
Finding a voice: Poetry and performance with first graders

Abstract
This is a qualitative research study of a ten week immersion unit in the reading, writing, and performance of poetry conducted in a first grade classroom in Closter, New Jersey during the winter of 1995. The three girls selected as case studies show the ways in which remarkably different children expand their repertoires of ways with words as speakers, readers, and writers. Danielle, a performative speaker, learns to make her tacit knowledge about performance part of her explicit frames of reference. This shift enables her to serve as a coach for peers who are less adept at crafting performative texts. It also helps to make the art of crafting performative oral texts, as well as written texts, a central part of the language arts curriculum. Sara, the second case study, is a quiet, nurturing child whose ways without words remind readers that communication is not limited to the spoken word. Immersed in a workshop in which the art of creating performative texts is unmasked, she acquires a more confident, playful sense of who she might be as a speaker. Christina, the third case study, was selected because she so closely fit the images of the child-as-writer found in writing process texts of the 1980's. In spite of her reluctance to immerse herself in performance workshop, Christina discovers that the language with which she plays during rehearsals has a profound influence on her writing process. The work of all three children is seen through lenses provided by Mikhail Bakhtin, John Dewey, Louise Rosenblatt, Erving Goffman, and Anne Haas Dyson.

The case studies are prefaced by a chapter on the history of oral reading in the 19th century and its subsequent demise during the efficiency movement of the 1920's and the emphasis on silent reading methods in the elementary classroom. The case studies are also accompanied by a chapter in which both the author and the cooperating teacher explore the roots of their own subjectivities and the forces which have drawn them to this area of research by exploring the patterns embedded in the literacy stories of their own lives as students and teachers.

Keywords
Education, Curriculum and Instruction, Education, Elementary, Education, Reading

This dissertation is available at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository: https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/2061
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6” x 9” black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
NOTE TO USERS

The original manuscript received by UMI contains pages with slanted print. Pages were microfilmed as received.

This reproduction is the best copy available

UMI
FINDING A VOICE:
POETRY AND PERFORMANCE WITH FIRST GRADERS

BY

LISA LENZ BIANCHI
B.A. Barnard College, 1981
M.A. Teachers College, 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

May, 1999
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
1999
Lisa L. Bianchi
This dissertation has been examined and approved.

Thoma Newkirk
Dissertation Director, Dr. Thomas Newkirk
Professor of English

Dr. Robert Connors
Professor of English

Dr. Cinthia Gannett
Associate Professor of English

Dr. Jane Hansen
Professor of Education

Susan Stires

April 12, 1999
DEDICATION

For

Christopher
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My dissertation could not have been written without the community of family, friends, and mentors who have generously offered their support and insight throughout this process. I would first like to thank my husband, Chip, who was there when I began my graduate studies and who has since been an unwavering source of encouragement. His ability to encounter a first draft and recognize the threads worth pursuing is unequaled. It is to our oldest son Christopher, and to his struggle to find a voice, that this book is dedicated. Without the understanding of both of our extended families and their generous offers of childcare, I would still be squeezing writing time from the wee hours of the morning.

When I left New Hampshire to begin my research - and family life - in New Jersey, I could not have foreseen the dedication with which the members of my dissertation committee would pursue on-going dialogues with me. Tom Newkirk, Robert Connors, Jane Hansen, Cinthia Gannett, and Susan Stires are true mentors. Their ability to share their expertise, respond to drafts, challenge my thinking, and respect my voice have enriched my life and work beyond measure. The learning communities they continue to build at the University of New Hampshire are testaments to the art of teaching. Long before he became my dissertation advisor, Thomas Newkirk listened to my emergent interest in the crossroads between literacy and orality. At a time when few of the people I sought out thought that these issues warranted their attention, his
challenge to pursue this avenue of inquiry meant the world to me.

Before I moved to New Hampshire, I was fortunate to have colleagues who shared an interest in teacher-research. I would like to thank Barbara Cullere, not only for her constant friendship and offer of a classroom in which to pursue research, but also for the energy of her mutual interest in drawing attention to performative ways with words in elementary schools. JoAnn Portalupi entered my classroom as a staff developer and asked me to explore the literacy stories from my own childhood that continued to play uncannily decisive roles in both my daily teaching and in my choice of research topics. Shirley Paris, like Thomas Newkirk, found something of substance in my earliest rambling attempts to describe what my students were helping me to recognize. She and the circles of teachers who formed the Central New Jersey T.A.W.L. group, the Caldwell-West Caldwell Teachers Network and the Bergen County Teachers Network continue to be an inspiration.

Finally, I would like to thank the children in the Caldwell-West Caldwell, Closter, and Tenafly, New Jersey Public Schools who have been my teachers. Without their inventive ways with words, and the support of their families, not one word of this text could have been written.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION...................................................................................................iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS...................................................................................v
ABSTRACT....................................................................................................viii

## CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION: THE PAST IS PROLOGUE............................................................1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. FINDING A VOICE.........................................................................................40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. COLLEGIALSE ROOTS FOR RESEARCH..........................................................63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. RESEARCH METHODS.................................................................................75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. FRAMEWORKS OF THE POETRY PROJECT......................................................90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. DANIELLE’S SONG: THE PERFORMER............................................................137</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. SARA’S SONG: FINDING A VOICE...............................................................172</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CHRISTINA’S SONG: THE WRITER..............................................................225</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. ANSWERING THE CHILDREN......................................................................264</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY...............................................................................................271</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A...................................................................................................288</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B...................................................................................................301</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C...................................................................................................302</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ABSTRACT

FINDING A VOICE:

POETRY AND PERFORMANCE WITH FIRST GRADERS

by

Lisa L. Bianchi

University of New Hampshire, May, 1999

This is a qualitative research study of a ten week immersion unit in the reading, writing, and performance of poetry conducted in a first grade classroom in Closter, New Jersey during the winter of 1995. The three girls selected as case studies show the ways in which remarkably different children expand their repertoires of ways with words as speakers, readers, and writers. Danielle, a performative speaker, learns to make her tacit knowledge about performance part of her explicit frames of reference. This shift enables her to serve as a coach for peers who are less adept at crafting performative texts. It also helps to make the art of crafting performative oral texts, as well as written texts, a central part of the language arts curriculum. Sara, the second case study, is a quiet, nurturing child whose ways without words remind readers that communication is not limited to the spoken word. Immersed in a workshop in which the art of creating performative texts is unmasked, she acquires a more confident, playful sense of who she might be as a speaker. Christina, the third case study, was selected because she so closely fit the
images of the child-as-writer found in writing process texts of the 1980's. In spite of her reluctance to immerse herself in performance workshop, Christina discovers that the language with which she plays during rehearsals has a profound influence on her writing process. The work of all three children is seen through lenses provided by Mikhail Bakhtin, John Dewey, Louise Rosenblatt, Erving Goffman, and Anne Haas Dyson.

The case studies are prefaced by a chapter on the history of oral reading in the 19th century and its subsequent demise during the efficiency movement of the 1920's and the emphasis on silent reading methods in the elementary classroom. The case studies are also accompanied by a chapter in which both the author and the cooperating teacher explore the roots of their own subjectivities and the forces which have drawn them to this area of research by exploring the patterns embedded in the literacy stories of their own lives as students and teachers.
INTRODUCTION

THE PAST IS PROLOGUE

Engraved over the entrance of the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C. is the phrase “The Past Is Prologue.” I first saw it in 1991 when I began the thread gathering task of piecing together my family’s history. The phrase came to mind again two years later when I began to pursue my doctorate. One Saturday morning in November, 1993, I volunteered to serve as a judge for a regional speech and debate event sponsored by the National Forensics League. The last event took place in a classroom located in a dark corner of the high school’s basement. Stenciled on the old oak door, just barely legible, were the words “Oral English.”

When the stenciling on the door was fresh, the room was used for required courses in Oral English or Declamation. Six decades later, elective courses in Public Speaking were offered there. Today, the room is subdivided into two classrooms and both the stage and the stenciled door have been removed. One side is now used for English courses. Although talk sometimes permeates that room, the emphasis is overwhelmingly on listening, note-taking, writing, and tests. The process of coming to know rarely, if ever, includes jumping into texts as performers. The quality of one’s talk for either performative or informative purposes is no longer a central player in that classroom. Only in very recent years, far behind the pace set by Great Britain, has talk
begun to insist its way back into the wider world of language arts in the United States. The select group of adolescents I heard that Saturday were members of their schools' Speech and Debate teams, not representatives of their respective English Departments. As I listened to their performances, the relative emptiness of the old classroom generated a voice that awaited an audience of its own.

Performative talk was once part of the mainstream of classroom life in the United States. Students used voice and gesture to embody the texts they read and involved themselves in formal debates. They and the spirit of the words that moved them held center stage. Quiet and performative souls alike were immersed in official worlds which held the crafts of speaking and reading aloud in esteem. Everyone took Oral English. The assumption that speakers are born, not made, would have been considered as unthinkable as the notion that certain children are born readers or writers while others never will be. The "poem" or transaction one wove during the reading process might remain private, but good readers were also expected to be speakers who had the ability to choose either artistic or discursive voices to broaden their experience.

Both informative and performative uses of talk now stand at the edge of our classroom doors, waiting for our attention. My research involves staking a claim for the inclusion of performative talk as a central member of the language arts in a first grade classroom. But if the past is prologue, we must listen not only to the silences and musical voices of the children who are now in our classrooms. We must also inquire into the past, attempt to understand the links orally and literacy once shared, and the events which, in the name of reform, led to the virtual exclusion of voice and gesture as ways of
coming to know in the mainstream language arts classroom.

Reading instruction in the 19th century: a portrait of declamation

My first image of the role declamation played in the teaching of reading came from its well-deserved caricature in Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer* (1886). Twain, who was acclaimed as both a writer and a speaker, captured a portrait of classroom life in which end of the year oral performances included ample doses of both recitation and humiliation.

Tom Sawyer stepped forward with conceited confidence and soared into the unquenchable and indestructible “Give me liberty or give me death” speech with fine fury and frantic gesticulation, and broke down in the middle of it. A ghastly stage fright seized him, his legs quaked under him and he was like to choke. True, he had the manifest sympathy of the house - but he had the house’s silence, too, which was even worse than its sympathy. The master frowned, and this completed the disaster. Tom struggled awhile and then retired, utterly defeated. There was a weak attempt at applause, but it died early. (Twain, 179)

If the end results of one’s schoolroom journey into literacy and orality during the 19th century sometimes ended in humiliation, the beginning of one’s journey seems to have been an equally joyless process. Textbooks shared the assumption that before a child could encounter meaningful reading material, he or she first had to master the sounds of individual letters of the alphabet and intensive spelling exercises. When children mastered the spelling of a sufficient number of words, they were introduced to textbooks which required them to memorize and recite literary excerpts that were beyond their ability to comprehend. Children were expected to perform these pieces with studied uses of gesture and vocal control. Readers, which were sometimes called speakers, eventually began to devote numerous pages to the task of drilling children on
how to stand when speaking and offered exercises designed to perfect their enunciation. A child’s comprehension of the material she read and performed received little attention.

The notion that children should master individual letters of the alphabet and spelling drills before they read real texts predates the nineteenth century. It may have first been challenged by John Amos Comenius, a Moravian bishop, educator, and advocate of universal education who lived in the early 17th century. He insisted that children should first learn to read in their native language rather than in Latin. He also critiqued the practice of making them memorize and recite endless lists of words. Instead, he felt that all children should be immersed in meaningful texts from the very start. Teachers could create children’s first reading lessons by writing down what they said.

Over a century later, the German educator Frederick Gedike proposed a similar approach. He insisted that children would learn to read quickly and with enthusiasm if, from their earliest days in school, they were allowed to read whole words in meaningful texts. At the time, most school children were required to learn the letters of the alphabet and how to spell a host of words before they read a complete thought.

It is neither necessary nor useful to begin learning to read with a knowledge of the individual letters, but it is not only far more pleasant but also far more useful for the child if it learns to read entire words at once, because in this way it will be occupied immediately with whole ideas, but on the contrary, the ABC’s and spelling supply the child with only fragments of ideas. (Balmuth, 17)

The earliest textbooks in this country, both those written by English and American authors, show little of Gedike’s influence. During the late 18th and early 19th
centuries, the first reader a child was likely to encounter was actually a speller. Noah Webster's well known textbook, *An American Selection Of Lessons In Reading And Speaking* was the third reader in a series. The first book was comprised of spelling lessons. The second was a grammar text. When a child reached the third book, he finally encountered lessons that centered around meaningful text.

More popular than Webster's texts was a series written by Lindley Murray. *The English Reader*, published in 1799, was designed by its American author for students who had almost certainly begun their literacy lessons at least a year earlier with a speller. Like many textbooks of the time, its aims were stated in its lengthy subtitle: "Pieces in Prose and Poetry, selected from the best writers, designed to assist young persons to read with Propriety and Effect, to improve their language and sentiments; and to inculcate some of the most important Principles of Piety and Virtue." The word English was included in the title simply to distinguish it from popular Latin and Greek readers. Like all textbook authors, Murray assumed that reading meant reading aloud. He later wrote two additional textbooks which, together with *The English Reader*, comprised a three-part series in which assignments were based on progressive levels of difficulty and length. None of the books contained questions designed to test comprehension. All assumed that teachers already knew how to help children learn to read aloud fluently.

Murray selected literary excerpts primarily for their instructive moral value, and secondarily as material for teaching children to read. In the forward to a similar reader, *The American Preceptor*, published in 1794, the author Caleb Bingham lists a commonly held set of criteria for the selection of reading material.

5
Convinced of the impropriety of instilling false notions into the minds of the children, he [Bingham] has not given place to romantic fiction. Although moral essays have not been neglected, yet pleasing and interesting stories, exemplifying moral virtues, were judged best calculated to engage the attention and improve the heart. Tales of love have not gained admission...neither a word...that would “raise a blush on the cheek of modesty.” (Bingham, 2)

One wonders how engaged children actually were with such pleasing stories as “On the Duty of School Boys” and “Filial Duty and Affection,” when Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* was so popular among their parents’ and grandparents’ generations. How much a child understood of the pieces he or she was required to memorize and recite went largely unquestioned. The ability to memorize and declaim came first. Comprehension might wait upon years of life experience. Though written for those on the brink of adulthood, this excerpt from *Miscellanies, Moral And Instructive In Prose And Verse, Collected From Various Authors For The Use Of Schools And Improvement Of Young Persons Of Both Sexes*, published in 1787, was included in a speaker for children who had only recently graduated from the use of spellers.

**Resignation**

Thou Pow’r Supreme, by whose command I live,
The grateful tribute of my praise receive;
To thy indulgence, I my being owe,
And all the joys which from that being flow,
Scarce eighteen suns have form’d the rolling year,
And run their destin’d courses round the sphere,
Since thou my undistinguish’d form survey’d
Among the lifeless heaps of matter laid;
Thy skill my elemental clay refin’d.... (James, 6-8)

Public speaking and oratory, rather than the silent reading of literature, held center stage in classrooms from grade school through college from the late 1700’s
through the 19th century partly because educators throughout the Western world drew their models of instruction from classical Greek and Roman times. The Roman educator Quintilian insisted that a child’s success in adult life depended largely on his ability to speak well in public. But oratorical skills were also essential in the 18th and 19th century worlds just outside the schoolhouse door. Our political structure required the election of individuals to public office. In an era when many could not read and access to printed matter was limited, candidates relied on public speaking to make their names and ideas known. Candidates still refer to their positions as platforms, a term that functions both as a metaphor and reflects a time when rallies were the only reliable way of commanding the public’s attention.

Protestant communities, including mainline denominations which did not hold audience response-dependent revival meetings, depended on the lay leadership of informed congregants, as did Jewish communities. Adults held responsibility for reading scriptures, attending weekly services, and educating the young. If a child could not read and use his voice effectively, he would enter adulthood unprepared for participation in both political and religious community life. Literacy and orality were thus perhaps even more intertwined than they were in the classical world Quintilian knew.

In the early part of the century, it was not deemed necessary to school all children as readers and speakers. Prior to the 1830's, most textbooks were directed at boys. In 1787 Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, was asked to deliver an address on the education of women at the Young Ladies Academy in Philadelphia. Taking a small step beyond his contemporaries, Rush portrayed women's voices as
powerful within religious and domestic circles.

Vocal music [singing and speaking] should never be neglected in the education of a young lady in this country. Besides preparing her to join in that part of public worship which consists of psalmody, it will enable her to soothe the cares of domestic life. The distress and vexations of a husband, the noise of a nursery, and even the sorrows that will sometimes intrude into her own bosom, may all be relieved by a song, where sound and sentiment unite to act upon the mind. (Rush, 66-76)

Perhaps the most widely used reader in the early part of the 19th century was *The Rhetorical Reader* by Ebenezer Porter. First published in 1831, it reflects educators' growing hunger for a text that would articulate effective methods for teaching oral reading. Written as much for the instruction of the novice teacher as for any student, its first seventy pages define and discuss reading, articulation, inflection, accent, emphasis, modulation, and gesture. The following sixty pages are devoted to technical exercises for these skills. The second half of the book consists of literary selections intended for oral performance.

Porter's book signaled a new trend among textbook writers in the United States. Special elocution texts for older students and adults began to concentrate on the technical side of speech delivery. Until the early years of the 20th century, elocutionists, both those who taught reading in public schools and those who formed private evening schools for adults, would emphasize the notion that clear expressions of thought could only be obtained when speakers used gesture and facial expression as artistically as they did their voices. Classroom teachers began to fan a widely held esthetic about reading. Effective readers were those who could use the emotional impact of the written word to move listeners. Their task involved the responsibility of creating doorways that invited others
to enter into important literary, intellectual, and emotional experiences. Hearing the
written word read aloud was an essential part of coming to know. The following excerpt,
taken from an address given at the Sorbonne, reflects how widespread convictions about
reading aloud were.

Neither writing nor printing either fixes or transmits the spoken word in
its full integrity. Such a word is not merely an image of the thought, but
an assemblage of tones and sounds. These tone and sounds contribute so
much to give character to a language, they serve so well to charm, to
persuade, to instruct, that the effect of the most pathetic scene, the most
eloquent discourse, the clearest lesson, is diminished, and sometimes lost,
if one has not heard the words. (Serviss, 39-40)

Publishers began to include specific elocution drills in most readers designed for
young children. In the best instances, students found themselves in classrooms where
they were steeped in the sound of the written word. Unfortunately, children were just as
likely to find themselves immersed in a daily grind of word calling in texts beyond their
ability to comprehend. William Scott, the author of Lessons In Elocution, went to
elaborate lengths to prescribe specific uses of gesture and facial expression that bring to
mind Tom Sawyer’s fine fury and frantic gesticulation. Like Quintilion, he dwells on the
absolute importance of one’s preparation as a speaker, but neglects to comment on a
child’s understanding of what he reads and declaims.

A boy will never be embarrassed for want of knowing what to do with his
legs and arms; nor will he bestow that attention on his action which ought
to be directed to his pronunciation; he will always be in a position which
will not disgrace his figure, and when gesture is easy to him, it may serve
as a ground work to something more perfect. (Scott, 26)

In the name of specificity, Scott goes on to recommend exercises in expression
that illustrate the extent to which good intentions went awry. The exaggerated use of
gesture he suggests probably served as ground work for literary performances which, like Tom’s, were something less than perfect.

Rage expresses itself with rapidity, interruption, noise, harshness and trepidation. The neck stretched out; the head forward, often nodding and shaking in a menacing manner, against the object of the passion. The eyes staring, rolling and sparkling; the eyebrows drawn down over them; and the forehead wrinkled into clouds. The nostrils stretched wide; every vein swelled; every muscle strained; the breast heaving and the breath fetched hard. The mouth open, and drawn on each side toward the ears, showing the teeth, in a gnashing posture. (Scott, 41)

The alphabetic method used to launch the youngest children into literacy slowly began to lose credibility among educators. In 1838, Horace Mann, who was then secretary of the recently formed Board of Education for the state of Massachusetts, was among the first to recognize the damage done by strict adherence to this method and the use of texts beyond the comprehension of young readers. In his annual report to the Board of Education, he delivered a stinging indictment of reading instruction in the state.

I have devoted especial pains to learn with some degree of numerical accuracy how far the reading in our schools is an exercise of the mind in thinking and feeling and how far it is a barren action of the organs of speech upon the atmosphere... The result is, that more than eleven-twelfths of all the children in the reading classes in our schools do not understand the meaning of the words they read; that they do not master the sense of the reading lesson, and that the ideas and feelings intended by the author to be conveyed to, and excited in, the reader’s mind, still rest in the author’s intention... It would hardly seem that the combined efforts of all persons engaged could have accomplished more in defeating the true objects of reading. (Mann, 1838)

While reform got off to an early start in Massachusetts, it moved at a far slower pace in other states. However, innovations in the teaching of reading did not always stem from the Northeast. One important influence came from the western frontier, which was
then just beyond the edge of the Ohio valley. Parents in isolated communities were eager
to purchase schoolbooks that would give children a choice or “eclectic” glimpse into the
literature of the world they had left behind. The values reflected in these literary
excerpts would, they hoped, become part of the new lives and communities they
established. A vast untapped market awaited a series of readers which would use
meaningful text to help even the youngest students learn to read.

Truman and Smith, one of the publishing houses that flourished in the Ohio
valley in the mid-1830’s, recognized the potential of this market and began to search for
an author who could help them create a new series of readers. They first approached the
educator Catherine Beecher, sister of the author Harriet Beecher Stowe and the
abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher. However, Beecher was then immersed in her efforts to
establish the Western Female Institute in Cincinnati. Winthrop B. Smith then
approached William McGuffey, a struggling college administrator who was already at
work on a series of readers.

McGuffey signed a contract with Truman and Smith on April 28, 1836 for a
graded series of four readers. He had nearly completed the first two books in the series
before he signed the contract. The third and fourth readers were completed only eighteen
months later. In 1844 McGuffey’s brother Alexander wrote the fifth reader and, three
years later, the sixth and final book in the series. In 1855 William also published The
Young Ladies’ Reader. The arts of public speaking and reading aloud play roles that
escalate in importance throughout McGuffey’s School Readers, or McGuffey’s Eclectic
Readers, as they were later known.
The selections McGuffey included in books for emergent readers would now be considered above the reading levels of young children. However, McGuffey broke a number of conventions and helped to establish new standards in the teaching of reading. He was the first author of a widely published series of readers to use only simple, meaningful stories accompanied by related pictures in a child’s first reading lessons. He also made a conscious effort to include stories whose content would be of interest to children. Like the authors of the Sanders’ School Readers then popular in the East, he believed that the reading material in a textbook should teach a child about moral and ethical values. However, he insisted that these lessons be taught through stories about children or animals instead of didactic essays. Although he did not completely abandon the alphabetic method, he broke from traditional approaches to stress Gedike’s notion that young readers should be taught to recognize a range of word families. The ability to recognize and use larger chunks of text would, he thought, enable children to encounter text in ways that a knowledge of isolated letter sounds could not.

A child’s ability to read aloud gradually assumed an increasing level of importance as he or she progressed through the first four readers. Alexander McGuffey’s Rhetorical Guide or Fifth Reader was completely devoted to coaching older students in rhetorical skills. The first 59 pages of the first edition of his book were devoted to lessons on articulation, emphasis, and elocution. The remainder of the book consisted of pieces for declamation. Alexander, like his brother William, believed that students grasped their most important lessons from stories. The first story included in the 1879 edition of his book stresses the then-current definition of a good reader as one who uses...
natural forms of oral expression to convey the written word effectively to listeners. The emphasis on a reader’s ability, and social responsibility, to use her voice to extend the reading experience to a larger community is a stark contrast to 20th century images of the isolated, efficient silent reader whose accomplishments could be measured in percentile points.

In “The Good Reader,” a child named Ernestine is called upon to read a petition to the king whose eyesight has been temporarily weakened. The king calls on her only after two of his pages fail at their attempts to read aloud. Each boy is an image of the excesses we now associate with elocution. One reads in a rapid, monotonous tone of voice. His lack of intonation suggests a habit of word calling devoid of comprehension, like that of the school children Horace Mann heard in the 1830’s. The second reads aloud in a slow, exaggerated manner which distracts listeners from the text. When Ernestine reads the widow’s petition aloud in a simple, unaffected way, the king is overwhelmed by the message and takes immediate action to help the woman and her son. McGuffey chose to highlight an oral reading style that bears little resemblance to the overblown images we now associate with the era.

The writer told her story in a simple, concise manner, that carried to the heart a belief of its truth; and Ernestine read it with so much feeling, and with an articulation so just, in tones so pure and distinct, that when she had finished, the King, into whose eyes the tears had started, exclaimed, “Oh! now I understand what it is all about; but I might never have known, certainly I never should have felt, its meaning had I trusted to those young gentlemen, whom I now dismiss from my service for one year, advising them to occupy the time in learning to read. (Alexander McGuffey, 41-2)

Ernestine, who receives a private education at the expense of the king for her
efforts, is considered a good reader not simply because she understands the text, but because she also makes the written word available for others. At home, she reads aloud regularly to her father and their neighbors. In an era when printed matter was in short supply, good readers were those who could go beyond the private transaction between self and print to offer information, enlightenment, and entertainment to others.

How much happiness was Ernestine the means of bestowing through her good elocution, united to the happy circumstance that brought it to the knowledge of the King! First, there were her poor neighbors, to whom she could give instruction and entertainment. Then, there was the poor widow who sent the petition, and who not only regained her son, but received through Ernestine an order for him to paint the King’s likeness; so that the poor boy soon rose to great distinction..... As for the two pages, she was indirectly the means of doing them good, also; for, ashamed of their bad reading, they commenced studying in earnest, till they overcame the faults that had offended the King. Both finally rose to distinction, one as a lawyer, and the other as a statesman; and they owed their advancement in life chiefly to their good elocation. (Alexander McGuffey, 42)

Adults could polish their speaking skills at one of many small, private elocution schools that were established in cities along the east coast. Francois Delsarte, who devised what he called a complete science of elocution, founded one of the most popular schools of elocution in the world. The Delsarte system was introduced to the United States in the 1860’s by Steele MacKaye. Several textbooks intended for older students and adults were published here using Delsarte’s name, but at least one of them, An Hour With Delsarte: A Study In Expression was actually written by Ann Morgan. Other elocutionists, such as George Ware, whose work was published in the earliest editions of McGuffey’s Rhetorical Reader, echo Delsarte’s call for a well articulated approach to performative ways with the spoken word.
For any other art they would serve an apprenticeship, and would be ashamed to practice it in public, before they have learned it. If any one would sing, he attends a master, and is drilled in the very elementary principles; and, only after the most laborious process, dares to exercise his voice in public..... But the extempore speaker, who is to invent as well as to utter, to carry on an operation of the mind as well as to produce sound, enters upon the work without preparatory discipline, and then wonder that he fails..... He will fancy that the grandest, the most various, the most expressive of all instruments, which the infinite Creator has fashioned by the union of an intellectual soul with the powers of speech, may be played upon without study or practice. (Alexander McGuffey, 66-7)

Ware’s insistence on a workshop approach to the craft of performative talk is similar to the call Donald Graves issued in 1983 for a workshop approach to the writing process. Children want to write - and they want to speak. Knowing how to use words to give shape to and discover one’s meaning is a craft which has many faces. Any of these ways with words emerges from classroom workshops which offer children a chance to immerse themselves in a particular craft accompanied by insightful teacher-practitioners.

We don’t find many teachers of oil painting, piano, ceramics, or drama who are not practitioners in their fields. Their students see them in action in the studio. They can’t teach without showing what they mean. There is a process to follow. There is a process to learn. That’s the way it is with a craft, whether it be teaching or writing. (Graves, 6)

By the turn of the century, a new generation of elocutionists denounced the excesses they encountered in classrooms. Alexander Melville Bell, the father of Alexander Graham Bell, was asked to give the keynote speech at the annual convention of the National Association Of Elocution in Chautauqua, New York, on June 19, 1899. He warned teachers that they would be responsible for the fate of future generations of speakers if they did not take immediate measures to correct the prevailing defects of elocution. He insisted that most children were confident speakers before they reached
classrooms where excessive, stylized forms of expression restrained their abilities.

The little speaker expresses his feeling without restraint under the impulse of oratorical instinct, and we apprehend his meaning by untaught sympathy. Most of us retain this natural appreciation of elocution, although we lose the power of spontaneous execution that the child possesses. Here, then, is a lesson for us as teachers. Let the theory - the guiding principle of expression - be a matter of feeling, and then the practical outcome will be effective and spontaneous. We must feel what we have to say in order to express it naturally. (Bell, 4)

Other latter-day elocutionists stressed an image of oratory as a form of magnified conversation. Garrett Serviss, the author of *Eloquence: Counsel on the Art of Public Speaking*, quotes abolitionist Thomas Higginson in order to build a contrast between ideal and popular practices. Higgenson was struck by the seemingly casual speaking style of fellow abolitionist and social reformer Wendall Phillips.

The keynote to the oratory of Wendell Phillips...lay in this: that it was essentially conversational - the conversational raised to its highest power... It was as if he simply repeated, in a little louder tone, what he had been saying to some familiar friend at his elbow. Then, as the argument went on, the voice grew deeper, the action more animated, and the sentences came in a long sonorous swell still easy and graceful, but powerful as the soft stretching of a tiger's paw. (Serviss, 4)

Although he portrayed the best form of oratory as a magnified form of conversation among peers, Serviss was quick to acknowledge that public speaking cast students in an entirely different relationship with their audiences. One’s terror of public speaking often results not from an inability to speak, but from the necessity of having to negotiate new types of relationships with one’s audience. Most often, that ability - or the tools which help one to acquire that ability - remain untaught in our classrooms. Serviss’ acknowledgment that social context plays a powerful role in one’s journey towards
making one's voice heard in public was novel.

Even one's friends appear in a different aspect when they are assembled in the form of an audience instead of that of a social circle. They no longer look like the same persons, and there is something formidable in their expectant silence. The accustomed bonds of sympathy are broken and the well-known lineaments shape themselves into the stoical faces of judges whose verdict is to be won by unfamiliar means. (Serviss, 8-9)

The failure to provide real audiences for oral reading proved to be one of the most criticized shortcomings of the oral reading method. In the early days of the Progressive movement, before research leaned overwhelmingly towards an emphasis on silent reading, reformers and textbook authors tried to create a healthy blend of oral reading, drama, and silent reading. Augusta Stevenson, author of the series *Children's Classics In Dramatic Form*, encouraged teachers to use a young child's instinct for dramatic play to develop both a love of literature and "the freedom and grace in the bodily attitudes and movements which are involved in reading and speaking.” (Stevenson, iii)

Children are dramatic by nature. They are for the time the kings, the fairies, and the heroes that they picture in their imaginations. They are these characters with such abandon and with such intense pleasure that the on-looker must believe that nature intended that they should give play to this dramatic instinct, not so much formally, with all the trappings of the man-made stage, but spontaneously and naturally, as they talk and read. If this expressive instinct can be utilized in the teaching of reading, we shall be able to add greatly to the child's enjoyment and to improve the quality of his oral reading. In these days, when so many books are read hastily in school, there is a tendency to sacrifice expression to the mechanics and interpretations of reading. (Stevenson, iv)

The tendency to reform methodology in the language arts without sacrificing attention to students' speaking abilities is also visible in composition books for upper
elementary students published during the early years of the Progressive movement. *A Child’s Composition Book* (1919) by James Fleming Hosic and Cyrus Lauron Hooper is an outstanding example. Hosic, who was then head of the Department of English at Chicago Normal School and who, one year later, would be President of the National Council of Teachers of English, viewed composition as a dual process of learning to write and speak. Mention of revision and rehearsal techniques are paired throughout his book. Writing and speaking are both portrayed as crafts that revolve around the purpose of final publication or performance for a real audience.

It has been the endeavor to construct this book on the following principle: In learning to write and speak, a child should have as nearly as possible the same mental experiences that he will have as an adult writer or speaker. These experiences are as follows: 1. Having an occasion, 2. Getting a subject, 3. Selecting the material, 4. Organizing it (making an outline), 5. Writing the first draft, or, if the composition is to be oral, rehearsing it mentally, 6. Correcting and revising; or, if the composition is to be oral, rehearsing it again in silence for the purpose of improvement, 7. Rewriting; or perhaps finally rehearsing it, 8. Giving it in public. (Hosic and Hooper, 1)

Both the early members of the Progressive movement and the last generation of elocutionists were addressing audiences which stood on the brink of immense social change. Although literacy and orality would continue to mingle in many classrooms for decades, the forefront of research in education would soon steer literacy instruction towards silent reading and standardized forms of assessment. But other fascinating influences were also at work during the first two decades of the new century, factors that still influence the ways in which we perceive and privilege the role of private discursive routes towards understanding over the role of the aesthetic, performative mingling of literary experience, voice, and gesture.
Oratory such as the ancients never dreamed of—word power of a new sort! In the politics of today the Mimeograph is performing many remarkable functions. From out of its flying wheels are coming the hot messages of the hour—to conventions, to delegates, helpers, voters. Because it is the speediest and most expedient means of getting important communications into the hands of many, it commands a multitude such as no Demosthenes ever swayed. Within an hour it delivers five thousand well printed copies of any typewritten sheet. Diagrams, drawings, etc., are easily duplicated in the same operation. Throughout the world, business and educational institutions are finding it a quick means of cutting costs and increasing efficiency. Why not get our booklet "A-8" today? (American School Board Journal, 61:20, 1920)
Although the demise of oral reading and elocution are, in part, attributable to the weight of their own excesses, the new directions taken by educators in the 1920's cannot be fully explained as simple reactions to past wrongs. The social web in which children learned to read was changing rapidly. In an era in which mechanical innovations were changing nearly every industry, the publishing industry was booming. Newspapers were widely available at low cost. Public lending libraries were common. The availability of typewriters and mimeographing devices made it possible for small businesses and schools to convey printed information to a wide audience. An oratory of print, in which writing replaced gesture and the sound of the human voice, empowered an increasingly diverse generation of school children with increased access to the printed word. But silence and institutional accountability measures also took the place of the public school’s emphasis on the ability to use one’s voice to understand, influence, and enjoy.

Even as the amount of printed matter available to the public grew, the numbers of children who were able and often required to attend grade school reached previously unimaginable proportions. Urban areas in the Eastern states were most effected. Not only were school districts faced with a constant influx of immigrants, but by the early 1900's, both a mandatory school attendance age in New York State and child labor laws helped to send more, but hardly all, children away from factories and into the classroom.

In private schools, where the number of children in a classroom could be kept to a minimum, drama and orality continued to flourish side by side with innovations in the reading curriculum for an extended period of time. Descriptions of the language arts program for fourth graders at the Horace Mann School at Teachers College reflect this
balance in the early years of the century.

It remains, then, to help [each child] to greater speed and accuracy in silent reading, to increase his desire and power to give pleasure to others by oral reading, to give him only that which is best in form and content, and so to help develop in him a taste and feeling which shall reject the trashy, or worse, books which are constantly thrown his way. (Robbins, 1)

There was also time for and appreciation of the value of meshing other forms of aesthetic understanding with literacy education. Teachers at Horace Mann routinely helped children step into the practice of what we now call envisionment. During the last quarter of the year, when fourth grade teachers read aloud from Scott’s *Lady Of The Lake*, they designed questions which helped students to develop an awareness of how authors invite their readers to involve their senses: “Close your eyes and see the pictures. What colors do you see? What sounds do you hear? Read aloud the lines which have sound in them.” (Robbins, 3-4) As they continued to read, re-read, and listen, children made charcoal sketches based on what they saw in their mind’s eye.

Six years later, the school’s curriculum is described in detail by Henry Carr Pearson, then principal of Horace Mann. The reading process for all grade levels is described as a three-fold process of the mastery of print in silent reading (including the attainment of decoding and comprehension goals), the development of effective oral reading, and the ability to listen with discernment to literary works. Pearson portrays the composing process as a matter of both written and oral work.

The term [composition] as here used is a broad one, embracing oral and written reproduction in the form of riddles, jokes, anecdotes, stories, descriptions, topical recitations in history, geography, nature-study, and other subjects of the grade as well as original oral and written work along the lines that appeal to the interests of the child, simple dramatizations,
and the writing of occasional verse. Acting on the principle that children learn their mother-tongue by imitation, the best models are placed before them for both conscious and unconscious imitation. (Pearson, 1913, 4)

Pearson’s portrayal of reading instruction and the composing process were distinctly different fifteen years later when he co-authored a basal series largely for use in public schools. A glimpse at the first page of the table of contents for the Manual for Everyday Reading reveals a shift in balance from one in which Pearson placed equal value on silent and oral reading experiences to one in which he privileges the silent reading process and standardized forms of assessment. Other portions of his table of contents reveal the lengths to which teachers’ manuals went in order to offer sets of detailed, prescribed lessons for each ability group.

Types of Reading.................................................................7
1. Reading silently for pleasure
2. Reading silently for information
3. Reading orally to convey thoughts to others

How Silent Reading Differs from Oral Reading.................................8
1. Silent reading simpler
2. Silent reading faster
3. Comprehension in silent reading greater

WHY SILENT READING SHOULD BE GIVEN MORE ATTENTION IN SCHOOLS.................................................................10

HOW TO MEASURE ABILITY IN SILENT READING..........................12
1. The Value of Tests
2. What Tests To Use
3. Standard Tests
4. Bibliography of Standard Silent Reading Tests...
   Standards of Speed in Silent Reading

The shift in Pearson’s definition of reading instruction and assumptions about teachers’ abilities to plan was typical rather than singular. Perhaps in urban public
school classrooms teachers could not possibly manage to hear 40 or more individual
recitations or indulge in improvisation and drama during language arts lessons. Instead
of methodologies which welcomed children’s voices into literacy instruction, there were
overwhelming practical incentives for urban public school teachers to implement
methods which helped them maintain something closer to silence. But the challenge of
teaching the language arts in crowded urban schools was accompanied by other
important societal influences. An understanding of why methods of reading instruction
were redefined during the early decades of the twentieth century depends upon a study of
other social phenomena and developments in the field of educational research.

While numbers multiplied in urban classrooms, Frederick Winslow Taylor began
to conduct efficiency studies in industry in the fall of 1910. His studies captivated
industrialists with their promise to pair lower costs with increased rates of production.
One central feature of the Taylor System was the practice of detailing every aspect of a
worker’s duties: what was to be done, how it was to be done, and the amount of time
allowed for each task. Another feature, called functional foremanship, was concerned
with methodology: teaching workers to understand and carry out their prescribed tasks.
In 1911, after publication of *The Principles Of Scientific Measurement*, interest in
Taylor’s ideas began to influence almost every field. In 1912, William H. Allen, director
of the Bureau of Municipal Research for New York City wrote, “An important first step
toward securing school efficiency is now well underway. Efficiency is in our vocabulary.
It is almost a shibboleth.” (Allen, 15) The age of efficiency had begun.

Administrators besieged by their school boards about budget issues attended the
1913 meeting of the National Education Association in the hope of hearing speakers who might help them apply the principles of scientific management to schools. Charles Judd, then director of the School of Education at the University of Chicago, cautioned his audience against using industrial models of efficiency, and businessmen rather than educators, to evaluate schools. His position as the director of an experimental school at a private university, sheltered from the immediate pressure of school boards, did not serve his authority well. Frank Spaulding, Superintendent of Public Schools in Newton, Massachusetts, then captivated his audience with the story of how scientific management had transformed his district. He described a wide range of results or products that he claimed could be measured in any school. Only the last product, the quality of education itself, raised a volley of questions about how such a quality could be measured.

I refer to such results as the percentage of children of each year of age in the school district that the school enrolls; the average number of day's attendance secured annually from each child; the average length of time required for each child to do a given definite unit of work; the percentage of children of each age who are allowed to complete their schooling.....and the quality of the education that the school affords.

(Spaulding, 1913, 250)

Spaulding's measurement of educational quality was rooted in a quantitative process of evaluating educational costs. The dollar value of each course was estimated based on the number of student hours that could be counted for every teacher hour purchased. The resulting unit cost of a course was then roughly substituted for its educational value. In order to lower the unit cost of each course to taxpayers, class sizes and course loads per teacher were raised.

Why is a pupil recitation in English costing 7.2 cents in the vocational
school while it cost only 5 cents in the technical school? Is the “vocational” English 44 per cent superior to the “technical” English or 44 per cent more difficult to secure? (Spaulding, 1913, 263)

Spaulding left penetrating questions about the actual educational value of each course unanswered. These questions, he insisted, were no closer to being resolved than they were when academics first read Edward Thorndike’s research on the transfer of training and began to debate the question of which courses were of greatest educational value. He advised administrators to turn their attention instead to determining the dollar value of each course.

Academic discussion of educational values is as futile as it is fascinating. Which is more valuable, a course in Latin or a course in the machine shop? ...there are, there can be, no permanent, no absolute and universal answers to such questions as these; but there are...temporary, relative, and local assignments of value. (Spaulding, 1913, 252)

With appalling pragmatism, Spaulding suggested that school boards should use the dollar value of a course or a particular methodology, to determine the desirability of its inclusion in the curriculum.

I am convinced...that when the obligations of the present year expire, we ought to purchase no more Greek instruction at the rate of 5.9 pupil-recitations for a dollar. The price must go down, or we shall invest in something else. (Spaulding, 1913, 257)

Spaulding’s contemporary, Franklin Bobbitt, an instructor in educational administration at the University of Chicago, also applied the principles of scientific management to school reform. The National Society for the Study of Education published his book, The Supervision of City Schools, as their twelfth yearbook. Inclusion of one’s text in what was then the most important annual publication in education meant
that one’s ideas reached a powerful national audience.

Bobbitt proposed that scientific measures should first be used to establish standards for achievement for each grade level and subject. These standards were to be determined by leaders from business and industry rather than by educators.

A school system can no more find standards of performance within itself than a steel plant can find the proper height or weight per yard for steel rails from the activities within the plant.... The commercial world can best say what it needs in the case of its stenographers and accountants. A machine shop can best say what is needed in workers that come to it. (Bobbitt, 34-5)

But if the business community was charged with the responsibility of defining standards of performance in local schools, what was the role of educators? Bobbitt likened the role of classroom teachers to that of factory workers. They were not, he insisted, responsible for determining what schools were to do, or what was educationally sound, but only how they could do what they were told.

Scientific management finds the methods of procedure which are most efficient for actual service under actual conditions, and secures their use on the part of the workers.... The burden of finding the best method is too large and too complicated to be laid on the shoulders of the teachers. (Bobbitt, 51-2)

He returns to this point many times. If adequate materials for and training in a prescribed method was provided, a teacher could no longer claim the freedom to determine which methodology she used.

Teachers cannot be permitted to follow caprice in method. When a method which is clearly superior to all other methods has been discovered, it alone can be employed. (Bobbitt, 95)

Superior methods were soon defined as those which could be scientifically
proven to be efficient and economical. Even if an administrator did not actually believe that the educational value of a particular methodology matched its dollar value, the notions of Spaulding and Bobbitt had so influenced school board members that he or she would have been under enormous pressure to concede to economic concerns. If budgetary concerns were not enough to convince a school board of the superiority of a given method, the nascent fields of educational and psychological research provided what was perceived to be the scientific proof needed.

The enthusiasm for scientific forms of measurement took root quickly in universities, where schools of education were striving to establish and reinforce a status of professionalism. Educators and psychologists began to study the reading process. As early as 1913, Thorndike began to measure the eye-motion patterns of readers. He noticed that the eyes of fluent readers paused far less frequently and took in larger units of print as they moved across the page than did the eyes of less skillful readers. He also noticed that many children had a habit of vocalizing as they read - if only to mumble - and that this habit slowed the pace of their reading. These children, whose habits were attributed to their immersion in oral reading methods, were perceived as less efficient in their use of time and management of print than were silent readers. In 1917, Thorndike suggested that oral methods for the teaching of reading should be all but replaced by an emphasis on silent reading.

In school practice it appears likely that exercises in silent reading to find the answers to given questions, or to give a summary of the matter read, or to list the questions which it answers should in large measure replace oral reading... (Thorndike, 333)
Thorndike and other researchers, such as W. A. Smith of the University of Chicago, observed that children who vocalized as they read also received lower scores in comprehension than did their peers who read silently. Researchers concluded that oral reading, with its demand for proper pronunciation of the written word, created lifelong habits that slowed a child’s pace of reading and distracted her from the process of “thought-getting.” Any boundaries which might have distinguished inefficient readers from poor readers were blurred and then ultimately lost.

Shortly after Thorndike’s eye-movement studies gained a wide audience, the public was shocked to read about the results of a standardized intelligence test given to hundreds of thousands of Army recruits in 1917. Out of a possible score of 212, over seventy per cent of supposedly literate white draftees earned a score of 74 (C) or below. While Robert Yerkes, then President of the American Psychological Association, insisted publicly that the tests he administered could not be used to measure the more important soldierly qualities of character, he assigned mental levels to the letter grades earned by recruits and published the results. Seventy per cent of the recruits were judged to have a mental age of less than fifteen. (Yoakum and Yerkes, 134)

The teaching methods used to bring young men to the brink of adulthood with seemingly impaired abilities to comprehend what they read became were the center of conversations then brewing around the question of how reading was taught in the United States. The contrast between the ways in which reading instruction is portrayed in basal readers prior to 1920 and those published shortly afterwards highlights the influential role played by the publication of the Army intelligence test results and the resulting wave
of public concern about the teaching of reading. Prior to 1920, even a basal series authored by two well known efficiency advocates struck a balance between oral and silent reading methods.

Frank Spaulding, the school administrator from Newton, Massachusetts whose advocacy of the Taylor system had so moved the audience at the 1913 N. E. A. convention, was, by 1916, head of the Graduate School of Education at Yale. He and Catherine Bryce, an Assistant Professor of Education at Yale, co-authored a popular basal series called *The Aldine Readers*. The teachers' manual for the series presents a highly varied image of the reading process. Although Bryce and Spaulding stress the role of phonics and the use of a controlled vocabulary, they portray drama as central to the reading process.

Dramatizing is complete reading. Dramatizing is, indeed, more than a mere preparation for reading; dramatizing is reading in the fullest sense. Instead of simply thinking and picturing in their imagination the thoughts and ideas of the printed page, the pupils, in dramatizing, make those thoughts and ideas live. Instead of merely thinking about the actors in the story which they read, the pupils, in dramatizing, become those actors themselves. Instead of reading what the actors of the story do and say, the pupils, as actors, do and say those things themselves. This is realistic reading...the pupils grasp not words alone, but ideas; and they feel as well as understand... Dramatizing thus serves as a preparation for and a culmination of the best primary reading. (Bryce and Spaulding, 12-13)

Like their contemporaries Hosic and Hooper, Bryce and Spaulding also stress the importance of the rehearsal process and the presence of real audiences in the development of effective oral reading and public speaking.

The reader should thoroughly prepare what he is to read. This preparation (rehearsal, if only heard in his own mind) he can make as part of his seat work... It is good both for the readers and the hearers. The one should
learn to read effectively to an audience; the others should learn to listen effectively to a reader. Effective reading and effective listening can be learned only by much practice under conditions that compel the reader to read and the listener to listen effectively. (Bryce and Spaulding, 41)

Good readers are thus portrayed as those who use both aesthetic and discursive approaches to understanding to make literacy a matter of private and public transactions. Readers are expected to be able to assume the social responsibility for using their voices to incite and enter into powerful interpersonal networks of thought. The road to developing that ability was, perhaps, anything but efficient. Nevertheless, even two well known efficiency experts considered it essential. One’s apprenticeship as a dramatic speaker also included an immersion in the art of listening. Bryce and Spaulding are careful to distinguish the vital reciprocity of the rehearsal process from the image of round robin oral reading.

The hearers, as critics, should be trained to note and to tell what they have understood well, what they have felt thoroughly, and why they have so understood and felt; conversely, they should note and tell what they could not understand, and if possible, give the reason for their failure to understand. Criticism of this kind directs the attention of hearers and reader to something vital. It is very different from that criticism which is trained to note nothing by miscalled words and failures in trivial mechanical skills... It is not intended to suggest that all school reading exercises should be of the kind described. But such exercises should have a growing place in the program by the end of the first year. (Bryce and Spaulding, 42)

Educators accustomed to hearing Spaulding lecture on the dollar value of specific courses and methodologies were left without an explanation to help them bridge the distance between his advocacy of the Taylor System and his insistence on the value of certain literary and dramatic experiences which did not fit efficiency schemes.
In 1922, the same year Thorndike left Teachers College to become Director of Psychology at the Institute for Educational Research, Charles Hubbard Judd and Guy Thomas Buswell, professors of education at the University of Chicago, published the seminal book *Silent Reading: A Study Of The Various Types*. The audience that awaited the results of their research was perhaps somewhat larger than that which awaits most scholarly works. Only two years had passed since the publication of the Army intelligence tests and the public's hunger to find more efficient methods for the teaching of reading was keen. But along with their efforts to establish the legitimacy of silent reading and describe its various types, Judd and Buswell wove a damaging caricature of oral reading.

The damage began with a pronounced shift in their definition of what a good reader could do. Instead of focusing on the dual abilities to carry out both private and public transactions with a text, a good reader was portrayed as one who processed print efficiently, read at an acceptable pace, and maintained a high rate of comprehension. A child's literacy was rooted in an efficient, measurable self seemingly cut off from her social voice or responsibilities. Judd and Buswell then portray the major obstacle to nurturing the growth of efficient silent readers as the adherence of many teachers to oral reading methods. If these outdated methods were followed exclusively, they maintained, a child would find it difficult, if not impossible, to step away from the habit of vocalization into mature patterns of silent reading.

A very common result of emphasis on oral reading...is to fasten upon the pupil the limitations which are characteristic of oral reading. Recent investigations of the laboratory have made this clear by showing that the
kind of reading exhibited by adults who are inefficient readers is usually the same as the kind of reading found in the case of immature readers who are at the early oral stages. (Judd and Buswell, 1)

Teachers who encouraged the practice of silent reading in their classrooms were portrayed as a pioneering generation of educators charged with devising new methods of instruction and assessment. The silent reading process was, Judd and Buswell insisted, more difficult to observe, and therefore, it was more difficult to for a teacher to interpret what was going on in her students' minds. Methods of evaluating oral reading were, by contrast, portrayed as open to observation and easy to interpret.

During the last few years it has become evident that it is by no means as easy to teach silent reading as to teach oral reading. They symptoms of success or failure in the latter field are open to direct observation. In silent reading, on the other hand, the observable facts are relatively few and extremely hard to interpret. This obscurity of the symptoms of silent reading makes it doubly desirable that scientific methods be developed which will direct the attention of teachers to every discoverable indication of the character of the silent reading process. (Judd and Buswell, 2-3)

The portrait of oral reading written between the lines of Judd and Buswell's text is notably that of simple recitations for one's teacher or round robin reading, not the construction of thought in the midst of rich book talk or learning to use the printed word to move audiences as portrayed by Bryce, Spaulding, Hosic, and Hooper a few years earlier. The image of oral reading promoted after 1920 brings to mind the "barren action of the organs of speech upon the atmosphere" described by Mann in 1838 and unmistakably critiqued by Alexander McGuffey in 1844.

School reading has been a formal ceremony for the pupil. He has formed the habit of thinking that the words have been adequately dealt with when they have been sounded. The fault is with the schools' selection of reading matter and with the schools' emphasis on mere mechanical
perfection in oral reading... The present practice of continuing drills in the mechanics of reading through the elementary school undoubtedly retards pupils rather than helps them. Many a pupil leaves school equipped with the mechanical ability to read words, but utterly unacquainted with the possibility of interpretation. (Judd, 184)

Judd and Buswell repeat this portrait and extend the image of misguided efforts to include grossly uninformed teachers. If these images are to some extent valid, they are also remarkably unrelieved by an acknowledgment of the rich aesthetic experiences a child might have when literacy and orality were both invited to play central roles in the language arts classroom.

It is a mistake to jeopardize the child’s independent, fluent, silent reading in the fourth grade by insisting during his period on the usual oral exercises.... The conscientious teacher supplied with a reading book and a period in the program carries on the well-known reading farce in the vain hope that the effects of unsuccessful teaching will be overcome by a liberal application of the same methods which produced the difficulties. (Judd, 188)

Although Judd and Buswell suggest that teachers would work out the practical details of how silent reading could be taught, they neglected to note that a competitive publishing industry, fed by the public’s appetite for the principles of scientific management was ready to produce the materials deemed necessary to produce efficient readers and monitor children’s levels of comprehension.

In 1922 John A. O’Brien, a professor of education at the University of Illinois, published Silent Reading, subtitled “With Special References To Methods For Developing Speed. A Study In The Pedagogy and Psychology Of Teaching.” O’Brien’s book popularized research conducted by Thorndike, Judd, and Buswell. His purpose seems to have been the task of educating teachers, school administrators, school board
members, and parents about silent reading and new methods of literacy instruction. He promotes the same negative image of oral reading constructed by Judd and Buswell.

Unless the findings of the psychological laboratory and of the experimental investigations can be adapted to development of practical methods of classroom procedure, the teaching of reading will continue to be in the future, as it has been in the past, the slow, mechanical, oral type, unbeneited and unimproved by all the discoveries of scientific research. (O'Brien, 31)

O'Brien began his argument by countering the claims made for the efficacy of teaching oral reading. Oral reading, he insisted, was a "fossil of ancient practices," (O'Brien, 29) the product of an era in which oratory was the only reliable way of making one's ideas known. In the 1920's information could be acquired through printed sources alone. Print had replaced the need of the average student for oratorical skills. O'Brien insisted that if schools were places which were to approximate the real conditions of children's lives, then the emphasis of literacy instruction should shift towards helping them become efficient silent readers. The need of children to use their voices to express their opinions, shape their understanding, and enjoy dramatic literature goes unmentioned.

While printing has revolutionized the conditions for the spread of ideas and the general means of education, yet the school under the sway of custom and tradition has preserved almost intact the curriculum of reading of centuries past with its sole stress upon oral exhibition, in spite of the fact that the objective conditions of life for which that curriculum was constructed no longer exist. (O'Brien, 32)

O'Brien, like Thorndike, made blanket associations of higher rates of reading speed with improved rates of comprehension. While the practice of linking pace with comprehension is valid, the slow practice of coming to know a literary work deeply, as
an actor might, by dwelling in it for long periods of time, discussing it, and using one’s voice to publish it, was largely ignored by researchers who were more apt to cast readers in the role of “hasty sightseers.” (Dewey, 1934, 220)

Clarence Stone, whose book *Silent And Oral Reading* was published in 1922, also sought to educate teachers, administrators, and parents about new methods of teaching reading. Stone acknowledged that the study of poetry and some forms of literature should rely on oral reading methods and the chance to hone one’s skills in front of a responsive audience. However, in spite of these claims, most of his book is dedicated to the task of convincing teachers to implement silent reading methods. He and O’Brien both assumed the role of educational evangelists, but only Stone seemed to recognize his potential worth to publishers. In 1924, just two years after *Silent And Oral Reading* was published, he began to publish *Stone’s Silent Reading Series* for Houghton Mifflin and Riverside Press. The series was advertised regularly in *The American School Board Journal*.

In the preface to Book One, Stone’s advocacy of oral reading becomes weaker. Instead of presenting positive, if limited, applications for oral reading, he characterizes it as a dull matter of word calling and contrasts it to silent reading, which, he insists, revolves around the process of thought-getting. In this volume, he argues that his series is a supplement to mainstream basals, to be used in reading instruction several times a week. Stone’s advocacy of silent reading is still held in check by the Report of the National Committee on Reading, which was about to be published in the *Twenty-fourth Yearbook of the Society for the Study of Education* (1925). William Gray and the other
members of the National Committee on Reading advocated a "rich and varied experience in reading" which involved at least a temporary balance between silent and oral reading methods.

These facts justify the conclusion that pupils should be taught from the beginning to read both orally and silently. As a rule, approximately equal amounts of class time should be devoted to each type of reading in the first grade. This will result in much more silent than oral reading when all reading activities are considered. (Gray, 43)

If the Report of the National Committee on Reading began to tip the balance subtly towards silent reading, Stone would soon push that imbalance further. In 1927, he published *First Grade Seatwork For Silent Reading* with Webster Publishing. The popular workbook, which was marketed as a supplement to any basal reader, asked first graders to perform a series of exercises that were supposedly designed to exercise their comprehension skills. On page two, under a black and white illustration of Peter Rabbit, children were presented with a list of vocabulary words and told to "Cut out and paste the words on the picture of Peter Rabbit. Paste the word "neck" near his neck and so on." On page 22, children were told to choose the correct words to complete a set of sentences and color an illustration.

Draw a line under the right word in the following:

The cat is (on the fence, up the tree, down the chimney).
The dog has (two, three, four) feet on the ground.
The cat has a (short, long) tail.
Color the dog gray.
Color the cat yellow.
Color the grass green. (Stone, 1927, 22)

The fact that this workbook was written by a recognized advocate of scientific
methods for the teaching of reading, combined with the frequency with which it, too, was advertised in the *American School Board Journal*, contributed to its popularity. Five years later, in 1932, Webster Publishing bought the rights to *Stone's Silent Reading Series*, renamed them *The Webster Readers*, and marketed them as a mainstream basal series. Stone also published a training manual in modern methods of reading instruction for administrators called *Supervision Of The Elementary School* (Houghton Mifflin, 1927). In it, he reminds administrators of their role as instructional leaders as well as business managers.

> However well grounded the elementary-school principal may be in the scientific management of a school, in theories of education, and in the fundamentals of general method and special types of method, he cannot supervise reading instruction as effectively as desirable without being well-grounded also in the principles that relate to the functions of teaching of reading, to activities and procedures in such instruction, to materials and equipment to be used, and to the problem of homogenous grouping. (Stone, 1927, 188)

Stone told administrators that after the primary grades, “further growth in reading lies mainly in experiences and specialized training in silent reading.” (Stone, 1927, 195)

He suggested a battery of materials that could be used by those who wanted their reading lessons to reflect the most modern methods. He was then at work revising and publishing some of the same materials he suggested.

> A basal primer with a brief manual, a series of literary readers, and a series of texts in silent reading for groups of class are essential instruments of instruction. This statement accords with the recommendations of the National Committee on Reading. (Stone, 1927, 203)

Stone acknowledged that an appreciation of poetry could only be built through...
hearing it read aloud well and by practicing the art of reading it aloud. He suggested that in grades four through six, “oral reading, rhythmic physical movement, and music, as appropriate to the poem” should be utilized.

The values of poetry, and of certain prose selections as well, are primarily auditory and emotional. Hearing oral rendition and physical expression of rhythm are valuable means of furthering appreciation of poetry throughout elementary school. The oral reading and other physical expression of the pupils aid in bringing about a feeling of satisfying familiarity essential to appreciation. (Stone, 1927, 211)

Even as he published a workbook whose contents typified the lower-level thinking skill drudgery of silent reading seatwork, Stone decried the extent to which instruction in the language arts was “formal, stiff, and unnatural.” For instance, school children of that era were often required to stand whenever they responded to their teachers’ questions. His criticism of the ways in which schools warped normal patterns of conversation between individuals with mechanical rituals are echoes of sentiments expressed by Annie Moore in The Primary School:

To require that children shall always rise, step into the aisle, take a certain posture, and refrain from touching any object while speaking is, again, to lay down strictures which would kill any meeting of adults assembled for an interchange of ideas. Members of college classes in Primary Education have been known to insist upon such regulations for children, themselves carrying on the argument while comfortably seated. Why make a fetish in school of forms which elsewhere in life are merely made to serve a useful purpose. (Moore, 1926, 141)

Stone’s fleeting emphasis on the legitimate role of oral reading and natural forms of conversation may have been sincere, but the overwhelming emphasis of his book lay in convincing readers of the superiority of silent reading, the necessity of seat work, and standardized forms of assessment. His audience, still haunted by the specter of the Army
intelligence tests, was left to face the question of how to fit every literacy practice that he, O'Brien, and Spaulding advocated into the school day. How were they to pay attention to drama, public speaking, and natural forms of conversation when so much time seemingly needed to be spent on the mastery of silent reading skills and the collection of supportive data? How could teachers in overcrowded urban classrooms implement methods of teaching the language arts which required children to use their voices?

The publishing industry was ready to provide an answer. Their systematized, teacher-proofed, and relatively economical basal programs appealed to efficiency-minded school boards, helped teachers to maintain something close to silence in crowded classrooms, and, in the name of normalizing reading instruction and assessment, virtually eliminated time for teachers to attend to the development of an essential element of the language arts: the power of their children's voices as tools for coming to know.
CHAPTER I

FINDING A VOICE

My story begins with silence. It begins with thoughts left unvoiced, points never made, and ideas never shared. It begins with my own reluctance to speak up in school, a reluctance that went unchallenged and un-investigated. My teachers rightly assumed that I was shy. Once or twice a year my classmates and I would suffer through a series of oral reports, all but two or three of us red in the face and tongue-tied. Only a handful of children in these memories stand out because they knew something the rest of us didn’t. They knew how to stir us from our self-absorption and make us laugh. As they worked the crowd, even our teachers, who were usually busy disciplining these same students for talking, would have to smile. But soon it was time for another peer to rise to his feet and walk, beet-faced, to the front of the room, and begin to read aloud from a damp sheet of notes. I’d look away out of sympathy and wait for my turn.

In our classrooms, the language arts were defined by a constant, quiet succession of basal reading groups, grammar drills, and spelling tests. But this narrow container could not completely restrain children’s language. It bubbled out to engender a covert world in which literacy was cloaked with an element of risk. The reading lessons I recall were different than those the publishers of our basals had in mind. The handful of us in the top group learned to race through the available sets of readers and S. R. A. kits until our teacher’s supplies were exhausted. By mid-winter, we’d usually win permission to
go to the library during reading time. Once there, we could read our way through shelves of real books, disturbed only by the thought that our classmates had to stay behind, filling in blanks, and waiting for a turn.

Although little writing was done for the official world of the classroom during grade school, writing became the core of covert operations in the unofficial worlds created by the children. By fourth grade, all of us hoarded plastic screw-apart pens, which, when emptied out, could be refilled with tightly rolled up messages. Pens were ideal vehicles for passing notes, like so many Trojan horses, right under the noses of our teachers. Our muse wasn't the literary sort that inhabits writing process classrooms now. Ours had one foot in episodes of television spy shows like Get Smart and the other in our profound need to speak with each other.

As the years passed, our classrooms grew more entrenched in quiet. We took notes, answered questions, and waited for the bell. Although the plastic screw-apart pens had long since disappeared, the scope of our language arts classes still revolved around hours of listening, waiting, reading, and testing. The extroverts who'd survived the disciplinary measures of grade school with egos intact now led classroom discussions: a series of exchanges tossed back and forth between the teachers and themselves. That same handful of students was likely to make up either the core of the debate team or the cast of a school play. It was rare that anyone else tried out for either. By then, the number of masks we felt comfortable wearing as speakers might have been set in stone.

Our English teachers took great care to see that we'd read the literature selected for each grade level. An equal amount of attention was now paid to making sure that
students knew how to write basic research reports. Some outstanding teachers made these individual reports the heart of their courses: inquiry prompted our studies, guided our research, and shaped our writing. But important classroom discourse took place largely in the quiet dance between a reader and the text or between a writer and the page. The classroom silences of otherwise capable speakers were left unchallenged.

Those of us who rarely spoke knew that there was a problem. Our teachers would have agreed. But the silence between us was fed by the fact that no one acted as if she considered talk a central member of the language arts. Not one of my teachers would have dreamed of not teaching a child how to read or later, how to critique a wide variety of genres. No teacher, administrator, or parent would have been satisfied if a child did not, in some capacity, learn how to write while she was in school. And our school days were endlessly packed with a certain odd passivity that passed as listening.

The ability to speak was assumed. Of course, the din in the lunchroom alone was evidence that we did, in fact, know how to speak and enjoyed doing so. We spoke around peers and family members. We spoke when a teacher questioned us or during the rare chances we had to work in small groups. But the range of contexts in which most of us felt a sense of proficiency as speakers was limited. It wasn’t a matter of language mastery. Most of us had been born in the United States to English speaking parents. Our vocabularies were more than adequate. But our hesitancy to take on certain roles as speakers, and the sheer lack of opportunity to revel in the sounds of language while in school might have been familiar classroom experiences to children in communities far different than our own.
Students who were able to speak well in public mystified me. How had they learned to make those initial bids for inclusion in a discussion? How had they learned to use talk as part of a performance, to turn a phrase cleverly and hold an audience spellbound? Where had they learned to playfully assume such a wide variety of masks as speakers? Not in school. Silence and not the ability to speak or to enjoy using the spoken word was a prerequisite language skill for success in our classrooms. The silences privileged there bore little resemblance to the rich, reflective silence in which one might learn to read faces or hear the voice of one’s own text while writing. In the crowded classrooms of the mid-sixties and seventies, the flat absence of talk was viewed as a sign that a good teacher was in control of her class.

The silence of those classrooms continues to make me curious. It is at the root of all the experience that prepared me for a serendipitous event in my own classroom and later to frame the questions which fuel my on-going research. Conducting qualitative research in schools depends partly on our ability to engage deeply in a situation and weave sense from all that surrounds us. But the questions we pose, the insights we gain from children, and the narratives we eventually spin are also intimately linked to the ways in which we first learn to exploit our subjectivities. Before this research project began, I needed to look for the roots of the questions that first made me restless.

I began to question the silences of the classrooms I’d known as a child when I began to teach. That first year, I was fortunate to stumble across a volume called *Understanding Writing* (Atwell and Newkirk, 1982). That book offered me the chance to step inside classrooms in which meaningful literacy lessons took place. Talk didn’t
command the attention of these teachers yet: reading and writing held the center stage of their inquiry, but they did so in ways that made tremendous sense. Voices in the classrooms they described didn’t remain locked inside the barrels of pens. One year later, I enrolled in Lucy Calkins’ course on the teaching of writing at Teachers College. Professional writers, authors whom I’d admired for years, were among our mentors. In their stories, I recognized my own struggle to find a voice as a writer. I saw my story reflected in the writing process mirror and dove head first into my early years of teaching.

I might never have realized that a major player in the language arts was missing from the process stage of my classroom if the actions of one child hadn’t arrested my attention. Jill Vitale was just seven years old when she returned from recess one afternoon and asked if she could read e. e. cummings’ (1989) “hist whist” to our combination first and second grade class. When I handed her the picture book version of the poem, a book our class had come to love, she told me that she didn’t need it. She already knew the poem by heart. Jill, an average reader and writer, then performed that poem in such a way that it sent a chill down the spine of every person in that room. It wasn’t simply that she captured the rustley sounds of an autumn night in her voice. She whisked all of us into the world of that poem and suspended all sense of time.

I was thunderstruck. I couldn’t get over Jill’s powerful performance, but I was even more stunned to realize how blind I’d been to her way with words. And I’d undoubtedly been blind - or deaf - to the ways in which other children had been crafting performative texts for years. Drama had been part of our reading and writing workshop,
but until then it played only a peripheral role. Our uses of the spoken word in the classroom had revolved largely around the communicative functions of language. Paying attention to its performative functions opened up a breathtaking new range of possibilities.

When Jill’s performance was over, the other children in my class clamored for a chance to perform their favorite poems, too. But for most, performances of this caliber were the end result of an in-depth process of reading, rehearsals, and oral drafts. Jill had probably been an engaging performer since infancy. Creating well-crafted performative texts was a process that I now needed to unmask (Newkirk, 1990) for the others, just as surely as reading and writing were dialogic processes that we needed to explore together. 

Redefining the boundaries of reading and writing workshop

It was surprisingly difficult to find drama texts which spoke to what I hoped to investigate in my classroom. Most consisted of a random assortment of theater games removed from, or only slightly coordinated with, the study of the other language arts in the elementary school classroom. Even those written by admirable educators were composed in the style of educational cookbooks: nearly devoid of theory and first cousins to the volumes of story starters and other random writing activities which, while highly marketable, made me cringe.

I didn’t want my students to have an enjoyable brush with drama. I wanted them to be able to invoke the music and pulse of the written word. I wanted them to be able to take risks and jump into any number of roles as speakers or performers. I wanted to reshape the boundaries of reading and writing workshop in an ordinary grade school
classroom - not a once or twice a week drama workshop - so that all of my students could build deep reservoirs of experience with the artful oral performance of literature. I began with poetry because of the abiding love my class and I had for the genre. But I also began with poetry because that was the window Jill had opened.

Dissatisfied with what I'd found at that time on the drama shelves of bookstores and libraries, I returned to a theorist whose work I'd only half understood earlier in my career and found metaphors which offered me a place to begin. Louise Rosenblatt (1978) calls the dialogic relationship that exists between an individual reader and text a poem. Part of that poem includes a reader’s ability to carry out “acts of evocation” which allow her to hear the voice of the text in her mind or “inner ear” as she reads. Although the dialogues between reader and text that Rosenblatt imagines are silent, the interpretive process she describes links the reader’s job to that of a musician.

The text of a poem or of a novel or a drama is like a musical score. The artist who created the score – composer or poet – has set down notations for others, to guide them in the production of a work of art. Moreover, in the literary reading, even the keyboard on which the performer plays is - himself. From the linkage of his own experiences with words, from his own store of memories, he must draw the appropriate elements symbolized by the score or text, to structure a new experience, the work of art... The “poem” comes into being in the live circuit set up between the reader and “the text.” (Rosenblatt, 1978, 13)

How children learn to construct those increasingly strong circuits between themselves and their texts - even to their world as a text - is a question that fascinates teachers. I’d tried to give students opportunities to build deepening dialogues with a range of texts. I’d been aware that each child’s inner keyboard of experience, drawn from individual and cultural wells, helped her to shape a distinctive relationship with the
But the image of the reader-as-musician allowed me to slip past these boundaries. I wanted my students to go beyond Rosenblatt’s silent acts of evocation and learn to publish the written word with their voices. (Hall, 1989) What experiences would help them learn to do what Jill had done? Perhaps the keyboards of experience they possessed when they left my classroom would be embedded with a knowledge of performance: echoes of their own voices playfully immersed in the rehearsal process, memories of themselves inviting an audience of their peers into a specially crafted moment, and the experience of having taken new risks as speakers.

I’d begun reading Rosenblatt’s book with images of the child-as-reader gathered from my classroom: individuals reading silently, book clubs gathered for discussion, and researchers pursuing the process of inquiry. Suddenly a host of other characters had walked on stage. Some carried written texts of poems, played with the delivery of lines, and listened to how their partners performed them differently during rehearsals. Some stepped into the stories they loved through improvisation. Others composed artful oral texts as they spoke, drawing on a repertoire of performative talk and storytelling from family and community. Groups of older children framed extemporaneous arguments in the midst of a lively debate, listened intently to what their opponents had to say, and quietly planned their rebuttals.

All these children were using their voices - as well as their abilities to read and write - to live between the lines of their texts. They were learning to use the tools of a performer in order to win the attention of an audience. In their classrooms, literacy
lessons were embedded with both the aesthetic experience of crafting performances and the esthetic practice of learning to anticipate the experience of a listener or audience member. The arts they were learning were not new literacies: the performances they shaped with voice and gesture did not involve encoding in print. But by learning to publish the written word with their voices, some of the children on this stage did more than enhance their experience of literary works. These students of studied genres of performative talk opened doors into literary arts which might have remained closed if print were their only vehicle.

Rosenblatt’s silent reader learned to recognize the “repetitions, echoes, resonances, repercussions, linkages, cumulative effects, contrasts, or surprises” (Rosenblatt, 1978, 57-8) in books, poems, and plays. But when we redefine the boundaries of our reading and writing workshops to include experience in the performance process, these qualities can also be felt: lived through, breathed through, and worked like a mass of resilient dough during rehearsals by students who are immersed in the practice of learning to publish that text for an audience. The dramatic moment is a door students and teachers can open in order to invite each other inside the world of a book, poem, or play.

One electrifying moment in the classroom brought me face to face with the potential power of aesthetic experience in the process of coming to know. John Dewey’s *Art As Experience* (1934) continues to help me understand the role it played during the next two years in my own classroom and later, in the classroom where I conducted my doctoral research. Several months into our first 12 week immersion in poetry, certain
elements of reciprocity, or new dialogic elements, began to surface during rehearsals. The children’s experience with crafting performative texts of their own was forging new links to their knowledge of how to serve as peer coaches. Similarly, the time they spent coaching, listening and giving feedback to others had a tremendous impact on the ways in which they approached each new text as a performer.

New dialogic currents were also evident in reading and writing workshop. The poems my students wrote were filled with traces - echoes, images, and rhythms - of the poems they’d read, analyzed, and rehearsed. The poems they crafted as writers were shaped, in part, by their multiple strands of experience with poetry as listeners, observers, readers, and performers. The reader-as-musician within each child began to converse with its twin, the writer. Dewey explains the chemistry which takes place when these multiple roles are woven into the composing process:

To be truly artistic, a work must also be esthetic — that is, framed for enjoyed receptive perception... The doing or making is artistic when the perceived result is of such a nature that its qualities as perceived have controlled the question of production. The act of producing that is directed by intent to produce something that is enjoyed in the immediate experience of perceiving has qualities that a spontaneous or uncontrolled activity does not have. The artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works. (Dewey, 1934, 48)

Of course, the influence of author-mentors had entered my students’ writing before. Mini-lessons often found us looking carefully at the tools a particular author used in order to craft a book or poem. Whenever children spent substantial amounts of time immersed in the works of an author they loved, traces of his or her voice could be found in their writing. Brian Cambourne noticed this phenomenon in the writing of
children who had been immersed in the process of retelling the stories they’d listened to or read. The children he studied first exhibited a growing ability to reproduce obvious features of the texts they’d listened to in their retellings of stories. He called this first phenomenon *linguistic spillover*. (Brown and Cambourne, 15) But weeks or even months later, he noticed that children were using specific features of text drawn from their listeners’ repertoire in their own writing. He called this second, less predictable, phenomenon *delayed spillover*. (Brown and Cambourne, 19)

These text features ran the whole spectrum - words, phrases, ideas, rhetorical devices, organization of content, as well as relatively superficial things such as spelling, punctuation marks and setting out. When questioned about this, in many instances the children were not consciously aware of where any of these particular text features had come from. (Brown and Cambourne, 19)

But when students went beyond the realm of literary critique, re-telling exercises, and book club discourse to step inside a poem as performers, the degree to which they grew familiar with the tools used by a poet multiplied. Immersion in the performance process multiplied the qualitative impressions students seemed to find in a poem. Their attentiveness to word choice, imagery, and every lyrical quality of the poems they read was taken into the children’s inner dialogues of thought and revealed in fresh new forms when they spoke and when they wrote poems of their own.

While others have noticed and documented this process before, no one explains it better than the Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin offers teachers a brilliant glimpse into the dynamics of language, at the ways in which it is created and constantly renewed, and at how we and our students use it to create places for ourselves on all the
stages we inhabit. The various lenses he provides will be of invaluable help in analyzing
the types of social work (Dyson, 1993) that each of my three case studies goes about
accomplishing with language.

The dynamic Bakhtin described which is of greatest importance here is
*intertextuality*. Elements of the poems children read, discussed, and performed were
assimilated, transformed, and later used for an unpredictable number of purposes
whenever they read, wrote, or spoke. (Bakhtin refers to our uses of both spoken and
written language as *utterances*.) But the texts that became part of the children’s inner
keyboards of experience were not only the carefully crafted words that made up each of
the printed poems they read. The word *texts* in my research also refers to the crafting of
performative moments: a child’s purposeful use of hesitations in her voice, the way she
plays with a poem’s lyrical qualities, or a first glimpse of herself holding the attention of
an audience.

The experiences of language, gesture, and audience contact embedded in
performative texts mingle with each child’s experience of the printed word. They alter
her ongoing experience with and creation of new texts and utterances, written or
performed, in the most formal and informal settings. And because, as my case studies
will show, young children filter out so little that an older consciousness might, their
spoken and written language reveals the dynamic heteroglossia Bakhtin described. Each
utterance we compose, whether in written or spoken form, or in the silent language of
thought, is “furrowed with the distant and barely audible echoes” (Bakhtin, 1986, 93) of
all the language pools in which we’ve swum. The reverberations of others’ talk and

51
writing infuses - or perhaps inspires - our own. The very breath that propels each word we speak is embedded with the metaphorical force of words spoken and written by others.

How can schools create multiple ways for children to learn to swim in the pools of language and thought offered by literature, poetry, and drama? Dewey compared the way people usually interact with works of art, including the way we often interact with texts as readers in or out of the classroom, to the habits of hasty sightseers. Only the visitor who returns again and again to a cathedral, who walks around inside it, and comes to know it in its various moods, is comparable to the reader who enters a familiar text again and again as both a reader and a performer and slowly becomes familiar with its very pulse.

A cathedral, no matter how large, makes an instantaneous impression. A total qualitative impression emanates from it... But this is only the substratum and framework within which a continuous process of interactions introduces enriching and defining elements. The hasty sightseer no more has an esthetic vision of Saint Sophia or the Cathedral of Rouen than the motorist traveling at sixty miles an hour sees the-flitting landscape. One must move about, within and without, and through repeated visits let the structure gradually yield itself to him in various lights and in connection with changing moods. (Dewey, 1934, 220)

Re-reading favorite poems silently could also have brought about a deep connection with and knowledge of each one. But performing a poem, using voice and gesture to move about, within and without, and through repeated visits to its text, gave my students the chance to play with its rhythmic and musical qualities. The nearly tactile relationship that grew between texts and performers during rehearsals gave them complementary realms of experience to take into their inner dialogues of thought as
readers, writers, and speakers. Lev Vygotsky called the process of turning external, social patterns of language use inward internalization. (Vygotsky, 1978, 56) As my research will show, when children are immersed in both text-centered discourse and dramatic performance, the inner dialogues of thought they build take on a range of textures not available to those who are invited to dive into only one of these streams of experience.

The 12 week Poetry Projects my students and I embarked upon in 1991 and 1992 laid the groundwork for the research that is at the heart of this book. During those years, my first and second graders helped to construct paths through the performance process, an area which seemed, at least for a reticent person like myself, like uncharted territory. When I felt as if I were an unlikely candidate for the job of exploring this subject, Donald Murray’s Expecting The Unexpected offered sage advice. Although he meant to reassure the hesitant writer, Murray’s words also encouraged me, a hesitant teacher-researcher who was trying to make sense of something vital that I’d observed in my classroom.

It was my remedial, doubtful, hesitant, insecure students who knew they couldn’t write who most sounded like writers. I felt comfortable with them. We shared our fears, our inadequacies, our astonishment at the miracle of writing. I never wanted to go into combat with someone without fear, and I don’t want to write with someone who isn’t scared: The word is powerful and must be feared. (Murray, 1989, 19)

Unmasking the oral performance of poetry and studying its effects on children’s composing processes meant that I had to step into doubly uncertain waters. Not only was I not performative by nature, but I also had to re-imagine, and in some cases subvert, the more familiar traditions of reading and writing workshop as described by my mentors:
Graves (1983), Calkins (1986, 1991), Clay (1991) and others. The sense-making processes they described center largely around discursive, informational uses of language in reading and writing workshop. The sense-making processes I was about to explore and treat as equal members of the language arts were centered in aesthetic experience and the performative functions of language.

One of the more obvious differences between the workshop experiences they describe and the ones I explored involves the roles played by audience members. Process-movement theorists describe audience members who help peers make sense of the texts they’re writing. As they pose questions and offer comments, the child-as-author ponders, explains, and clarifies, carrying on an external form of a dialogue which eventually becomes part of her inner dialogue of thought. When an emphasis on creating performative oral texts is added to reading and writing workshops, the roles played by audience members doubles.

When children gather for a poetry reading, performers don’t expect the members of their audience to pose helpful questions. The responses they hope to elicit are found instead in the mummers, applause, or laughter that flicker over the crowd. Responses such as these can be read in the eyes of one’s audience. Miscues can be devastating. The character of what each of my case studies expected to find written in the eyes of her audience members proved to be a critical factor in determining the way each initially approached - or avoided - the composing of oral texts. Tackling the business of helping young children to interpret and control the way they “read” faces and used voice and gesture to compose performative texts were forms of reading and composition I never
dreamed I'd teach.

During the 1994-95 school year, I began seven months of research at Tenakill School in Closter, New Jersey. My cooperating teacher, Barbara Cullere, and I faced a tremendous challenge. We wanted to help children gain a sense of agency in what Erving Goffinan called the art of “impression management.” Impression management is essentially the art of striking deals with the various audiences - informal or formal - that one faces in the course of daily life. Barbara and I struck a deal of our own. We bet that the artistry that went into composing the “front” or “mask” (Goffinan, 1959) a child projects as a speaker could be developed consciously. The child as reader of audience reactions would not be caught in a system in which she had no sense of agency.

Only a handful of children with whom we worked believed, from the start, that they could hold the attention of an audience. Most were plagued to varying degrees by the fear that audiences would laugh at them. The relationships they envisioned between audience and self were ones in which the cards were stacked against them. In this familiar fear, Barbara and I found a place to begin. We invited all the children - not just those who were already able performers - into a classroom in which their need to explore ways with words included attention to their growth as speakers, creators of performative oral texts, and negotiators of audience response.

Our invitation stems from my argument with the way in which performative verbal texts are often thought of in schools. We read children’s other texts carefully - and justifiably - in order to understand classroom events. A teacher might listen to a child read aloud and construct a running record of her narrative which enables her to
look at the reading "event" and discover what strategies that reader is - or is not - using. This procedure should then provoke companion pieces of inquiry which move teachers from the recorded narrative itself through the process of looking at how they've structured classroom events which enable that child to encounter other written texts. The original text - the running record - becomes a tool for examining and reshaping on-going lessons. However, when one looks at events in which verbal artistry - a child's speaking ability - holds center stage, his or her oral narrative is often a stopping place. When teachers asked me to give oral book reports in grade school, my performances were up for judgment, but the processes which should have led up to and demystified the crafting of such narratives were never made part of classroom life.

My research involves restructuring reading and writing workshops so that children also learn to negotiate the art of verbal performances. The intention of our immersion unit in the performance of poetry was not limited to looking at the ways in which children created the occasional exquisite performance. Neither was it limited to discovering the ways in which their poetry - embedded layers of delayed spillover - helped them to make sense of the events in their lives. We hoped that children's experience with performance would be infused with a growing realization that they could use the spoken word to create, sustain, and change relationships with all the audiences they encountered.

A child's written and spoken texts are both tools with which they will go on to encounter the world. The ethnographer Richard Bauman studies the ways in which our spoken narratives serve as instruments for maneuvering one's way through life.
...for all that “narrative is a primary cognitive instrument [for] making the flux of experience comprehensible” as event (Mink 1978:131), it may also be an instrument for obscuring, hedging, confusing, exploring, or questioning what went on, that is, for keeping the coherence or comprehensibility of narrated events open to question. (Bauman, 1986, 55-56)

The rehearsal process allowed children a chance to immerse themselves in poetry even as it encouraged them to acquire the performative tools they’d need as speakers and performers when they faced other audiences. Even the most reluctant speakers grew more nimble about changing the masks they wore. At one moment, they offered advice, questions, and comments to their partners in a coach like manner reminiscent of audience members in writing workshop. Later, they tried on the masks of performers, paying careful attention to their own efforts even as they fielded the comments of the peer coach seated across from them. As children’s grasp of performance grew, they gained a sense of agency when they turned to look into the eyes of their audiences. Instead of a tendency to miscue the messages they found written there, children approached the art of audience management with a sense of inner control.

Cacophony: The different fabric of sound in performance workshops

The process of weaving an emphasis on performance into our immersion unit in poetry was filled with surprises. Initially, the most startling of these was the sound factor. Our idiosyncracies probably affect the way we fine tune any workshop experience with our students. Writing workshop in my own classroom began with the class gathered together for a mini-lesson on the rug. But afterwards, we’d return to our desks and, for the next ten or fifteen minutes, we’d indulge in what we called Quiet

57
Writing Time. I find it difficult to hear the voice of what I’m trying to write when there is too much background noise in the room. Even my busiest first graders came to crave a brief envelope of quiet when they first sat down to write.

When the poet Ralph Fletcher visited our class, he tried to jump into student-teacher writing conferences immediately after the mini-lesson. My students looked over their shoulders and grimaced at the kindly stranger who was getting in the way of their need to concentrate. Of course, after a few minutes, this quiet gradually gave way to the hum of conversations among children, or individual children humming and talking to themselves as they wrote. But my writing workshop always began with a few minutes of rich silence.

When my students and I jumped into performance workshops, I was unprepared for the relative cacophony. The dance between a writer and the page isn’t usually audible to a passerby. The dance between a performer and a text is something quite different. As I watched the children scattered around our classroom in pairs for rehearsals, or reading an “oral draft” (Lenz, 1996, 245) to the wall, I was reminded of what it’s like to be outside the doors of the practice rooms in a high school music department. Inside each room, a musician struggles to interpret pages of musical text. It usually sounds melodic. But out in the hall, where sounds from ten different practice rooms mingle, cacophony abounds. My students thought nothing of the sheer volume and varieties of talk going on in our room. They concentrated on what they were rehearsing and had thoughtful conversations with me when I stopped for a conference. Within the cacophony, they found a new sort of privacy, a place in which they could
begin to take risks with voice and gesture.

When my own classes began to build paths through this noisy, new territory, we named the places we found. Second graders were especially adept at this. Seven year-old Rehana Lanewala named the stages she went through as she prepared for each performance. Stage One, she told me, was when she first tried to read a poem aloud. For first and second graders, that usually means simply decoding a text. But it also means that when someone of any age begins to read a poem aloud, she sometimes encounters unexpected verbal glitches.

My violin teacher used to call the sticky business of getting one’s fingers accustomed to a new piece getting it “under one’s fingers.” Repetition, time, and patience soon made stiff, awkward fingers dextrous. Speakers often initially encounter similar glitches, even when the voice of the text they hear in their mind’s ear sounds smooth and resonant. Seven year-old Jason Desch, reflecting on the process of bringing smoothness and clarity to the lines he was practicing, compared what he was doing to the job of the mechanics in the book *Garage Song* (Wilson, 1991). He was hammering out “all the bumps and dents” in his voice.

Rehana’s Stage Two was a longer, infinitely playful time, when children experimented with ways of shaping a text with voice and gesture. During Stage Two, students might begin by tackling the problem of volume and pace, experiment with emphasis and timing, and end by practicing ways of making eye contact with the audience. By the time a child reached Stage Three, she was ready to perform for an audience.
Recognizing the suggestion of these stages helped us to locate and explore certain facets of performance more thoroughly. It also gave the children a precise language for reflection, self-assessment, and peer coaching. But the convenience of these terms never blinded me to the fact that the skills each child developed were not acquired in a neat, lock-step sequence. Their grasp of their craft emerged in an idiosyncratic manner in the midst of a rich daily workshop atmosphere in which children received, and offered each other, abundant challenge and support.

My first and second graders also proved to me that the practice of keeping notebooks during our mid-year immersion units could serve as a catalyst to heighten our interaction with written texts, rehearsals, and performances even as it fed our lives as writers, creating a sense of wide-awakeness to the pools of experiences in which we lived. One notebook practice which had a tremendous impact on my on-going research took an unexpected form. I'd known when I planned our initial immersion unit that the children and I would use notebooks of various shapes and sizes to house entries: readers' responses to the poetry we read, rehearsal notes to foster self-reflection about our growth as performers, and, of course, vast idiosyncratic collections of short entries. I never imagined that one of our most important notebooks would be made up not of lined paper, but of hours of videotape.

I'd originally hoped to tape a visual anthology of children's performances so that they and their parents would have a lasting record which, in addition to their print publications, would help them to remember our project. We soon discovered that making one good performance level clip takes time. One day, I decided to leave the
camera on as children worked their way through a succession of oral drafts. That left me free to work with each child: prompting here or there, helping her to concentrate, or serving as an appreciative audience. Leaving the tape on also left children more in charge of when they wanted one draft to end and another to begin. In 1992, this practice evolved into a habit of leaving the camera on while children reflected on what had gone well during the preceding clip, how they'd rehearsed, and what they needed to work on next. The camera caught the dialogic relationships of students and teacher assessing artful performances (Dyson, 1993).

During my initial teacher-researcher projects, my students and I began the process of redefining the scope of language arts within the walls of our classroom. Secondary orality in the form of performance was now inextricably woven into my process approaches to the teaching of reading and writing. The oral performance of poetry allowed my students to engage in a new dimension of Rosenblatt’s poem. They were now able to extend that poem beyond themselves and their written texts - beyond those private transactions - to an audience of listeners. The reader-as-musician within each child was able to claim both a public and a private audience.

But those first two years also showed me how little time I’d had as a classroom teacher to investigate this subject. In order to stake a claim for the inclusion of the studied uses of secondary orality, especially the oral performance of literature in grade schools, I left my own classroom after the 1991-92 school year and entered the Ph.D. Program in Reading and Writing Instruction at the University of New Hampshire. In the intense mixture of challenge and support a doctoral program provides, I sorted out the
questions that would guide my ongoing research and found in the works of theorists, especially John Dewey, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Anne Haas Dyson, metaphors which would suggest the power of what I'd seen to a wider audience.

But the questions that guided me were rooted in the energy and inventions of children. I close this chapter with a list of the questions born in my own classroom, revised at UNH, and given a challenging new life when I was privileged to pursue seven months of research in Barbara Cullere's first grade classroom in Closter, New Jersey.

- How do we construct elementary school classrooms in such a way that we enable children to perform the literature they read?
- How do children use gesture, intonation, and other features of speech to interpret texts dramatically?
- How do writers who have been immersed in the oral performance of poetry use rhythm, assonance, word choice, and other arresting features of language to suggest that they perceive the texts they create as scripts for performance?
- How can all children - both those who are already adept at creating performative texts and those who are reluctant to speak - develop more playful, malleable senses of themselves as speakers and performers?
CHAPTER II

COLLEGIAL ROOTS FOR RESEARCH

I was a member of an extended family that provided a link to my research site long before I entered Barbara Cullere’s first grade classroom in September, 1994. I’d been a member of a network of local elementary school teachers since the Fall of 1986, when I began to teach in Northern New Jersey. During my first week in the Caldwell-West Caldwell school system, two colleagues asked if I’d like to attend a meeting where teachers from several other districts gathered to write and discuss the ways in which they were implementing reading and writing workshops. Delicious dinners were involved. I was new to the community, new to the state, and eager to be part of such a group. Network meetings sounded like, and indeed proved to be, ideal places in which to speak with teachers whose interests meshed and whose conversations offered challenge, solace, and support.

Four years later, Barbara Cullere, one of the other first grade teachers in the network, and I discovered that we’d both registered for the same summer workshop at the University of New Hampshire. During the ensuing three-week program, Barbara told stories about her schooling that were a stark contrast to my own. A dramatic speaker and former music major, Barbara composes stories whenever she speaks. Each story she tells is a performative event colored by her use of gesture, intonation, and a studied sense of
timing. While this trait serves her well in the classroom today, it got her into constant trouble when she was a child.

When our summer workshop ended, Barbara and I kept tabs on what each other was doing in the classroom. She seemed intrigued by the element of performance I was weaving into my immersion units in poetry. The chance to mull this over with someone who knew from experience exactly what it meant to craft a performative text was a tremendous asset. Not only did our conversations help me to clarify my thinking, but in the midst of a whole language community in which everyone’s attention was turned exclusively to discursive uses of language, Barbara’s shared interest in its performative functions was unique.

In March of 1992, Barbara visited my classroom and watched children rehearsing and writing. One month later, I accepted a fellowship to the Ph.D. program in Reading and Writing Instruction at the University of New Hampshire. Barbara’s parting words were an invitation to pursue my doctoral research in her classroom. Two years later, after my course work and comprehensive exams were completed, I returned to New Jersey and accepted that offer.

By establishing a well-rooted collegial link as a base for conducting doctoral research in education, Barbara and I declared ourselves part of a new generation of teacher-researchers or “indigenous ethnographers.” (Ohnuki-Tierney, 584-6) Although I would be the only one who assumed the role of full-time researcher during the 1994-95 school year, the issues that were central to my dissertation were crucial to both of us. The process of sorting out what we heard and saw in Barbara’s classroom was invested
with a level of urgency not typical of most researcher-cooperating teacher relationships.

Although we applaud the variety of voices now conducting research in our field, neither Barbara nor I could help but feel a twinge of camaraderie with Nahua Rooney, a native of Papua, New Guinea, when we read what she’d told a NOVA reporter:

   I think, in the 1980's, we must stop anthropologists coming into the country... We have our own academics, we have our own Papua New Guineans who now can become anthropologists themselves.” (Rose, 39)

My position in Barbara’s classroom seemed well-rooted and familiar, but at the same time, from the children’s perspective, I had to adopt the role a kindly stranger who was there to listen and observe. James Clifford (1986) cautions that the accounts indigenous ethnographers, such as teacher-researchers, write will be both empowered and restricted in certain ways. Indeed. In the midst of an intensely familiar world, I had to adopt the eyes and ears of a stranger in order to problematize what I saw and heard. I had to decode the rhythms of a classroom culture, describe how it worked, and help others see how children crafted both dramatic texts and written texts whose lines were filled with signs of their rich contact with poetry as performers.

But my experience in the classroom, as well as the defining literacy stories Barbara and I told, also gave me access to rich ways of knowing which complemented my role as a participant-observer. These complementary forces create a healthy tension which played a crucial role in shaping this text which, as Bakhtin insists all texts or utterances are, is truly an interplay of voices. Distanced as well as deeply invested selves were constantly in dialogue as I pursued my research and composed a story in word and film. Situated at once on the boundaries of the children’s multiple worlds and my own,
my research “furrowed with the distant and barely audible echoes” (Bakhtin, 1986, 93) of the multiple selves I, like any teacher-researcher, brought to the table when I wrote. The ethnographer James Clifford welcomes multiple-voiced perspectives such as those offered by teacher-researchers as well as research which challenges the capacity of the objective eye alone to capture the essence of a culture.

Once cultures are no longer prefigured visually, ...it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than a visual paradigm, the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye and toward expressive speech (and gesture). The writer’s “voice” pervades and situates the analysis, and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced. ...The evocative, performative elements of ethnography are legitimated. ...From another angle we notice how much has been said, in criticism and praise, of the ethnographic gaze. But what of the ethnographic ear? (Clifford, 1986, 12)

Listening: Finding patterns in our own stories

I launched my doctoral research project one warm afternoon in August of 1994 by recording the stories Barbara and I told of our divergent experiences as language learners: readers, writers, speakers, and listeners. Transcribing that first set of stories helped me begin to trace the patterns and themes embedded within them. In search of additional data, I returned to a series of reflective pieces about literacy lessons I’d written while at UNH. The rest of Barbara’s stories weren’t written yet, but were ready to be told, brought to the surface not only by my invitation to talk about her school experiences, but also by the subtle, persistent feeling that some aspect of her literacy wasn’t part of the reading and writing conversations going on in the professional circles around her.
In order to carve out time for telling these stories and reflecting on daily classroom events, we did what many researchers do: we kept journals. Mine was written, but Barbara had a 1-year-old daughter at home and little time for writing. Because she is especially adept at composing stories when she speaks, I gave her a tape recorder and cassettes so that she could record her journal entries during her daily commutes. I listened to her taped entries or car tapes during my own drive home.

Once we shared that first set of stories, events which we’d almost forgotten begged to be told. These stories, as well as our reflections about what we’d observed in the classroom, filled the “backstage” (Goffman, 1959) spaces for informal conversation we struggled to maintain that Fall during hours spent apart from first graders, colleagues, and family. Many of the stories we told were about our experiences as students. Others were set in our homes or neighborhoods. The patterns that emerged helped us to be clear about what had drawn us to this particular type of research in the first place.

But unpacking our subjectivities enabled us to understand more than simply where the drive to pursue this research had come from or how our literacies happened to complement each other. Our responsiveness to the task of sorting out the questions which had made us restless set up a chain of answerability (Bakhtin, 1990) which affected the way in which we went on to pursue research in the classroom. We listened to and observed the children with a heightened awareness. We wanted them to learn to use their literacies, oralities, and classroom lives in order to become “world travelers” (Lugones), people who, throughout their lives, are able to use their literacies to create places for themselves in any number of communities. But we needed to begin this
process by bridging the distances between the worlds around ourselves: the whole language community, our out-of-step interest in performance, and the persistent memories of the classroom worlds we’d known as students.

This answerability to past selves, present children, and peers helped us work towards a new vision of literacy and orality in the elementary school classroom even as we privately mended the fabric of our own literacies. Anne Haas Dyson explains the concept of answerability, as inspired by Bakhtin, which is at the heart of teacher-research:

In addressing others, children compose texts that declare their existence in the world, but that existence is acknowledged, momentarily completed, only by the response of the other. All of us come to know ourselves as we take responsibility for responding to the other; our fates are bound together in dialogue.... For, in answering the children, we are also composing ourselves. (Dyson, 1993, 229-30)

Composing ourselves: Written out, written in

When given an open-ended invitation to tell about her early experiences as a reader, writer, or speaker, all but one of the positive stories Barbara told revolved around the image of herself as a performer. If you could listen to her taped notebook entries, you wouldn’t envision the child-as-writer that fills the pages of texts authored by writing process visionaries. You’d hear a child singing her way through her mother’s stack of show-tune albums, conducting mock interviews on tape, breezing her way through oral book reports, or walking on air when a teacher asked her to perform in a readers’ theater sketch for his other classes. You’d see a child whose principal mode of composition - performance - has stood outside the inner circle of a pedagogical movement dominated.
in the United States by attention to reading and writing processes.

My stories reveal a child who seldom, if ever, sought out the spotlight as a speaker. Aside from an occasional dance recital, where the faces of the audience were mercifully blurred by footlights, I reacted to performance the way a deer reacts to the headlights of oncoming cars. Even today, speaking before a large audience is, at best, a nominally enjoyable experience for me. I engage in it only when some strong conviction pushes me forward. However, from my earliest years, I've been a voracious reader. And I love to write. The composing I do best takes place on the page.

Fortunately, my mode of composition, though not indulged much in schools at the time, has since been written into literacy lesson. Thanks to the ground-breaking work of a generation of educators, the image of the child-as-writer has gained a central position on the stage of many grade school classrooms. However, with the exception of the work of Anne Haas Dyson, Vivian Paley, Perry Gilmore, David Booth, and Dorothy Heathcote, images of children as creators of performative texts have been somewhat scarce. This scarcity, combined with persistent historical and political factors, has maintained a certain widespread blindness to these powerful images.

Although they were hundreds of miles apart, the classrooms Barbara and I recalled were remarkably alike: basal readers, S. R. A. kits, and fragrant purple ditto's: the Everyclassroom of the mid-60's and 70's. Judging from our stories, neither of us thrived there. The overwhelming number of joyful literacy tales we each recalled came from home and neighborhood rather than from school. But our differing ways with words created a stark contrast between our abilities to cope with and be accepted in the
life of the classroom.

Barbara's gifts as an imaginative speaker constantly got her into trouble. By the time she began junior high, her name was on a list of potential troublemakers given to the school principal. In contrast, my reluctance to speak in front of large groups, for either communicative or performative functions, remained largely unchallenged. I was among those quiet students missing in interaction (Sadker and Sadker), but silence was a trait teachers seemed to welcome. An abundance of seat work and an emphasis on silent reading allowed for a higher student-to-teacher ratio. Good students, perhaps especially girls, applied themselves quietly to the work set before them. Those who did not fit this mold, like Barbara, were viewed as problems rather than as indicators that something might be amiss with current definitions of literacy education and the language arts.

My invisibility left me free to pursue my own ends: reading library books or contributing to the covert network of note-passing in the room. But Barbara's urge to talk in a performative manner made her more than a little visible to her teachers. Coupled with her need to talk in a school culture that discouraged it was the fact that a slight perceptual problem made her initial forays into reading and writing difficult. She needed to have her gifts as a performer recognized and made a central part of literacy lessons. Drama could have served as her bridge into reading and writing. Furthermore, studying the process of what she already did so well would have been a tremendous gift to the children in the class who were more like me.

We each needed teachers who would attend to our development as speakers and performers, as well as to our growth as readers and writers. We should have been
challenged to use the spoken word in a vast range of communicative and performative genres. Instead, silent students like me became experts at doing school and had only a limited idea of how to manipulate the spoken word in formal settings. Children like Barbara, who entered the door of their kindergarten classrooms with a well-developed knack for shaping performative texts, often saw themselves and their considerable talents as misfits in the system.

Barbara’s career also involved an early plunge into the writing process movement of the mid-80’s. For her, this movement wasn’t so much a matter of seeing herself reflected in a pedagogical mirror as it was knowing from experience that this, at last, was something that made sense. Her first graders could begin their literacy lessons by indulging their passion for reading and sharing the stories of their lives. Her sense of professionalism was also nurtured by a school system that already had outstanding grassroots leadership and links to the Teachers College Writing Project.

But as the years passed, Barbara began to be aware that something was missing. Barely noticeable to those of us who’d seen ourselves reflected so accurately in the child-as-writer stories told in writing process circles was the absence of stories about other modes of composition. When Barbara looked onto the stage of writing process pedagogy, she couldn’t see herself. The masks the players were wearing were all wrong. The image of the child as a creator of performative texts was still missing.

Although my classroom memories were wreathed in silence, my life outside of school was filled with an aurally rich blend of storytelling and music. My sister Linda and I would often sneak into my father’s study to listen to him record segments of his
weekly sermons when we were very young. Whenever he'd press the rewind button, the machine's butterscotch colored tape offered up the sounds we longed to hear: a series of mouse like, jittery sounds no member of his congregation ever heard.

Sermon appreciation over, we'd beg for the chance to record stories of our own. Once, when I was about three years old, I told my father that I wanted to record something called "Fish Story." I then took the microphone, pursed my lips, and quietly opened and closed my mouth, imitating the silent language of the fish I'd been watching in his office aquarium. My father should have brought that tape recorder home at night, because he, like his own father, was an excellent storyteller. Every night as we tried to keep sleep at bay, we'd listen to another installment of one of the thrillers he'd make up. Read-alouds from mere books seemed tame by comparison.

Music was also a constant backdrop to these years. In third grade, I began taking violin lessons from Sister Mary Callista, an elderly Sister of Mercy in Buffalo, New York. She'd been schooled in the Suzuki method, so we students memorized all the music we played during our initial years of instruction. However, most of us simply continued to memorize everything in the years that followed, because our weekly lessons seldom wound back to the task of teaching us how to read music as thoroughly as they might have. During the group practices she held in her studio each Saturday in Spring, Sister Callista would be reduced to swinging her bow at the hapless students who played well but had trouble sight reading the new pieces of music she'd set before them.

If my classroom teachers tried to maintain silence, their counterparts in the music department did not. Both of the public schools I attended had marvelous music
programs. Even our grade school, P.S.#72, had its own orchestra. The local chapters of the New York State Music Educators Association sponsored a steady stream of competitions and state sectional orchestras and the Director of Music for Buffalo’s schools frequently gave out tickets for Sunday concerts at Kleinhan’s Music Hall. More than once, in the midst of a drowsy winter afternoon, the Buffalo Philharmonic and Mahler would conspire to catch us off guard and scare us half to death.

The efforts of music teachers created a space within Buffalo’s public schools where there was a lively blend of music, talk, work, and recreation. Learning to read music and play with its shapes in sound was embedded in the richest of contexts. Given this backdrop to literacy instruction, elements of musicianship found their way into the ways in which I went about reading and writing. These processes didn’t necessarily match the neat, linear formats we were taught in English class. My writing process bore a closer resemblance to what took place in the music department. When I wrote, I created draft after messy draft, but the crafting was fueled by an intensity that eventually produced something worth listening to. When I read, I found myself listening for what Eudora Welty called the voice of the poem or story itself.

The cadence, whatever it is that asks you to believe, the feeling that resides in the printed word, reaches me through the reader-voice. I have supposed, but never found out, that this is the case with all readers - to read as listeners - and with all writers, to write as listeners. It may be part of the desire to write. (Welty, 11-12)

The habit of listening to that musical voice may also be one’s doorway into the sense-making processes of reading. During the last portion of my qualifying exams at UNH, my committee members asked me to explain how I had analyzed a poem for one
of the questions they’d posed. As I explained my reading process, I realized that my analysis of that poem - or of any poem - began with its musical elements. I recognized this trait in the children I taught before I realized how central it was to my own reading process.

My desire to read and write was born outside the classroom. I learned to listen to the voices of texts through storytelling and recording at home, and through school-based immersions in music. After listening to Barbara’s stories, I understood that her desire to sing and create performative oral texts had roots in similar ground. In spite of our decidedly different ways with words, our patterns of literacy and orality shared strong roots in music and performance. The literacy lessons we’d shaped individually in our own classrooms were influenced as much by the ways in which we listened for the music embedded in words as by the more mainstream habits of literary discourse or book talk that monopolized talk in the professional circles around us. The success of our work in the months of research that lay ahead would hinge on our awareness of these common roots and how we might exploit them as strengths.
CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

Gaining Access to a research site

Closter, New Jersey is a small middle and upper-middle class community in Bergen County, New Jersey. Half an hour’s commute from New York City, the district’s K-8 schools include children from a variety of European-American and Asian-American ethnic populations. Although I was eager to pursue my research in the midst of a diverse community, I chose Closter primarily because one of its teachers, my friend and fellow network member, Barbara Cullere, invited me into her first grade classroom. Barbara’s interest in the ways in which the performative functions of language could be woven into a primary grade language arts program were as urgent as my own. Since childhood, her ways with the spoken word have made her the center of attention. She dives into talk, composing musical, artful performances (Dyson, 1993) which are both her way of coming to know and a means of entertaining herself and others.

I also knew that Barbara had a marvelous literature-based classroom. The ways in which she teaches have long been fostered by the Closter Public Schools’ commitment to staff development and their association with the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. However, conversations in her learning community focus around ways of teaching reading and writing that largely by-pass the notion of the performative functions of language. The texts they talk about are written ones. Attention to what they
call quality talk abounds, but it is rooted in the communicative functions of language.

Children have rich conversations about books, but talk is generally not the vehicle they use to step into written texts or into the creation of oral texts as performers. Voice and gesture are not used to embody, transform, and compose the written word. Performance is not privileged as a central way of coming to know. Instead, a child’s experience of a text evolves in the midst of lively intellectual discussions. Creating an experience with voice and gesture to share with an audience, whether to publish a poem, jump into written texts through improvisation, or make a point in the midst of a formal debate or conversation - these oral texts still hover at the periphery of language arts lessons in Closter.

But this is by no means a local problem, nor was it a predictor of the quality of welcome that awaited me. Talk has remained at the periphery of reading instruction across the United States since the 1920's. The adult members of the Closter school community - parents, teachers, and administrators - who welcomed me into their midst were intrigued by my research. If my questions were not ones which currently held their attention, their open-minded tradition of inquiry into educational practice opened doors for my research and surrounded us in a web of encouragement. Even the children’s most cacophonous rehearsal hours were tolerated and greeted with friendly curiosity.

In March of 1994, I wrote to Dr. Jeffrey Feifer, the Superintendent of Schools in Closter, and described the research project I hoped to pursue in Barbara’s classroom during the 1994-5 school year. We met soon thereafter, and set in motion a process of admittance which included meetings with the building principal and a vote of approval.
from the school board.

During the summer months, I drafted letters of consent for the parents of the children in Barbara’s class in accordance with guidelines set by the Internal Review Board at the University of New Hampshire. These letters are intended to protect the rights of children and families whose lives are influenced by the presence of a university researcher in the classroom. In my letter, I included a description of my project and briefly defined the role I would play in Barbara’s classroom during the first seven months of the 1994-5 school year.

I also asked parents to discuss my research and the permission process with their children in terms they could understand. Although I planned to send these letters home on or before the first day of the Fall semester, the school’s principal advised me to wait. Each child would carry home such a flood of official forms during the first two weeks of school that the letters of consent which were so essential to my research might get lost in the shuffle. Without a chance to first make a detailed presentation to the parents, the letters of consent might also trigger a frenzy of misunderstanding.

Dreading the prospect of misinformation and recognizing the importance of the ritual September exchange of paperwork between home and school, I waited to distribute my letters of consent until Back-to-School Night, an informational evening held during the third week of school year. By then, I had already introduced myself to most of the parents when we met casually before or after school. On Back-to-School Night, I had an opportunity to speak with them formally. Barbara launched the evening by introducing parents to the pulse of her classroom: curriculum, daily routines, and other concerns.
Then she introduced me. I described my research, the role I would play as a participant observer, the various types of data I would collect, and answered questions before I distributed the letters.

By the following Monday, all the forms had been signed and returned. Not one parent objected to my presence in the classroom or to the data gathering work I would conduct as I listened to and learned from their children. That morning I also reminded the children of what I had told them on the first day of school. They did not have to be part of my research. School can be a busy place without the presence of a researcher listening and looking in as you speak, read, write, draw, and play. Even a quiet participant-observer who had no intention of taking on the authoritative role of teacher might sometimes be too much to tolerate. They could decline interaction with me whenever they chose. The children told me that yes, they understood, and that they had also discussed the process with their parents. They then signed brief statements of assent.

Maintaining access to my research site meant acknowledging that my presence could potentially be an encumbrance, not just to Barbara, but also to other teachers in the building. Reciprocity had to be reflected in the subtleties of daily interaction. Because I would photocopy reams of student work, I asked permission to use the school's photocopier during low-usage hours. When that permission was granted, I purchased a large carton of photocopier paper and delivered it to the office. I also made use of the school's uncomplicated, sturdy camcorder, but worked around its occasional use by teachers. Throughout the course of the year, I also made purchases for Barbara's
classroom: a large screen microscope, four hand-held tape recorders for use by partners during rehearsals, and another tape recorder and tapes for Barbara’s recorded notebooks. I did not attend faculty meetings, but met informally with teachers in the hallway or during the lunch hour. I was already well acquainted with two teachers and the district’s staff developer because we had been members of the same writing teachers’ network for years.

When the school year began, I was in Barbara’s classroom four days a week. Although our immersion unit would not begin until January, I wanted ample time to get to know the culture of the classroom and the ways with words of its children. I also knew that in order to be an effective participant-observer, I needed to be part of daily classroom life from the first day of school, not a startling mid-year addition. The children understood that it was my job to learn from them, take notes, make tape recordings, listen in, and observe. They treated me as an adult friend, and graciously let me listen into asides that were intended for each other. As a result, I got to know them from angles that weren’t always available to Barbara, who was, after all, in charge of the entire classroom.

My field notes, taken from this backstage perspective among children and then shared with Barbara, helped both of us get to know the children. Our observations and reflections, whether shared on paper, on tape, or in person, also proved to feed each others’ understanding in important ways. Because we worked in tandem, we could test our perspectives, wonder aloud, or laugh together. Although we found that we occasionally needed to spend time apart, the collegial model of two adults in one
classroom, balancing the jobs of teacher and researcher, made us wish it were part of our everyday teaching lives and not a seven month aberration.

In previous years I had pursued immersion units in my own classroom while playing the roles of both teacher and researcher. Exhilarating though it was, I drove myself into a state of complete exhaustion each year. Worse than the exhaustion was the awareness that, in spite of my efforts, vast quantities of data had slipped through my fingers. The freedom to delve completely into just one role - that of researcher - was a rare privilege.

Participant-observers shed most of the authoritative roles adults normally play in schools in order to gain access to the rich variety and quantity of data that help them describe a particular classroom or child. When one’s research includes a study of children’s oral language, the task of creating retrievable texts to study takes enormous reserves of time and energy. Technological advances will eventually make the process of transcribing children’s voices from audio and videotape easier and within the budgets of teacher-researchers. When it does, the intensity with which educators study children’s talk will undergo a revolution. A comparatively unstudied ocean will slowly be charted, perhaps by classroom teachers. But as a solitary researcher with access to today’s standard recording and transcribing devices, I could not have conducted thorough research on oral language while playing both the roles of teacher and researcher.

I never found a satisfactory solution to the problem of background noise on audiotapes. The equipment within my budget seemed to gather background noise more efficiently than it did children’s voices, but the voices were there, and eventually I made
the transcriptions I needed. When I attempted to find someone to help transcribe, I
found that typists lacked the detailed recall of classroom contexts that would have
sustained their ability to pick conversations out from the noise on tapes. Although flat
microphones or clip-ons might have eliminated some of the background noise, they are
better constructed for use in boardrooms than in classrooms full of active first graders. A
sizable investment might have been lost in an instant.

Combining through the data

After the permission process was complete, my data collection began in earnest.
During the first three weeks of the school year, I had taken in the pulse of the classroom
in large brush strokes. I made tape recordings of whole class discussions and sat on the
periphery of large and small groups, scribbling notes into stiff-backed legal tablets that
proved to be the most mobile and least intrusive way of taking field notes in a grade
school classroom. Even with ample use of abbreviations, I took twenty-five to thirty
pages of notes each day and had hours of transcriptions to type when I returned home.

Driven more by fatigue than discretion, I initially transcribed entire audiotapes.
But as I poured over those late-night transcriptions by the light of day, I realized that
arresting features of the children's interaction had eluded me when I simply listened to
tapes and took notes on what I thought were their most interesting segments. In spite of
Barbara's efforts to the contrary, some children were all but missing in verbal
interaction. In large groups they rarely spoke unless called on. In small groups, they
played the role of supportive listeners, affirming and extending the ideas of their
classmates if they spoke at all. There were as many quiet girls as quiet boys, and
outspoken girls as outspoken boys in the class. The roles these first graders played as speakers were still not beset - or perhaps as beset - by the social, cultural, and gender-role complications that will influence their classroom lives as adolescence approaches.

My field notes confirmed the patterns of talk caught by my audiotapes, but they also caught the presence of an inaudible web of facial expressions and gestures that indicated the involvement of quiet children in group interaction. Some often looked as if they were on the brink of jumping into a conversation, but didn’t quite know how to make that final leap. Sensing that a response was expected, others kept their eyes cast down or away as if they hoped they would not be singled out.

The silence of these children did not indicate a lack of involvement in the life of the group. In their gestures, if not in their words, I could trace the strands that knit them into the fabric of community interaction. They were the only children who moved over to give latecomers a place to sit without being prompted by an adult. When peers spoke, they were far more likely to turn and look at the speaker than were the children who were waiting, as it were, for their turns to speak. If some children spoke infrequently, they read the faces, gestures, and moods of their peers. Without the use of both audiotapes and hand-written notes, I might have missed the roles quiet children played in a communicative duet of voice and gesture.

Dialogues with Barbara were a catalyst to the ways in which each of us came to know the children. Beginning in the first week of the school year, she read and wrote responses to my class notes two or three times a week while I listened to the tapes she made during her daily commutes. Towards the end of September, Barbara read an entry
about the aside one quiet child made in my presence that indicated how deeply she had been engaged in a whole group discussion. Initially frustrated by that child’s complete silence, Barbara wrote, “Wow! I really feel that I am getting to know some of these [quiet] kids through reading your notes.” A week earlier she had wondered aloud about whether that same child liked her or wanted to be in her class. Barbara mistook verbal reserve for aloofness and a certain distaste for her performative ways with words.

I had to be equally aware of my own miscue patterns. As a shy person, I grew up assuming that the seemingly confident speakers around me must not be subject to the barrage of insecurities that plagued me. If my speech patterns faltered in the face of audience attention, theirs switched into an entertainment mode, one that seemed to stem from immense reserves of confidence. But as both one case study and Barbara were to show me, this assumption was misguided. Two highly verbal, performative children spent the first week of the year in relative silence, edgily erased the miniscule mistakes they made in print, and kept their attention riveted on Barbara. As we moved into the second and third weeks of September, they stepped away from their reserve and became the assertive, entertaining speakers we knew for the rest of the year.

I recorded the transition of one of these children from braid-chewing angst to the sparkling center of attention in my field notes, and in these pages, Barbara recognized a glimpse of her younger self. “Danielle’s a perfectionist, like me,” she wrote. “She’s hard on herself, she doubts herself, but she loves to talk. Everyone turns to hear what she’s going to say or how she’s going to say it. Now that she feels at home, she’ll have fun with that, but watch her. The eye contact, the uncertainty that we saw during the first
weeks? That won’t go away.” She was right. Barbara’s knowledge of her childhood self continued to provide an uncannily accurate barometer for gauging her interactions with and observations of Danielle.

By the end of September, several other children’s stories had also begun to stand out from the reams of notes I had taken. It was time to narrow the focus and select several students whose contrasting stories might teach us about their ways with the written and spoken word.

Selection of case studies

When October began, I selected five children as case studies. In subsequent months, I narrowed that list to four children, and then only three. Each child actually seemed to choose me, but perhaps they stood out because their complementary ways with words promised to build an intriguing set of contrasts about how children grow as language users. Danielle, the first child, was very much like Barbara: an engaging, performative speaker who created far more oral texts than written ones. The second child, Sara, was more like me: shy, nurturing, and reluctant to make her voice heard in public circles. The last child, Christina, was the Everychild As Writer whose images fill the pages of writing process texts published in the 1980’s. Although she was reluctant to put her notebook aside for performance workshop, or, for that matter, for any activity other than reading, Christina’s plunge into the creation of dramatic oral texts profoundly influenced her growth as a reader, writer, and speaker.

All the children I selected as case studies were girls. I could just as easily have selected a group of boys or one made up of both boys and girls whose ways with written
and spoken language would have presented similar contrasts. I certainly found equal numbers of extroverted and shy girls and boys in Barbara’s class. But I wanted readers to respect the integrity of each case study’s story without unintentionally inviting them to look through interpretive frames that might attribute the children’s contrasting ways with words primarily to socialized gender-role differences. If Danielle’s story had been replaced by that of Matthew, would readers have too easily attributed his performative ways with words to the ways in which the voices and opinions of boys are often privileged in some households and classrooms? All of the children in Barbara’s class were just six or seven years old. Tremendous differences in the ways in which they used language in the official world of school as readers, writers, and speakers were not yet as defined or as strongly influenced by gender-role complications as they might well later be.

Nor did I want to diminish the importance of any parent’s story about how his or her child had, since infancy, been perhaps a bit shy around strangers or remarkably eager to get the attention of others. There are powerful influences, both hereditary and socially constructed, at work in the lives of every child who walks into our classrooms. Both strands play profound roles in their lives as language users. I wanted readers to focus on the wonderfully elastic sense of self six year olds - shy, extroverted, or somewhere in between - bring to their classrooms along with their other differences. My research is concerned with recognizing and using this pivotal moment. In their still profoundly elastic senses of self and what they might do as speakers, readers, and writers lies the spark that fueled my research. We who teach elementary school students and spend
hours with them each day have unparalleled opportunities to create a space in children’s lives where their sense of private and public uses of voice can be profoundly influenced.

After they played a role in granting me access to their children’s classroom, parents continued to play an important role in my work. When I originally selected five case studies, each child’s parents signed a second letter of consent. One father volunteered to be interviewed at length about his lifelong interest in dramatic performance. Most parents supplied anecdotal stories whenever we met in the hallway or outside the school. When I completed a chapter about one of my case studies, I always sent a draft to that child’s parents and asked if they thought I had captured an accurate image of their daughter. All of them approved.

When they read the final drafts, parents asked if their daughters’ real first names could be used in my dissertation. The portraits of their children were accurate and they were proud. They were also concerned that their daughters would receive acknowledgment in print for the poems they had written. One mother, whose daughter was not selected as a case study, but whose poems and interviews figure powerfully in my dissertation, said that her daughter would be angry if her real name wasn’t linked to the poems she had written or the reflections she made.

This was a new consideration. As a poet, I agreed. As a researcher, I had some reservations. The permission slips that originally gave me access to my research site stipulated that a pseudonym would be used for each child in both my class notes and in any published piece. In addition to parental requests and personal empathy, several other factors contributed to my eventual decision to use each case study’s real first name. Due
to the reconstruction of school buildings in the district, the children no longer attend classes in the same school in which this study took place. They are also now several years older, so a certain anonymity has crept into the actual lives of the children whose images are preserved here as first graders.

Barbara and I also found that the children jumped into a self-styled performance ritual of introducing themselves to the camcorder and their audience members before they performed poems. They linked their names to oral texts as performers just as writers insist that their names be linked in print to the books and articles they publish. The children wanted to be sure that their audiences knew them. Of course, their names could have been dubbed out, or I could have refrained from showing portions of their taped rehearsals to teachers. But when I present my work and talk about the rehearsal process, teachers want to hear the children's voices. They want to see their expressive faces. When the children's verbal signatures on their performance clips are dubbed out, the performance itself doesn't seem whole. It's rather like reading only half of one of their poems. When I submitted revised permission slips to the parents of each case study, I made sure that I also asked for and received their permission to show selected clips from rehearsal tapes in conference presentations.

In addition to field notes, transcriptions, and audio and videotaped records of daily classroom life, I made files of each case study's writing: notebook entries, chapbooks, published poetry collections, and notes, plans, and lists each child prepared for adult and peer consumption. Just before the poetry project began, I waded through a semester's collection of class notes, videotape transcripts, and interviews about each case.
study and opened a computer file on each child. As I added material to the file, I expanded or clarified the comments I had originally scribbled in the margins of my handwritten notes. For safety’s sake, I stored a hard copy of each computer file with the files on the children’s writing. Transcripts of each child’s rehearsals and on-going interviews were later added.

Interviews were another potent source of information because they gave children a chance to reflect at greater length and with more time for puzzling aloud than we found in the classroom. We met in the quietest spaces available: the hallway or a book storage room a few doors away. Throughout the course of my research, I included all five of the children who had originally been selected as case studies in these interviews. They were accustomed to my attention and had fallen into subtle habits of rehearsing together. When I eliminated two of these children as case studies because their stories closely paralleled those of other children, it seemed pointless to exclude them from our conversations. They were part of a cohesive group and their presence never failed to help the others strengthen or clarify what they wanted to say.

When I returned to interview these children in their new school building two years later, they picked up their conversations about rehearsals, performance, reading, and writing as if only two weeks had passed since we last spoke. Their reflections about their experiences in first grade had deepened and matured. The intensity was startling. I expected their memories of the project to have diminished, but instead, they were eager to talk about how that experience still affected them as readers, writers, and speakers.

In search of the historical roots of orality in grade school literacy programs across
the United States, I used both the archives of the National Council of Teachers of English
and the Special Collections department of Milbank Memorial Library at Teachers
College, Columbia University. With their assistance, I pursued two areas of inquiry: the
declamation movement of the 19th century and the silent reading movement of the early
20th century. Both collections provided access to original student textbooks and
professional journals from school boards and English, Elementary, and Vocational
Education. At Teachers College, I also had access to the archives of the New York City
Board of Education.

Much of the material in these collections was in fragile condition. Comparatively
little has been preserved on microfilm. The National Council of Teachers of English
graciously photocopied and sent the documents I requested, but because many of the
books from the 19th century could not be photocopied, I spent weeks in the Special
Collections department at Teachers College copying material by hand. At the end of
each day, my right hand was badly cramped, and I felt numb, stunned by the amount of
research on our own history that now sits virtually untapped in archival collections. With
room in my dissertation for only a chapter of data on the historical roots of my subject, I
collected enough material for a volume.
CHAPTER IV

FRAMEWORKS OF THE POETRY PROJECT

Gathering resources:

The best possible resource for the reading material needed for an immersion unit such as this is a three-ring binder filled with hundreds of poems that the owner of that binder happens to love. Teachers can build fantastic, idiosyncratic collections that include the work of adult poets as well as their own students. Gathering and sorting these collections is a time-consuming task that must be fueled and informed by a love for the genre and an abiding concern for one's students. Without an abiding commitment to both, an immersion unit will fail.

Over-preparation of reading materials for the first three weeks of the Poetry Project was key. Barbara and I wanted the children to be focused as they set out on their journey, but our ability to help them hinged on our own readiness. Before we left for the holidays, a file of more than forty multiple-copy sets of poems waited on the windowsill, along with boxes of glue sticks, high lighter markers, and safety scissors. Another small basket held a collection of homemade chapbooks in which the children would publish the poems they wrote. On the half-filled “Sounds Like Poetry” section of the chalkboard were snippets of the children's poetic descriptions drawn from their talk and writing.
during their December author's study of William Steig's books.

The children and their parents were ready, too. Reminder letters were sent home two weeks before the holidays. Children brought in thick, spiral bound notebooks which they would use to house what they called ordinary entries such as might be found in any writer's notebook. But because we wanted to encourage the spillover of language from their immersion in the reading and performance of poetry, the children's notebooks would also house responses to poetry and the rehearsal notes, plans, and lists of advice they wrote during performance workshop.

Gathering a notebook of favorite poems can become a habit. My collection was born the summer before my first immersion unit. I found unique, eye-catching collections of poetry in libraries and bookstores, but some of my favorite poems were hiding in thick, dusty-looking volumes which hadn't been checked out of the adult's section of the library in years. If I loved a poem, I made a photocopy of it and jotted a reference on the reverse side. Then I sorted out the poems I wanted to use in my teaching and trimmed off the ocean of 8 1/2 x 11 inch white paper in which they usually swam. Then I stuffed them in a large manilla folder and waited until a month before the beginning of the immersion unit.

Choosing initial lessons

One night, I took the poems I'd collected out of the over-stuffed folder and began to sort. My intention was to build about fifty short stacks of poems. Each stack would include would be designed to direct children's attention to a specific feature of the genre: brief immersions into the work of one poet, poems in which consonant sounds served to
give them a certain bite or softness, and poems that featured intense imagery, unusual word choice, or uses of repetition. I planned to select one to three poems from each stack, glue them onto a sturdy sheet of paper, and place the sheet in my notebook, ready for photocopying. Most of these poems were destined to be part of both Reading and Writing Workshops. Others, such as “My Favorite Word,” by James and Lucia Hymes, “Umbilical,” by Eve Merriam, or “Jabberwocky” by Lewis Carroll would be introduced as children took their first steps into performance.

Every surface in my livingroom, even the rows of swirled designs on my oriental rug, was soon covered with stacks of poems. I was overwhelmed. The poems I had collected could lend themselves to hundreds of configurations. I was forced to decide what my students most needed to notice about poetry. I already knew that they loved it. But now I could to introduce them to elements of the poet’s craft. If I structured each day’s selection around one of these elements, I thought that perhaps the children would be better equipped to make discoveries of their own.

One important lesson was already evident in some of the stacks of poems that were making it difficult to walk around my livingroom. They centered around intense images that evoked strong emotional responses. I picked these short poems as a starting place because I wanted to show the children that for me, poetry is like a house which has no front door. You can’t get inside emotion, where a poem is born and where a reader encounters it, by taking the most obvious route.

Intense images are one of the passageways in that poets construct with words. When Barbara planned the first two weeks of her immersion unit, she, too, selected a
variety of short poems that revolved around one compelling image. She spoke about how her class might react to these poems.

We’ll ask them to close their eyes and listen. And after the first time through, I can guarantee they’ll have plenty to say. Or most of them will. They’ll go on and on about what it made them see, (or) about what pictures they saw. If I read it again, they’ll come up with more. Older kids - Well, I don’t think they would say as much, but first graders don’t care what their friends think.

One of the gifts of working with very young children is that they hold back so little. That, coupled with the fact that they are as yet comparatively unbound by conventions of descriptive language, means that almost from the start, a first grade classroom can be filled with astonishingly fresh, rich talk about poetry.

Plunging into Reading Workshop

The aesthetic or undergoing phase of experience is receptive. It involves surrender. But adequate yielding of the self is possible only through a controlled activity that may well be intense..... Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy. To steep ourselves in a subject-matter we have first to plunge into it.

(John Dewey, 1934, 53)

Framed by talk about what each image made them see, feelings at the heart of the children’s experience did, in fact, pour into their first conversations about poetry. They jumped from telling Barbara about what they saw when they closed their eyes to pinpointing the feelings a poem gave them or the memories it triggered. This plunge into aesthetic experience grew stronger as children learned more about a poet’s craft.

As their experience broadened, the dances between readers and texts became more intricate. So did their network of talk about poetry. Children who spent fifteen
minutes talking about three short poems during the first week of their immersion unit
spent twenty minutes discussing one poem two weeks later.

During the second week of the Poetry Project, Barbara widened the focus of talk
to include the subject of word choice. She read from her poster-sized copy of a poem
and paused to think aloud about what she had noticed. She circled one word here,
underlined a phrase there, and talked to the children about why certain words had caught
her attention. Before she read the poem again, she invited the children to use their
pencils to mark up their own copies.

Barbara also taught them about how they might save special words or phrases
from a poem by drawing rectangular boxes on their notebook pages or poetry sheets. She
drew a rectangle on her poster-sized copy and filled in the words that she and they agreed
were outstanding. Rectangles of every conceivable variety soon sprouted in the
children's notebooks. Some collections were made up of words which all began with the
same consonant sound. Other rectangles housed descriptive phrases like "silver-scaled
Dragon, or "flaming red."

As soon as the children noticed that word choice was part of a poet's craft, we
revived the practice of capturing and displaying fragments of their descriptive language
on the Sounds Like Poetry bulletin board. Their attention to each other's oral and written
language soared. The first generation of quotes was stored away in a notebook in order
to make room for new ones. One child worked overtime at inventing clever phrases
simply because he loved to see his words displayed in print. We didn't mind. The
practice of honoring unique ways with words set up a certain chemistry in the room. The
children's excitement about language was probably not coincidental with the beginnings of spillover.

By the end of the second week, traces of poetic language appeared in every child's notebook. A few children wrote poems that they referred to as "regular entries" until we asked them to read these entries aloud during writing conferences. When Barbara made the first poem written by a member of the class the focus of a mini-lesson, the children treated its author, Matthew, like a celebrity. They listened as Barbara read the poem he had written about a snake moving in the grass. She exploited its succession of /s/ sounds and spoke in a hushed voice. The children told Matthew that it gave them a mysterious feeling. They made boxes on their papers to house the words that stood out for them. Afterwards, there was a short-lived fad for writing poems about snakes.

It was time for us to take our cues for reading workshop from what we were beginning to see in the children's writing. Barbara and I noticed that the children unconsciously walked right into metaphors and similes whenever they wrote and occasionally when they spoke. We returned to our three ring binders and selected poems that would allow them to discover how poets use comparisons of various types. The children continued to talk about the images a poem made them see or unusual words that caught their attention. But they also noticed that comparing one thing to another could make a shiver of recognition go down their spines.

If a child didn't understand a metaphor, we explained it as best we could. In every first grade, there are always children who take figurative language in fairly literal ways. If a teacher attempts to clarify an image, they may dwell on their literal
interpretations, but the groundwork has been laid for their evolving levels of understanding. In the meantime, a child’s literal interpretation of metaphors can be intriguing. When the class read “The Toaster,” by William Jay Smith, five children had no idea that the silver-scaled dragon mentioned in the first line was actually a toaster. They drew tremendous pictures of dragons seated at the breakfast table, doing the work of a toaster by carefully aiming their fiery breath at slices of bread.

Barbara and I also asked the children to pay attention to the ideas, memories, and associations that came whispering into their thoughts whenever they read or listened to poetry. We knew that these personal connections were the wells from which they would eventually draw their own poems. By the time we were into the fourth week of the project, it wasn’t unusual for a child to stop in the middle of a whole group discussion and say, “Ooh! I have a connection!” with the same note of urgency he or she usually reserved for asking permission to make a trip down the hall. When we noticed urgent responses, we knew that good poems were on their way.

Children began to make comparisons between poems that suggested the growing realm of their experience. We framed several mini-lessons around the first such entries we found. For instance, in “Last Word” by Richard Margolis, the speaker takes a blunt, serious look at the aggravation of dealing with his older brother. But in “Lessons,” Margolis treats the same subject with a touch of wry humor. Learning that a poet could use different voices to broach one difficult subject was comforting. The talk that wound out of comparative readings like these seemed especially suited to helping children write about their own complicated feelings and relationships.
Reading Workshop: Protocols for response in whole group settings

If children do not acquire thoughtful habits of response in the whole group setting, they will probably not practice rigorous response in small groups. Chances are that the internalized conversations we expect them to have with the page as readers and writers will also be malnourished. When Barbara and I talked about the Shared Reading experience, we knew that our job consisted of much more than the careful selection of poems.

Text selection in all its complexity had to be paired with other equally important factors. We wanted everyone to be involved in group discussions about the poems we read, but after months of getting to know their habits as speakers, we knew that we needed to teach children ways of being involved. Some rarely spoke in the large group setting. Others wanted to talk all the time, but more than a few of them had trouble listening to what their peers had to say. We couldn’t assume that first graders already knew their way around book talk, but we also couldn’t assume that some of them even knew how to bring their voices into large group conversations. The following protocols are offered as a demonstration of planning for shared reading sessions which goes beyond the questions of text selection and skills taught.

1. Habits of careful listening precede talk: listening with a pencil

Expecting a child to know how to focus on a text as a reader or listener is as careless a notion as is expecting that they already know how to join in the networks of group talk in the classroom. One of the ways we found to help children focus on a poem was to ask them to mark up their texts as readers.
Marking up the text, or reading with a pencil, is one way of making obvious the ways good readers attend to even the finest features of text as they read. Children need us to unpack these strategies. It isn’t enough for us to demonstrate this process by marking up a poster-sized copies of the poems we read with them. That helps, but it doesn’t take children’s attentiveness to its deepest levels. Children need their own copies to mark up, a firm surface to write on, and a pencil or high-lighter pen. Clipboards aren’t essential. Many children prefer to grab large picture books from the book crates that line the edge of the rug and use them instead. Sharpened pencils or high lighter markers can be kept in containers near the rug.

The first time a class listens to a poem, they might close their eyes and drink in all the words and images, allowing them to resonate and stir their emotions. When their teacher reads a poem a second time, the children should be ready to underline or circle the parts of the poem that catch their attention: a single word, a phrase, or an entire line. Sometimes children will circle just one wonderful word or phrase. Other children will underline patterns of repeating consonants or rhyming words. Barbara’s class first noticed what they called a sandwich pattern of identical first and last lines in “Snail” by Federico Garcia Lorca. Circling this pattern on their own copies helped them to recognize the same feature in “Poem” by Langston Hughes. Barbara always added their discoveries to her poster-sized chart and encouraged the children to borrow the ideas they heard from each other for use in their written responses. Color coding what the whole class noticed on her poster-sized copy helped children to retrieve desirable bits of information while they wrote their responses.
Marking up a poem as a reader does more than call children’s attention to specific features of text. It also helps their teacher show them how just one powerful word or image can trigger an important personal connection. They might not have time to write about these connections in the whole group setting, but they can jot down a one or two word reminders or draw something to jog their memories later.

Underlining also seems to help children adopt a poet’s powerful uses of language. Without looking back at a poem, a child will make free use of a poet’s words or phrases when he or she writes, as if borrowing windows to look through. I don’t mind seeing this. It’s part of being so involved in what they read that they - and the language they use to structure their own experience - are changed.

2. Drawing everyone into the conversation

The silence of some children in the midst of circles where rich talk about poetry is going on can be truly frustrating. Barbara and I found a few ways of helping these children learn to join in. We broached the subject of talk in the same way in which we addressed any other subject. We designed mini-lessons and implemented certain protocols for talk that we began to implement in late November. The children continued to use these protocols throughout the Poetry Project.

Role-cards

Because Barbara’s students were already involved with drama and improvisation in Reading Workshop, every child knew what it meant to play a role. I recalled the ease with which they were now able to step into particular roles one afternoon after Barbara and I spoke about the silence of some children in large group settings. After three
months of practice, children were no longer frustrated by minor glitches in their improvisations. They plunged into a role and had fun as they got to know a character. It occurred to me that the role of speaker might be assigned, too.

I found a number of 5x7 cards in my desk. Four were orange and four were blue. On the front of the orange cards, I wrote the word “Speaker” and made a picture frame of the words “comment” and “question” around the edge of the card. The next day, when the children met on the rug for Reading Workshop, Barbara and I talked to them about the idea of assigned roles. Anyone could, of course, continue to add to a conversation, but if you got a role card marked “Speaker,” you needed to be ready to make a comment or ask a question. The children helped us draft question and comment prompts to print on reverse side of the cards.

Barbara then told a small group of children who were comfortable about speaking in large groups that she needed to coach them in ways they could help for the first few weeks we used role cards. Her purpose was dual. She wanted them to think of themselves as coaches, but she also needed to teach them how to recognize wait time and read facial expressions. She was not reprimanding children who made uncaring claims on air time. She was coaching children who were honestly as oblivious to the silent network of body language and eye contact around them as their shy friends were at a loss for how to join conversations.

Two weeks later, Barbara wrote the word “Piggyback” on the front of four blue 5x7 cards. When she introduced these role cards, she gave the children their first mini-lesson on what it meant to piggy-back on each other’s comments. Piggy-backing my way
into their conversation by design, I talked about patterns of teacher-student-teacher interaction. Playing the role of a student, I sat on the rug and directed all my comments to Barbara. The children complained that they felt left out. We then talked about ways of passing conversation around in other patterns. Barbara demonstrated how she might pose a question to a peer or acknowledge what he or she had said. We talked about how important it was for people in a community to learn how to talk with each other.

Piggy-backing habits took more awkward practice time to establish than did learning to add a simple comment or a question to a conversation centered around a teacher or a writer. Children had perhaps seen them demonstrated less frequently. But after three or four weeks, the children were beginning to piggyback on each other's statements even when they did not hold a role card.

Jerome Harste's "Say Something"

Barbara implemented Jerome Harste's "Say Something" (Harste and Burke, 1984, ) protocol for response during Shared Reading lessons in December. Basically, this protocol is designed to help children share ideas with each other first instead of directing all their energy to student-teacher interactions. The fact this protocol had a name helped children focus on the concept and its rules as if it were a game.

"Say Something" begins at the point when children might ordinarily raise their hands and wait for their teacher's attention. Instead, they are asked to turn to the person next to them and share their ideas. Later, these partners are responsible for sharing their ideas with the whole group.
Reading Workshop: Protocols for Written Response

A child’s written response to the poetry we read began the moment she sat on the rug with her classmates and used a pencil or highlighter marker to notice a poem with her mind’s ear. When she returned to her seat, she pasted her favorite poem from that day’s assortment into her notebook and began to write and draw a response. Because a child responded only to her favorite poem, she usually had a host of personal connections, memories, or associations that fueled her writing. When six-year-olds talk about associations, they don’t use that term any more than they would use the word metaphor or simile. Instead, a child might explain that a vivid memory of her grandmother came to her while she was looking at the cloudy sky by shrugging her shoulders and saying, “It just popped into my head.”

Barbara and I circulated during response time, helped children to cut out their poems, and listened to them talk about what they were going to write. About thirty minutes later, the group would meet back on the rug, where they shared what they had written and drawn. After two weeks of immersion in poetry as readers, the children’s written responses began to sound like poems. Indeed, they were often complete poems that needed no revision except, perhaps, a student-teacher conference about line breaks.
Reading Workshop: Sample Lessons

Day One

Three short poems about the night sky

which each revolved around one strong image

“Haiku” by Grace H. Lin

“Haiku” by Satoshi Iwai

“Winter Moon” by Langston Hughes

Lesson: One of the main objectives of this lesson was to get children attuned to recognizing strong imagery in poetry. After Barbara gave each child a copy of the poems, she asked them to close their eyes and listen as she read each aloud. While they listened, the children tried to see the picture the poem painted in their imaginations or on the “t.v. screen” behind their eyelids. Barbara read each poem twice, and then asked children to open their eyes and tell us what they’d seen.

After considerable discussion, the children returned to their tables, glued their favorite poems into their notebooks and wrote and drew about the images they had seen. Barbara and I circulated and focused their attention by asking them to tell us more about those images. Just before the mid-morning snack, we met again on the rug for a brief share circle. For homework, children shared their poems and entries with their parents. Many parents added a one or two line response of their own to their child’s notebook. We spoke to parents about these rituals in late September and sent a reminder note home before the immersion unit began. We wanted to make sure that we made every effort to include them as extended members of the classroom community.
Day Three: Three short poems
which feature strong metaphors and unusual word choices

"Dragon Smoke" by Lilian Moore

"A Modern Dragon" by Rowena Bastin Bennett

"The Toaster" by Myra Cohn Livingston

Lesson: This was a transitional group of poems. We wanted to show children that the images they would find in poetry couldn’t always be taken literally. Interesting surprises might in store. But we were prefacing ourselves. It would be another day or so before we talked at length about the way poets use comparisons to evoke strong images, moods, or associations. The day we introduced these poems, we primarily spoke about the way interesting word choices could ignite their imaginations.

When we first read “Dragon Smoke” by Lilian Moore and “A Modern Dragon” by Rowena Bastin Bennett, children circled or underlined unusual words or phrases that caught their attention, like huff, dragon smoke, roars, wriggles, all the earth trembles, and one yellow eye. Asking them to notice the words that arrested their attention made them pay closer attention to the text. It also drew their attention to the way certain lines, like “Breathe dragon smoke today!” moved them. In this case, it made them anxious to get outside and breathe “dragon smoke” at each other during recess.

First graders are at a magical age. Many aren’t completely and unequivocally able to distinguish between fantasy and reality. They loved the idea of breathing like dragons - or actually turning into dragons for a few minutes - when their breath was visible on cold winter days. Some had also seen commuter trains coming back from
Hoboken at night, so they were familiar with the image of Bennett's "modern dragons." These poems allowed us to draw attention to word choice, tap reservoirs of visual memories, and preface our study of how poets use comparisons. They also allowed Barbara's first graders to enjoy being six years old, an age when they could still choose to step away from the real world and imagine that either they or familiar commuter trains might actually be ferocious dragons.

Days Six and Eight: Alliteration and Mood

"Cat in Moonlight" by Douglas Gibson

"The Snake" by Karla Kuskin

Lesson: By the middle of the second week, the children's ability to respond to poetry was acquiring breadth. They talked about the pictures a poem made them see, a poet's use of repetition, favorite words or phrases, and a host of personal connections. Individual children who were especially given to reading aloud started to circle patterns of initial consonants and end-of-line rhymes. They also talked about the feeling a certain word or line gave them. Poems like these by Kuskin and Gibson allowed us to look closely at the subject of mood.

The children were now able to sustain longer conversations about poems, and the poems we read were becoming more complex. When Barbara read these two poems to the children, she asked them which one they'd like to talk about. Only one child, Matthew, chose Kuskin's poem. The other children opted for reading and responding to "Cat in Moonlight" by Douglas Gibson. I reassured Matthew that he would be free to respond to his favorite poem when he wrote in his notebook.
Barbara read the poem to the children twice, trying to exploit the pattern of /s/ and /w/ sounds and maintain a gentle, mysterious mood. When she read it a second time, the children marked up their texts to show what their minds’ ears noticed. Most of the children underlined appealing phrases like “moonlight’s milk” and a few of the words which had the letter s as an initial consonant. After they shared what they had noticed with a partner, they listened to Barbara read it again and raised their hands to tell the whole group what they had noticed.

Barbara marked up her poster-sized copy of the poem with highlighter markers to emphasize what they noticed. As each child added something to the list, patterns of /s/ and /w/ sounds came into view, color-coded by the markers. When the children commented on these patterns, Barbara heard her cue. Without using technical terms, she used their observations to draw attention to the way poets use alliteration and how, in this poem, the pattern of sounds suggests a certain mood.

When she read the poem again, the children closed their eyes and tried to pay attention to what sort of mood the poet was suggesting. Most of the children thought it sounded mysterious. They extended their talk about mood by discussing personal experiences or “connections” about watching cats move soundlessly or being out of doors at night. The children’s written responses were no longer one-faceted. Matthew wrote a response to Kuskin’s poem. Five days later, he wrote a poem about watching a snake move through tall grass. It made ample use of /s/ sounds and had a mysterious, tense mood.

One day after the class read “The Snake,” they read Robert Louis Stevenson’s
“Windy Nights” in performance workshop. This time, the children were quick to notice the patterns of consonant sounds and how the rhythm of the poem made them feel the hoof beats of the supposed night rider's horse.

**Day Eighteen: The Close Observation of Memories**

“*The Sea*” by Andrew Park

“*Waves*” by Ralph Fletcher

**Lesson:** When we reached the middle of the Poetry Project, children began to write long entries about family members or special memories. Some of these entries sounded like poems. Other children skimmed over the details which would have invited readers into their memories. We extended our talk about observations and day-dreaming to the notion that we could step back into memories, almost as if traveling there, in order to observe the details that would evoke feelings and strong images in the minds of readers.

“*The Sea*” by Andrew Park and “*Waves*” by Ralph Fletcher helped us to talk about this notion. When Andrew wrote “*The Sea*,” he was a six year old who was thinking back to the days spent on the beach during family vacations. He closed his eyes as he listened to Langston Hughes' poem “*Long Trip*” and imagined that he saw an image of waves making a “w” pattern on the surface of the ocean. At the time, he was surrounded by other six year olds who were learning to write, but in Andrew’s mind, they were experts compared with the child he had in mind. That toddler scribbled script-like lines on huge sheets of drawing paper while holding a crayon in his fist. Something about that image clicked, and Andrew wrote his poem. He didn’t write a bed-to-bed account of vacation days spent at the beach. He focused on one image and let his
imagination take him where it would.

In “Waves,” Ralph Fletcher brings that same focused energy to each of the types of wave he mentions, drifting from those we expect to encounter to others that surprise us. When Barbara’s students responded to his poem, they focused on one intense image that sparked an important memory. In more than one case, their responses were songs or poems, sparked, we hoped, by the poems we had read and our lesson about focusing in on the details hidden in one memory.

Day Thirty-Five: Responding to Classwide Concerns

“At Annika’s Place” by Siv Widerberg, translated by Verne Moberg

Lesson: As the weeks passed, the range of subjects children wrote about narrowed and they dug deeply into their obsessions. Reading and discussing poems that related to their concerns helped them gather the energy they needed to write the poems they’d been writing around for quite some time. “At Annika’s Place,” by Siv Widerberg was one of these triggering poems.

The children moved into habits of response that by now were routine. As Barbara read the poem, they underlined and circled the words and phrases that were important to them. Most of them circled the questions the adults at Annika’s house posed to the children. During the “Say Something” response that followed, we heard a range of personal connections. Most children could relate to times when they’d felt a little ignored at home. Some insisted that they loved to be treated as if they were almost grown-up while others argued that at times, it felt good to be treated as if they were very young. The debate that ensued made them eager to write.

108
At this point in the immersion unit, there were few distinctions between reading and writing workshops. Instead of writing a response to the poem, the children plunged back into writing entries and poems about their own family concerns. After a mid-morning snack, the children looked at a poem one of their peers was writing on her mixed feelings about having two younger brothers. We read her poem several times while she highlighted the parts that her peers told her sounded very strong. Her own opinion was that it still did not sound exactly right, but she appreciated their attention.

And that was that. We didn’t try to force more out of the lesson. The author didn’t feel that her poem was finished, but neither was she ready to move on. While she was at this stage, it simply helped to have others listen in. Paying attention to her draft also helped the members of her audience take such conversations into their inner talk about poems that still felt unfinished.

Performance Workshop

Performance workshop began ten days after we launched children’s immersion in poetry as readers. In many ways, performance marked a new facet of their immersion as readers, one in which their involvement with a text was more intimate than were habits of discussion and written response.

When performance workshop first began, a casual visitor might have assumed that we were about to jump into a shared reading lesson. The same props were there: a large poster-sized copy of a poem or two, individual copies for children to mark up, and an assembly of children on the rug. But the ways in which we would work with the text were entirely different. We jumped into these texts with voice and gesture. We talked
about the texts and marked them up, but neither of these practices matched our activities in Reading Workshop. Some of the practices that were integral to performance are discussed in the pages that follow.

Early Apprenticeships

Children didn’t so much learn to react to a poem in performance workshop as they did learn to interact with it as performers. In order to publish a poem with their voices, children began by marking up their text to show how they planned to use their voices, and then moved through a series of rehearsals. During rehearsals, they were coached by their teacher and peers, made numerous oral drafts, and assessed their progress. Finally, they performed the poems they selected before audiences of their peers at our Friday afternoon poetry parties.

Barbara’s students had been involved in a subtle series of apprenticeships in the art of performance since the beginning of the year. Each morning, the children would meet for twenty minutes of singing and dramatic readings of story poems. Within these noisy forums, even the quietest children joined in because their voices could get lost in the crowd. When the element of risk all but disappeared from dramatic speaking, they could let themselves have fun. They could try on the exaggerated expressions, gestures, and uses of voice they saw and heard around them.

When one extrovert first began experimenting with different voices in a story poem, the quiet child seated next to her looked over in surprise and smiled. When she glanced back at her own Jingle Book, she couldn’t concentrate. She kept turning to listen to her friend. Although I couldn’t hear her voice, I could see that the next time we
read that poem, she was imitating the gestures her extroverted friend was using. The children learned about experimenting with tone of voice, volume, pace, gesture, and facial expressions with each other, and in reaction to each other. These subtle networks of peer apprenticeships would continue to be their primary source of learning throughout the poetry project.

Demyystifying the performance process: Marking up the text

Because we hoped to demystify our narrow slice of performance, we focused on specific elements of craft. One of these elements of craft involved helping all the children gain an increased sense of control over the ways in which they used their voices. We did this, in part, by teaching children to mark up their texts as actors.

We used no standard shorthand. Few of the marks Barbara and I used, other than the habit of underlining or circling parts of the text, were adopted by all of the children. The marks they made were idiosyncratic, but they worked. Children fell into the habit of using their marked-up texts to remind themselves of their intentions. Barbara invited the children into this practice by asking them to help her plan how she could use her voice when she performed “Windy Nights.”

She elicited their opinions from the start. “Which sounds better?” she said, pointing to a line. “When I make it sound like this? Or like this?” Then she demonstrated. One version was fairly loud, and the other was quiet and tense. The children chose the latter. Barbara marked up the margins of her poster-sized copy of the poem to reflect their advice. “Hmm. Now let me read just the first verse and you tell me if I keep that sound in my voice. I think there are still a few rough places.”
Barbara also asked the children to help her find the places where she was rushing or mumbling. Whenever she demonstrated some new aspect of performance, she built in touches of pedestrian blunders and let the children coach her out of a snarl. By doing so, she taught them about the pitfalls people usually encounter when they first try to read a poem aloud in a performative way. She also taught the children to work with small chunks of text and to listen carefully to their own or their partners' rough drafts.

Children initially focused on one or two poems a day in whole group sessions. "Windy Nights," by Robert Louis Stevenson, "One Thing You Can Say About Roaring" and "If You, Like Me" by Karla Kuskin, and "The Flattered Flying Fish" by E. V. Rieu were among the poems we found useful during this period. We needed a common ground for conversation, a place where we were all involved in tracking our way through similar territory before we branched out. Working on the same poems also allowed us to talk about the various interpretations thoughtful performers might bring to a text.

Children also needed a chance to try out the various forms of rehearsals and see what worked best for them.

Even after children were ready to select their own poem, they were far too eager to perform in quantity than they were with any degree of quality. Without a one poem a week limit, which they initially insisted they did not need, they were crestfallen to find that their performances fell flat. When they saw that rushed efforts resulted in a restless, bored audience, they narrowed their focus and agreed that it was a good idea to concentrate on polishing just one poem a week. Barbara and I let them discover that responsibility for knowing their material throughly played a key role in their efforts to
reach an audience.

Styles of Rehearsal: Reading to the wall

Barbara introduced three different styles of rehearsals: reading to the wall, partner rehearsals, and taped oral drafts. The most primitive form, reading to the wall, was a rehearsal technique that had a broad range of appeal. To outsiders, reading to the wall looks strange. Children are scattered around the classroom reading aloud to no one in particular and gesturing while seated underneath tables or facing into bookcases or walls. Many children read to the wall because they want to get through the initial phase of their rehearsals in relative privacy. They need a day or two apart from peers so they can get past the awkward stage of making written text flow smoothly from their lips.

Quiet children used this form of rehearsal for much longer periods of time. They needed to get comfortable with listening to the sound of their own voices without having an audience listen in. The mere thought of having multiple pairs of eyes turn in their direction was enough to silence some children when they first began to rehearse. They preferred to begin the rehearsal process with an audience that was completely imaginary.

Barbara was often their first real partner. She would find a relatively isolated spot in the classroom and ask them to mirror her facial expressions and gestures so that they learned to anticipate their appearance in the eyes of their audiences. They needed her help in order to gain a conscious sense of control over the masks they presented. Barbara, who had excelled at performative talk her entire life, learned that she couldn’t assume that some children had any idea of how to look out at an audience, use facial expression, or adopt relaxed postures when they performed. Mimicing her expressions,
gestures, and tone of voice helped these children reach a point where they could begin to work with peers.

When I watched Barbara working with them, I thought how lucky they were to have a teacher who cared enough to address their needs. Barbara knew how to jolly the shyest children out of their fear and make these exercises seem like games. The chemistry she created was probably the single most important factor in helping them learn to try on new masks. The fact that Barbara also had a mental checklist of all the elements of performance they needed to learn was helpful. But without an understanding of the places from which these children approached performance, even a highly skilled performer could not have established a climate that let these children find a way in.

Styles of rehearsal: Partnerships

Most children eventually selected a partner or two with whom they worked each day. They concentrated on all the musical and expressive physical elements of their performances. Partner rehearsals offered children a chance to shuttle back and forth between the roles of coach and performer. Coaches had to learn to be active listeners. One of their most basic responsibilities was to affirm what their partner was doing well or working hard on before they mentioned what a facet still needed work. A coach might tell her partner that she noticed that he wasn’t rushing through his poem any more, and that working on just one verse at a time had helped him to iron out all the rough spots. Now he needed to work on the mood. Did he want it to sound very scary or just a little mysterious? Teaching these strategies took place both during mini-lessons and while Barbara and I circulated around the room.
The most performative children had no use for reading to the wall. When they walked into a rehearsal, they wanted feedback from a real partner who wouldn't mince words. Reserved children needed the support of partners who could help them realize that any aspect of their performance was good. Once that was established, they could take on new challenges. It was important that each child could select a rehearsal form that suited his or her needs.

Many children preferred not to perform their own poems at our Friday afternoon poetry parties. Initially, we looked at the poems they chose and concluded that children preferred to perform poems that were full of rhythm and rhyme. That was partly true. But children bare their souls in the poems they write. They aren’t always anxious to share them with an audience of less-than-intimate friends.

**Styles of rehearsal: Videotaped oral drafts**

When a child had put forth her best efforts at rehearsing a poem, we videotaped several oral drafts. Some children initially felt a little nervous about sitting in front of the camcorder. They raced or mumbled their way through drafts and often needed me to prompt from behind the camera. But eventually they realized that it was an informal setting. They were taping drafts, not performances.

When children realized that, the fear factor disappeared. They relaxed and rehearsed productively. After each clip, I asked children to assess what they had done well and what they needed to work on next. If they could not reflect on either facet of their reflection, I helped them. When a child began again, he focused on improving only one feature of his draft.
Background noise and standard equipment made it difficult to review videotaped drafts with children. Fortunately, we found that the presence of the camera was actually more important to the rehearsal process than conducting tape review sessions. Sitting in front of a camera helped children to channel their energy into their performances. If I had not been conducting research, it would have been tempting to film with an empty camera.

Rehearsal devices

Children invented wonderful ideas about the devices that helped them rehearse. The “Performance Tips” they added to their notebooks were hauntingly similar to books in which writers share bits of wisdom about the writing process with each other. The following list is a collection of five rehearsal devices that Barbara and her students made up in order to help themselves.

1. Pretend the camera is an ice cream cone

Danielle found it easy to gaze directly into the lens of a camera and smile. Her friends, who felt a little more intimidated about looking back at the camera’s empty stare, asked her what they should do. She told them her secret. When she looked into the lens of the camera, she pretended that she was actually looking at an ice cream cone. Danielle’s idea helped her friends to look at the camera lens with the intensity and focus they needed. Because the idea of staring at an ice cream cone instead of a camera also struck them as a funny idea, it made them smile and take their nervousness less seriously.
2. Make your own camera

Richard got tired of waiting for me to film several drafts of the poem he and his partner were rehearsing. He went to the paper station, rolled a single sheet of 8 ½ by 11 inch paper into a cone and began to “film” his partner. The other children in the class loved the idea. Although they didn’t replace the camcorder, paper cone cameras became standard equipment. Looking into them helped children bring a heightened sense of energy and focus to the advanced stages of their rehearsals.

3. Invent an audience

Sarah spent long periods of time reading to the wall because she felt apprehensive about looking at an audience. When I visited her in third grade, she said that she still preferred to rehearse the same way, but when she faced the classroom wall in her new school building, she pretended that the thousands of speckles that made up the textured surface of each cinder block were the faces of her audience members. Later, when she looked out at a real audience, she radiated confidence. Sarah coped with her fear of audience contact by perfecting the art of seeming to look at people, just as she had let her eyes gloss over the sea of faces in the cinder blocks during rehearsals.

4. Mirroring

Barbara asked children who had trouble making their facial expressions reflect the mood they hoped to convey to spend four or five minutes mirroring her. To warm up, they would try the simplest of movements, like the slight raising of an eyebrow. Then they focused on saying just one line or even just a phrase from the child’s poem while he or she echoed Barbara’s tone and mirrored her facial expressions. Barbara offered
several mini-lessons about these practices during Performance Workshop, but their popularity preceded her lessons. The children had already noticed her working with some of their quiet peers, and thought that it looked like fun. Rehearsal partners also made ample use of echoing without mirroring to address problems of pace, clarity, and expressiveness.

5. Setting parameters: Work on one chunk at a time

Some rehearsal problems needed to be tackled from an adult's perspective. When Barbara saw that one group was having trouble discerning the difference between racing through a poem ten times and actually rehearsing, she stepped in. Children who dearly wanted to perform humorous poems were especially prone to doing a series of sing-songy multiple readings. They assumed that because the words to a poem were funny, their performances would be equally side-splitting. Instead, they virtually killed off all the humor in their poems.

Barbara told them flatly that they had to focus on one verse of the poem and say it in conversational tones of voice. She would help by asking them to echo her. After they worked together for ten minutes, Barbara let them know that she expected them to use this technique for a week. They also needed to set a goal for the meeting they would have with her in two days. The children agreed to figure out a set of subtle movements that would match one verse. Such movements might have looked a little artificial on tape, but they helped children remember to speak at a slower pace and in more modulated tones. Because the use of these gestures made children see themselves as actors, they were also apt to use more facial expression.
Sample Lessons: Performance Workshop

Whole class lesson: Beat, Mood, Alliteration

“Windy Nights” by Robert Louis Stevenson

Children listened for the mood of this poem long before they picked up their pencils to mark up their copies. They felt the mood of this poem best when they closed their eyes and listened. Then they patted out the beat softly on their knees while Barbara read it again. She asked the children if they would help her go back into the poem to rehearse it. She was still confused about which mood she would use. Should it sound scary or just a little tense? Was the speaker of the poem completely frightened, or was he or she also fascinated by the night noises? Barbara then read the first verse of “Windy Nights” in ways that reflected each mood. Most of the children preferred when she made the poem only somewhat tense and spoke in a hushed voice.

Then the children helped Barbara mark up her text to show how she had used her voice. They concentrated on one line at a time. Several children noticed how she had emphasized the initial /w/ sound at the beginning of many words. “Hm. I didn’t realize I was doing that, but I did notice that there is a pattern of /w/ sounds in this poem,” Barbara said. “Look. Here and here and - .” She highlighted every w in the stanza. “Maybe I’ve been trying to put the sound of the wind into my voice. Let me try it again.” She repeated the first two lines. “Like that?” she asked. The children nodded. Barbara moved on to the second verse.

By inviting them into her rehearsal process, Barbara helped her students anticipate the conversations they would be having with the page and with each other.

119
She demonstrated that it helped to focus on one stanza, how she needed to experiment with different moods, and how one interpretation could be equally as valid as another.

**Individual lesson: Putting down the paper**

"For a Bird" by Myra Cohn Livingston

Danielle was a confident, entertaining speaker. But even she was prone to rushing a little and mumbling when she first started to rehearse. For days, she and her partner worked on slowing down her pace when she read "For a Bird" by Myra Cohn Livingston. Danielle also worked on matching her voice to the mood of the poem. Racing through it didn’t help her to convey the gentle, sad tone she felt she needed.

When she met with me to tape a series of oral drafts, I was struck by the fact that she was still looking down at her printed copy of the poem. The fact that I could not see her face made it hard for me to enter into the world of the poem. All the emotion she conveyed in expressive eyes was lost.

But Danielle initially felt that she was not ready to put her paper down. When I finally asked if she would give it a try, I was ready to give her a few silent prompts from behind the camera, but that wasn’t necessary. She looked directly into the camera, and read the poem in a moving, simple way. She knew without looking at the clip how much her performance had grown.

**Echoing**

"The Flattered Flying Fish" by E. V. Rieu

Christina and her partner were trying to rehearse a familiar poem for the Friday afternoon poetry party. "The Flattered Flying Fish" by E. V. Rieu was a poem each knew
by heart and could read dramatically if her voice were absorbed by the crowd in a whole group recitation. But when the partners sat down to rehearse, they suddenly realized that their voices could be singled out. Self-consciousness began to snuff out all the expressiveness they usually poured into the poem. Barbara looked over and saw two girls who didn’t look at all happy with their efforts. She asked them to do the poem again for her.

“Okay,” she said after they finished. “You already know all the words to this poem, right? And you know the characters very well. All you have to do is work at making your voices sound like these characters. All right?” With their task in perspective, the girls began to look more hopeful. “Now, if you’re going to be the Shark-Narrator and you’re going to be the Flattered Flying Fish, I’m going to ask each of you to echo me. Ready? Let’s do the Narrator first.”

She turned to Christina. “Look right at me and say, “Said the shark to the flying fish over the phone - ” Christina repeated the words, but she spoke softly and looked away. “More like you’re telling a story to a group. Look up. Look me right in the eye.” Christina smiled and looked up. “Said the shark to the flying fish over the phone,” Barbara prompted. Christina started to giggle, but then took a breath and looked her coach in the eye. “Said the Shark to the Flying Fish over the phone,” she said, imitating Barbara. Barbara nodded and went on. She put an imaginary telephone up to her ear and changed her tone of voice slightly. Now she sounded sly and sophisticated. “Would you join me tonight? I am dining alone. Let me order a nice little dinner for two, and come as you are, in your shimmering blue.” Christina echoed her words phrase by phrase and
imitated her tone. “Now add a little eyebrow movement,” said Barbara. “He’s being tricky and you have to let the audience know about that.” Christina wiggled her eyebrows in a not entirely subtle way, and said her lines. The pattern of exchange continued for three minutes before Barbara turned to the other child and asked her to participate in the same echoing routine. After she left, the girls moved out into the hall and continued their rehearsal.

Echoing and mirroring were often mentioned when children spoke about their favorite rehearsal devices. They allow young performers to step away from their feelings of self-consciousness and jump into a game that involves mimicry. Nothing could more appropriate for children their age.

Writing Workshop

For the first two weeks of the poetry project, we emphasized children’s immersion in reading, responding to poetry, and early rehearsals to the extent that only 40 to 45 minutes remained in the morning for writing workshop. During this time, children finished a few projects and made entries in their notebooks after a daily mini-lesson. However, it would be a mistake to think that this pattern of pushing writing workshop slightly to one side continued for very long or that the shorter amount of time devoted to writing during those first two weeks was accidental.

It was actually highly intentional. The immersion experience in reading needs ample amounts of time if it is to make a profound impact on young readers. Perhaps the term immersion doesn’t do justice to the dynamic nature of the experience. Other popular metaphors fall shorter still of conveying an accurate sense of the chemistry that
is at work. *Spillover* suggests an image of empty vessels filled to past their capacity. Water is poured in, and water pours out.

After two weeks of intense reading, discussion, and a few initial experiences in performance, a child’s notebook entries and responses are laced with fragments of poetic language. Some of their language might be called delayed spillover: words, images, and ideas borrowed from the poetry they have encountered. But most of their writing is like fresh, new growth that springs out of a certain readiness, fed by the past. Spring - the first signs of children using poetic language as a way of seeing and experiencing - reached the inside of Barbara’s classroom in late January, months before signs of it appeared outside the classroom window. It was time to give writing workshop an equal share of the morning.

When children’s experience with poetry as readers begins to trigger a change in the way they write, writing workshop is an exciting place. They initially write about a wide range of topics. Their first poems are written as responses to the poems they read or the observations they make. Children need this time to experiment widely. They enjoy jumping into almost any writing exercise a teacher might introduce. One child will run to a window every morning with his notebook, day dream, and take notes or draw about his train of thought. Two other children will use magnifying glasses to examine the details of rocks, fossils, feathers, and buttons, and draw and write about the details they have observed. Another child sits alone at her table and writes about some personal connection triggered by the poem she read earlier that morning. Something of the musical qualities of the poems in which she is currently immersed as a performer begins
to steal its way into her writing.

By the fourth or fifth week, a child’s wide range of interests winds its way towards one or two passionate topics. A child will write around one of these subjects for days, perhaps even for weeks, before she writes one or two important poems. During this time, children crave alternating periods of time to be alone with their thoughts and time to conference vigorously with their teacher.

Children often need to conference about specific elements of craft. They will need to tag the “seeds” of poems scattered throughout their notebooks. Offering whole class lessons on this subject may help speed the review process, but most six year olds will tag a few wonderful “seeds” and skip blithely over a dozen others. They need to speak with a teacher in order to hear their own entries.

At other times, children need time to dwell in a kind of rich attentiveness instead of a lesson. A teacher needs to sit with a child, pull out all the entries she has written around some topic, and review them without feeling forced to teach some specific skill. They might highlight portions of her entries that sound especially strong. Or the child might be asked to elaborate on the stories or images embedded in her strongest entries. The gift of attentiveness can give someone who is on the verge of writing an important poem an energy that can serve as a catalyst to her thoughts.

During this period, a teacher must stay closely attuned to each child. Without the capacity to act as an informer listener and reader, she won’t be able to meet her students at the crossroads they will confront during this phase of the immersion unit. How teachers stay attuned to their students differs. I kept notes on conferences and lunchtime
notebook reviews that were more detailed than usual. Barbara, who has the capacity to recall entire filing cabinets worth of information about each of her students, wrote brief notes that categorized her observations.

The craft lessons which follow stem from our work during the third through the seventh week of the immersion unit. Most were offered first as mini-lessons, but were repeated many times during individual or small group writing conferences.

**Writing workshop: Lessons on craft**

**Brain-storming and Free-writing**

When we found fragments of poetry in children’s responses to poems written by others, we knew it was time to move purposefully into lessons on the poet’s craft. We asked children to turn back to the series of short poems we had read about fireflies in the night sky. Then we talked about the powerful images and memories that came swimming back into our imaginations whenever we read poems like these. The children closed their eye while we read these poems again.

Afterwards, I acted as Barbara’s scribe. Beginning with the word fireflies as a starting place, Barbara thought aloud and let me record her chain of thoughts. Using single words and short phrases, she drifted from images of herself catching fireflies to the sensation of feeling cool grass underfoot, to a memory of her daughter seeing fireflies for the first time, to the sensation of her daughter’s hand in her own. The children could see that by collecting a chain of thoughts on paper, we found our way towards poems that wanted to be written.

Our lesson was cut short by an assembly, but the next day we returned to the topic
of brainstorming again. I showed the children a poem I wrote called “Sister” and the brainstorming list that had led me to this poem. The subject - my older sister - was one I had been writing around for ages. I didn’t feel as if I was getting anywhere, so I jumped into a brainstorming exercise using the word sister as a starting place and wrote down every word or phrase that occurred to me. Eventually, I wound up at an unexpected place: one of my earliest memories.

My sister Linda and I were both very young at the time, perhaps two and three years old. We chased each other around the house until I skidded to a stop, bumped into the edge of the kitchen table, and cut the place just above the bridge of my nose. My sister was more upset than I was about the accident. When she saw the needle the doctor was holding in the emergency room, she didn’t want to let him get near me.

Sister

That day, we were running, fourteen months apart, closer than twins, we were running, we would not stop when they called. We ran from the stairs to the kitchen and did not stop until we slid on the newly waxed floor and the table edge cut that place near my eyes. You screamed louder than I, you got them, sat between them in the car and would not let me out of your sight. You were there, wrapped in our mother’s arms, struggling to get free. You couldn’t believe they did nothing while that man in white bent over the cold steel table, needle glinting in his hand. Cheeks streaked with tears, socks still bunched tight inside your shoes, you screamed at him until they had to take you out, while I said it was alright, everything would be alright.
For the photo one year later, we sit still,
side by side. You reach behind me,
your hand rests lightly on my shoulder
and my scar hardly shows. We peer
into the dark, mirrored world
inside the lens, we smile
and wait for the flash
and I laugh
because deep inside,
I can see that you
are there.

The children tolerated my poem, but they loved my brainstorming list and were anxious to make their own. Some children asked if they could write “across” instead of making “long lists” in their notebooks and we said that they could. Drawing too fine a line between brainstorming and free-writing would have been pointless. What was most important was that they found a simple starting place and then jotted down anything and everything that popped into their minds.

Children were comfortable with this practice, more comfortable than most adults are in writing workshops. The way they jumped from one image to another reminded me of the meandering course of their conversations. In writing workshop, the first graders’ freedom from the constraints of linear thought often served them well. As if collecting a string of assorted beads, the children each began with one image and rambled on. Some of these ramblings sounded poetic.

Sarah N., one of the children who asked if she absolutely had to write a long list was given to telling and writing long stories. Her notebook ramblings had a more narrative quality than did most of the list-style entries other children wrote that day. Technically, they were closer to free writing than to brainstorming, but for her, they
represented a tremendous break from writing bed-to-bed stories.

The fireflies swiftly soaring though the air like a bird. It is so beautiful. They are stars up by the moon shining bright. When the moon is out no one sees them. Beautiful moon, light so bright.

Seven weeks later, Sarah returned to this entry and wrote a poem.

Night by Night

by Sarah N.

The fireflies swiftly soar through the air like birds. They fly in front of the moon, but when the moon is first out, no one sees them.

Beautiful moon, light so bright,
sheltering fireflies night by night.

Habits That Promote Wide-Awakeness

The Discovery Table

Barbara introduced her students to habits which helped them pay closer attention to the world. One of the rituals that became a permanent part of the classroom was a Discovery table filled with boxes or trays of things to explore, as well as a half dozen hand-held magnifying glasses, a child’s large-screen microscope, and cans of pencils, crayons, and markers. Children visited the Discovery table with notebooks in hand during independent reading time, after quiet writing time, or during centers time.

The Discovery table was introduced in a reading lesson that centered around the poem “Magnifying Glass” by Valerie Worth (Worth, 1987, 45). As the children gathered on the rug, we passed out a magnifying glass to each child and asked them to cluster around one of the bins we had brought from the Discovery table: shells, minerals, fossils,
buttons, and a few feathers. We talked about how poets, like scientists, are in the habit of observing things closely. Sometimes they observe the physical world so closely that their observations wander into poems they never expected to write. The children used their magnifying glasses to examine one item from their bin in great detail. In the conversation that followed, Barbara helped each child stretch his or her description.

Then we read Worth’s poem.

Magnifying Glass

by Valerie Worth

Small grains
In a stone
Grow edges
That twinkle;

The smooth
Moth’s wing
Sprouts feathers
Like shingles;

My thumb
Is wrapped
In rich
Satin wrinkles.

Because it was their habit, children circled the words that stood out for them and we gathered a list of the words they loved: small grains, twinkle, sprouts feathers, and rich satin wrinkles. We talked about how each stanza could have started with pages of detailed writing and drawing. “Magnifying Glass” also taps the connections that might, in the children’s words, “pop into” an observer’s mind. Noticing these associations played an important role in writing her poem.
When the children returned their tables, they wrote and drew detailed descriptions of the items they found in the bins. Like the early writing Worth might have done, the children's entries were pages long. If entries like the one below did not result in poem, certain phrases or images from these exercises lingered and reappeared in poems children wrote weeks later.

Swirly designs - There are lots of colors: tans, browns, some pinks, and black and gold. It is shiny and smooth. This rock looks like the sky. It's shiny. The sea shell has a rainbow (inside). Outside it has a bit of orange and brown, a little green, a little white. It looks like a flute. This sea shell has a little tower. It's smooth and shiny and it is very fragile and it is brown. Fools gold shimmers in the sun. It looks like it has glitter on it.

Habits That Promote Wide-Awareness

Looking out the classroom window

Donald Murray once wrote about his habit of day-dreaming when he was in grade school. He found that day dreaming led him to so many good stories and ideas that he wished teachers would let children turn their desks towards the window and write. When we introduced Barbara’s first graders to the habit of observing the larger world around them - things that could not be observed with a magnifying glass - we asked them to capture the images they found outside the classroom window.

We introduced this concept by reading a poem written by Meghan Shapiro, one of my former students. Meghan wrote an entry about what she saw outside our classroom window one winter afternoon. In a manner that was by now familiar to the children in Barbara’s class, she noticed while she was writing that her entry was “turning into a poem.” Meghan and her classmates had also recently had lessons on making detailed observations as well as one lesson about poets’ uses of white space inspired by Georgia

One afternoon, the sky grew dark and huge, feather-sized clusters of snowflakes began to fall. Meghan grabbed her notebook, ran to the window, and began to write. In her reflection, Meghan mentions that she “sort of saw the poem” when she looked outside. During a writing conference, she said that the words on the page were supposed to look like the giant snowflakes she saw silhouetted against the dark sky.

Snow

by Meghan Shapiro

Snow falling, snow falling
All around the world.

Snow falling, snow falling
All around the world

The snow and the wind
are doing a lullaby.

*Reflection*: I looked out the window and the kids and I sort of saw the poem. And I quickly turned over my book and wrote down quickly the poem.

The children responded to Meghan's poem by looking out the window and writing detailed notebook entries. The poems that follow were based on the entries children wrote that day.

Poem

by Jeffrey

The wind is a dragon
that races you to the trees
and blows you away.
Poem
by Christina

The puddles on the field
look like baseball players
and the bare trees
look like the bald fathers.

Poem
by Randy

A puddle outside
looks like a giant’s footstep.
A dinosaur has been here!

Habits That Promote Wide-Awake ness

Turning our thoughts inward

By the sixth week of the Poetry Project, children almost always used the same poems for both reading and writing workshop. Indeed, there were fewer distinctions between the two workshops than ever before. After snack-time, we still gathered on the rug for a mini-lesson on writing, but that lesson was often based on the children’s own poems which were triggered by something they had read or observed.

Some of their poems and entries responses were about difficult subjects like loss, rejection by peers, or sibling rivalry. Barbara and I searched for poems that would, in some way, reflect their thoughts or encourage them to write more. We also extended our talk about observation to include the notion that they could walk back into powerful feelings, memories, and images and write about what they found there. We urged them not to stop now to write about the tools a poet used when they wrote their responses. Instead, when they reacted to a poem like “At Annika’s House” by Siv Widerberg or “It Hurts” by lindamichellebaron, they should follow their own train of thoughts and write

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
everything down.

The poems they wrote were now infused with a knowledge of what made poetry work. Some of these poems are studied in each case study chapter, but there were, of course, many other fine poems that were written when children began to turn their thoughts inward. The two that follow needed only a brief conference about line breaks before they were ready to publish.

Poem
by Robert

My dad says,
“You’re a big boy.”
The next day he says,
“You’re a little six year old.”
Is he gonna say it again?
It makes me feel like a baby
and I cry.

Sweet Dogs
by Sarah N.

My dogs treat me like I’m their mom.
They hold my hand with their leathery paws.
They sit still for a special treat.
When they’re scared they curl
up in a ball on my lap,
so soft and warm,
just like they’re my children.

Learning to make line breaks

The topic of line breaks needed to be addressed several times in whole group lessons, but many times in individual writing conferences. In the first whole group lesson, we followed a simple exercise. We read a poem the children already knew, but which had been printed in lines that made it look like prose. The first-and-final draft
poems first graders write in their notebooks often look exactly like this. As we read the poem aloud, we stopped wherever their voices paused and added a pair of slash marks to the line. The children then rearranged the text in its familiar form.

The next day we looked at the notebook copy of a poem written by Andrew Park called “The Moon is a Daddy to the Sun.” Barbara used Post-It tape to cover the places in the draft where Andrew had inserted slash marks and made unrevised-looking copies for her students to read. Then she and her students added slash marks to indicate where they thought his line breaks might go. Afterwards, we used an overhead projector to show the places where Andrew placed his slash marks. The places the children selected for line breaks differed slightly from Andrew's. That only gave us a chance to talk about the poet's prerogative. Later this read-aloud-and-slash pattern would be repeated in every editing conference for poems that were about to be published.

Barbara and I gave another line break lesson that was especially successful with children who wanted to experiment with the shape of a poem on the page. During the last two weeks of the poetry project, when our energies in Writing Workshop were directed toward publishing, the children read several poems arranged, as X. J. and Dorothy Kennedy say, in “eye-pleasing ways.” (X. J. Kennedy and Dorothy Kennedy, 101). They knew that poems could take any number of shapes, and so, when some children walked into a conference, they wanted to experiment with ways of arranging their poems on paper.

We did not have access to a computer in the classroom, so we cut two wide strips off the bottom of some chart paper, taped them together and asked Christina to print all
the words to her poem in one long line, leaving a normal-sized space between each word. If she had not been able to do this herself, we would have printed it. The we asked her to read her poem aloud several times, and make slash marks where she thought each line should end. If at the end of three times through, she had a good sense of where she wanted her line breaks to remain, she could tear the strips of paper at the slash marks.

Then she could move on to the task of arranging each line on her wide sheet of drawing paper. If the shape Christina chose made her wish she could insert more slash marks, she was free to tear the paper or tape it up again. Once she got to this stage, Barbara stopped at her desk and looked at the arrangement she had made. It looked as if she wanted a center margin. Christina used a glue stick to paste her poem onto a large sheet of plain drawing paper and the draft was ready to be published. Such a lesson might be easier with a computer, but the hands-on work with words left what I think might have been a more lasting impression.

Ten Week Outline:

A brief overview of practice and pace

When I was working alone in the classroom, I spent twelve weeks in each immersion unit. Barbara’s class spent ten weeks involved in the Poetry Project. Although I wasn’t there as a teacher, we had two adults in the classroom who could conference with children, monitor rehearsals, and coordinate information sent home to parents. Barbara and I could also read and reflect on notebooks together, talk about what saw and heard in a child’s writing or during rehearsals, and plan lessons. Teaming up was both a catalyst for our own learning and for the pace of the immersion unit itself.

Third-Fourth Weeks:  Delayed spillover begins. Children generate wide range of responses as readers, write numerous short poems and entries in writers’ notebooks, experiment with rehearsal format, get accustomed to roles of coach and performer.

Sixth-Seventh Weeks:  Focus narrows, children dig in deep. Writing spirals into obsessions, most important poems written, chapbooks begun, productive, varied rehearsals, reluctant speakers begin to feel wider range of competence, disappearance of boundaries between reading and writing workshops. Comb through notebooks for seeds of poems. Overlap into final publication phase.

Eighth-Tenth Weeks:  Publication: Children select poems for anthology, rehearse for final poetry celebration for parents, write assessments for selves as writers and performers.
CHAPTER V

DANIELLE’S SONG: THE PERFORMER

Don’t be embarrassed to act out or anything. Just go out there and just -
Your heart might be embarrassed. You might be embarrassed inside.
Don’t show ’em. Because then people’d give you, like, “Oh no. She
doesn’t want to do it. Get off the stage.” Or whatever. But just think
what the parts are and don’t get too frustrated. You know? And say the
words. If you do a mistake, don’t worry. People won’t really make fun of
you because they know you’re little and they know you. So just do the
part you’re acting. And the people will clap for you. It doesn’t really
matter if you make a mistake.

Danielle, age 9 - March 1997
Follow-up interview: Advice to a younger child

Three girls are gathered on one corner of the classroom rug for partner rehearsal
time. One has rolled up a sheet of blank paper to form a cone. She stands poised with
the narrow end of the cone held at eye level, peers through it a moment, then nods ever
so slightly at the dark haired figure who sits opposite her. That child, whose hair is held
in place by numerous barrettes, tips her chin up a fraction of an inch as she sits up and
smiles, looking back at the cone as if it were her most attentive friend. “Hi,” she says.
“My name is Danielle. I’m going to do one of my favorite poems for you. It’s called
“Windy Nights.” With that, her eyebrows arch and her voice takes on the mysterious,
driven hush of the poem’s narrator as she describes the night rider sounds that surround
her home on windy nights. The third child, who sits just off to one side, seems oblivious
to the cacophony around her created by other rehearsal groups. Like an understudy
waiting in the wings, she mouths each word to the poem and tentatively mirrors Danielle's artful gestures and facial expressions as if trying them on for size.

As her performance ends, Danielle smiles and looks directly ahead as her image fades from the lens of the imaginary cone camera. Only one twitch at the corners of her mouth hints at her struggle to repress her glee. This time the clip went just as she had hoped. The child filming the performance holds up three fingers, then two, then one. The clip is complete. She lowers the cone and the spell is broken. All three jump out of their performance roles and talk excitedly about what went well or what was especially effective: the steady, taut beat Danielle maintained, the hushed tone she used in place of greater volume, or the way she widened her eyes to accent the speaker's sense of fright.

A minute later, the girls regroup. Sara, the quiet child who sat observing the previous performance so intently now sits on stage. She looks towards the camera, raises her chin a fraction of an inch and waits. From behind the paper cone, Danielle gives her a quick smile and nods. It's time to begin.

Researchers sometimes insist that their case studies remind them of some aspect of their younger (Calkins, 1984), or more ideal selves (Chiseri-Strater, 1991). I selected Danielle as one of my case-studies because her astonishing differences fascinated me. I had only to observe her for a few minutes on any one of the days I spent in her classroom to be overwhelmed with a sense of what she might teach me. Danielle, like her teacher, was an extrovert. In January of 1995, she dove headfirst into the 10 week poetry unit with its accents on reading, writing, and performance with the energy of a child who has long awaited the arrival of a carnival. But long before she entered Barbara's first grade.
classroom, she had begun to acquire a wealth of experience with performative ways with
words and gestures at home.

Both sides of Danielle's family share a history of fascination with the art of
dramatic performance. Her maternal grandmother spent years as an aspiring actress and
singer in New York. Danielle's mother and father both have excellent singing voices.
Vito, who holds two full-time jobs, is employed as the school custodian in the same
building in which Danielle attended first grade. Since high school, he has been adept at
imitating the voices and mannerisms of former stage and screen personalities. With the
possible exception of an occasional talent show or Christmas pageant, his gift for
performance was never made part of the official world of literacy lessons in the parochial
schools he attended. What was once his way of entertaining friends outside the
classroom has now taken root in family entertainment. Vito emcees mock radio shows at
home and serves as his daughter's coach when she takes the microphone to sing or act
out familiar stories.

Danielle's parents place a high priority on helping her to do her best in school.
To this end, and with her kindergarten teacher's advice, they kept her in kindergarten a
second year. They also decided to drill their daughter in graphophonemic decoding skills
at home. But the constant partner to their ways of encouraging Danielle's growth as a
reader has been the ways in which they've always acknowledged her flair for creating
performative texts. They videotape the impromptu shows they put on in their living
room, singing show tunes they know by heart, and acting out stories. They dive into the
serious play of rehearsals, coaching each other and serving as appreciative audiences.
The quality of their attention to and sheer love of acting helped Danielle begin to construct bridges that linked the worlds of literacy, orality, craft, and play long before she entered first grade in September of 1994.

Fortunately, the classroom she entered was one in which these particular bridges played a crucial role. Her teacher, Barbara Cullere, had decided that the 1994-95 school year would be highlighted by a 10 week mid-winter immersion in the reading, writing, and performance of poetry. Students whose ability to plunge into the oral performance of poetry was as pronounced as Danielle’s or as undeveloped as those of a shy child who edged away from all occasions for talk were welcomed into a community in which their development as speakers was as important as their development as readers and writers.

Danielle’s presence in the class, just as Barbara decided to concentrate on the development of children’s ability to revel in secondary oralities, was also important for her teacher. Danielle brought an element of poetic justice to Barbara’s year. When she watched Danielle during the first weeks of September and reviewed my notes, Barbara saw a startling reflection of herself at the same age: a child with boundless energy and an effervescent sparkle that frequently crystalized into storytelling sessions for friends. At the same time, Barbara also recognized the perfectionist within Danielle, a child who worked hard at making sense of print, and whose flashes of bravado were quietly at war with a vein of uncertainty.

Because Danielle’s patterns of literacy, orality, and personality so closely mirrored her own, Barbara was especially well attuned to noticing moments in which Danielle could share her performative strengths with others. Instead of casting an
 intelligent and abundantly talkative, assertive child in a negative light, she would help Danielle and her peers become better acquainted with the strengths she might offer the class. Her familiarity with Danielle’s ways with words also allowed Barbara to anticipate which aspects of language and literacy – especially collegial talk and listening – might present ongoing challenges.

The “Loud-Middle Girl” and the Language Arts: A Performer of Texts

For both actor and producer the author’s text is a sort of scalpel, enabling us to open ourselves, to transform ourselves, to find what is hidden in us all..... For me, a creator of theatre, the important thing is not the words, but what we do with these words, what gives life to the inanimate words of the text, what transforms them into The Word.

(Jerzy Growtowski, Towards A Poorer Theatre, 57)

During the first half of the year, Danielle would have been badly miscast in any child-as-writer story. In the midst of a challenging, literature-rich writing workshop, she persisted in thinking of writing as the construction of letter-perfect text. She painstakingly completed pedestrian pieces on sheets of lined paper smudged with eraser marks while her peers wrote hard-to-decode but wildly inventive stories and personal narratives. Danielle sounded out each phoneme, shaped her letters carefully, and hurried to show Barbara how nicely she’d completed her work. She wasn’t ready to take risks if her sense of right or wrong couldn’t be easily confirmed. Writing was a process she had yet to decode. It’s performative function seemed illusive and utterly dissatisfying until the second quarter of the year, when she began to gain a sense of mastery over mechanics, wrote at greater length, and found she could also use the written word to gain the attention of both distant and nearby audiences.

141

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
The audiences Danielle preferred were made up of flesh and blood listeners. When a volunteer was needed to share a reaction to a book, hers was the first hand up. In the conversations which took place at her table, she was almost always at the center of the talk, initiating topics, adding new twists to a story, pointing out contradictions, making plays on words, and using facial expressions for comic effect. If a scene had been painted of her classroom, Danielle’s table partners would have been portrayed facing in her direction.

In reading workshop, rather than in writing workshop, Danielle began to compose. Barbara’s students spent the first hour of each day that Fall reading a variety of big books, poems, and jingles. Their favorites were those which offered interesting character sketches or catchy, patterned texts. Folk tales often fit both categories. By the end of October, the class had a repertoire of eight familiar stories which became a resource for improvisations during reading workshop. When groups of four or five children met to rehearse a scene, Danielle drew on the tacit knowledge she’d gained about performance at home. She organized her peers, assigned roles, and assumed the jobs of both stage manager and director within her small group.

Her expertise was so obvious that her peers initially welcomed the fact that someone was able to tell them exactly what to do. “Don’t turn your back to the audience,” she’d advise, turning someone by the shoulders. Or she’d whisper from the boundary of the imaginary stage, “It’s your turn. Go! Go!” Afterwards, she’d verbally offer director’s notes to everyone in her group without realizing that adult directors, other than her dad, were in the habit of doing the same.
When children got carried away and inserted elements which went counter to the basic story, she’d explode: “You can’t DO that. It’s not - It can’t be part of the story, guys. Guys?! The bears don’t get to KILL Goldilocks. This ISN’T The Three Little PIGS!” Danielle initially assumed that everyone else shared her expertise and brought a similar knowledge base to reading workshop and improvisations. She grew frustrated when they couldn’t map their way through the territory as easily as she did. Until she learned the craft of being a better coach, she mistook her peers’ lack of foresight to a willful and unforgivable lack of commitment to the rehearsal process.

Danielle’s peers eventually recognized and implemented the internal structures that made improvisations possible. They learned to jump into stories and play with their dramatic possibilities while developing their own notions of characterization or action sequences. When Barbara and several students role-played collaborative decision making procedures in whole group sessions, the class learned to discuss and negotiate improvisations as they unfolded. Barbara also made her expectations for uses of time during the half-hours set aside for rehearsals absolutely clear. Four minutes after the children left the circle, each rehearsal group had to be organized and ready to step into an improvisation. No one could afford to waste time arguing about roles.

Exchanging the mask of authority for that of collaborator was difficult for Danielle. Her insistence that things be done her way eventually led to the collapse of efforts in her group and a failed performance or two before she realized that something had to give: the end results of their work no longer merited the attention of the audience. If teamwork or shared authority would help them to win it back, she’d adapt.
Echoing Danielle’s struggle between self as local authority and self as collaborator in improvisation groups was the tension in Danielle’s book club. Until December, she often played the role of group decision maker. The other girls agreed to read what she wanted, discuss what she’d noticed in a story, and act out the scenes she selected. She never exerted overt pressure in order to get them to do so. Instead, she’d show how taken she was with the dramatic possibilities of a book or the discussion topics she saw within it. Her enthusiasm was contagious. It was also, somewhat unconsciously, a tool for molding the will of others.

By December, the pattern grew confining. One day, her ability-level group decided to read aloud in unison instead of by taking turns, as Barbara had suggested. Danielle dreaded this new arrangement. Although she routinely tackled any book the others in the top reading group might select, she alone knew that she read at a slower pace. Drill on phonics skills had resulted in Danielle’s painstaking over-reliance on the graphophonemic cuing system. She fretted so much over the task of sounding out words that her reading was less guided by the other cuing systems than it might otherwise have been.

Danielle’s group often read silently until everyone was ready to discuss the book, but on the occasions when they read aloud one by one, she discovered that she could scan ahead, decode text, and then read with such expression that it entertained her peers. Her construction of these performative moments served as both tool and shield. At mid-year, she struggled successfully with the decoding process that had once been her greatest hurdle, but the element of struggle was still real. Decoding demanded Danielle’s
complete concentration. It slowed her down. Until that day, her struggle had been invisible to her peers.

When the others insisted that they read in unison, Danielle reluctantly agreed to their plan. But by the time they reached the end of the fourth page of *Owl At Home*, she had fallen far behind. Panic brought her reading process to a halt. Chaos ensued. In the midst of their struggle to assert their authority for the first time, the other girls remained completely unaware of the cause of Danielle’s frustration and anger.

Reading aloud dramatically offered Danielle a chance to create a counterbalance of talents in her group. She could share her love of diving in between the lines of a text in a way that drew her friends’ attention away from the pace of her decoding. The fact that her pace was slow was seldom noticed. When she needed help, her requests were made as quiet asides. Danielle used her ability as an artful performer to negotiate a place for herself in a group she longed to join. Once part of that inner circle, she taught her friends how to look for promising dramatic subtexts in the books they read or to imagine themselves playing the parts of the characters they came to know while reading. Her dramatic readings showed the girls ways of weaving performative verbal texts out of written ones.

Danielle used her ability to craft the spoken word to create a place for herself on the stages upon which she needed or desired the chance to play. Many children come to school without a background which, like Danielle’s, encourages their development as performers of the spoken word. However, the importance of developing a range of ways with the spoken as well as the written word was once reflected in classroom practice.
Privileged young white men of the 18th and 19th centuries took workshop-like courses in rhetoric as well as in written composition during college. It was assumed that skillful uses of both the spoken and written word were key to the leadership roles they were expected to assume.

Research in education has delved recently into ways of teaching young children about the power which the written word might play in their lives. But children from every economic, ethnic, racial and cultural background also need to develop multiple ways with words as speakers if their voices are - quite literally - to be heard during their lifetimes. Richard Bauman suggests that skilled verbal performances - both impromptu moments shared with one listener or studied events shared with an entire audience or recorded on film - are tools which, like powerful written texts, help one to do more with language than simply communicate. The ways in which we use the spoken word to create an impression is a vital part of the ability to negotiate places for oneself.

Through his performance, the performer elicits the participative attention and energy of his audience, and to the extent that they value this performance, they will allow themselves to be caught up in it. When this happens, the performer gains a measure of prestige and control over the audience — prestige because of the demonstrated competence he has displayed, control because the determination of the flow of the interaction is in his hands... When the performer gains control in this way, the potential for transformation of the social structure may become available to him as well. (Bauman, 1984, 43-4)

Danielle came to school with invaluable tacit knowledge of a craft. She needed a forum in which she could develop her already keen ability to perform at the same time she learned to teach friends about her craft. She also needed the chance to learn the arts of collaboration and listening from children who often had less-than-performative ways
with words. Learning their skills was crucial to Danielle’s on-going development as friend, coach, performer, and teacher. An opportunity to create that dynamic symbiosis among types of children came to Barbara’s class that winter in the form of the Poetry Project. The mid-winter immersion in the reading, writing, and performance of poetry offered all of Barbara’s students a chance to learn vital skills from, and along with, each other.

Danielle described herself as a “loud-middle girl.” Although she occasionally had trouble recognizing the line between healthy assertiveness and treading on the toes of others’ who longed for a chance to make their own voices heard, the core of what she offered her peers was rooted in striking, positive characteristics. Danielle has a knack for playing with the spoken word. The tones of voice in which she reads, combined with the body language and elastic facial expressions she uses, make people pay attention. She has the power to entertain others by publishing stories or poems with voice and gesture as well as in print.

Danielle’s performative ways with words are a complicated asset. She uses her strengths as a composer of performative oral texts to do far more than - as Bauman suggests - negotiate places for herself in social arenas. Composing with the spoken word is also her art, her way of constructing meaning. She uses performative ways with words to make sense of the texts she holds in her hand and the social texts or contexts she reads in the everyday world that surrounds her. Performance also gives her great joy. Unlike Dewey’s hasty sightseer, she feels compelled to get out of her reader’s chair, to “move about, within and without, and through repeated visits” to the poems and stories she
reads during rehearsals. Danielle constructs an understanding of characters, their worlds, and what makes them tick during the recursive reading and rehearsal process.

When she performs, she goes beyond Rosenblatt’s private transaction of reader, text, and poem to invite an audience into a different dimension of that poem. Perhaps Danielle’s performances also invite the members of her audiences to engage in new transactions of their own. They are the co-authors of an actor or speaker’s performance: the necessary, answerable others without which a performer’s work is incomplete. Of course, a performer is her own constant, primary audience. But that sense of oneself in that role is the product of a process of on-going construction. Danielle studied audience reactions while she performed. The memories of other audiences and their esthetic reactions to her work became part of the way she approached the aesthetic tasks of production in each new rehearsal. As Dewey noted, artists, like Danielle, embody in themselves “the attitude of the perceiver” while they work. (Dewey, 1934, 48)

I once asked Danielle if acting helped her to get to know the characters in books better. Instead of answering my question directly, she responded as actor who has made that reciprocity between self and audience part of her inner language of thought. Instead of an explanation, she offered a demonstration that did more than answer my question. It revealed the way in which she was learning to study the reactions of her audience members. The performances she constructs are the result of a subtle, on-going series of negotiations with her audiences. Because sound plays such a strong role in her composing process, it wasn’t surprising to find in her response both a fairly musical demonstration and an image of the reader-as-musician.
L: Somebody told me that it helps them to get to know the story or characters better if they act it out.

D: Yeah, because if you're saying, “Mother Hen did this and that and that and that (speaks in monotone),” the people are like, “I don’t get it!” Now, if you say, “Mother Hen - (speaks expressively).” Like, make a breath. (Demonstrates use of breathing to set a slower pace.) Then you get, “Oh, she made the bread!” But if you’re singing it in a low voice, sometimes they can’t hear you. If you’re not doing it with movements, they don’t understand. (With emphasis) You have to **be** the character.

Knowing how to **be** the character or how to move one’s audience is a knowledge drawn from a long-standing habit of shaping transactions between text, self, and audience. Actors, performative readers, and public speakers must know how to use body and voice as instruments to draw an audience into the performative texts they weave.

When asked what she liked best about rehearsals, Danielle sighed happily and said, “The voice, and like, movements, and knowing the character. You know, that’s what I really like in my acting. I don’t care how I’m dressed.” Her comment accents her emerging grasp of the expressive skills which helped her to reach audiences. These same tools are at the center of Bakhtin’s description of the verbal arts.

Outward appearance must not be taken in isolation when considered in relation to verbal works of art. A certain incompleteness of the purely pictorial portrait is compensated here by a series of features which are directly associated with outward appearance, but are only barely accessible or completely inaccessible to visual art: deportment, gait, vocal timbre, changing facial expression... (Bakhtin, 1990, 35)

Bakhtin’s - as well as Danielle’s - fascination with the relationship between self and other, or actor and audience, stresses the absolute interdependence of the human players involved. As effective players on the various stages we inhabit with language,
gesture, and expression, we are brought fully into being through our transactions with our audiences and answerable others.

In this sense, one can speak of a human being’s absolute need of the other, for the other’s seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity - the only self-activity capable of producing his outwardly finished personality. This outward personality could not exist, if the other did not create it: aesthetic memory is productive - it gives birth, for the first time, to the outward human being on a new plane of being. (Bakhtin, 1990, 35-6)

Looking at texts as possible scripts

After the Poetry Project started, Danielle began to select books and poems according to the dramatic possibilities she saw within them. Reading quietly was, as ever, not her cup of tea. Vocalizing while she read wasn’t simply an immature stage which was eventually tucked away into her silent language of thought. When Danielle read - and when she wrote - she frequently gestured, and mouthing or mumbled the words on the page. True, she had indulged in subvocalization during the first part of the year in a way that revealed her decoding strategies. So had most of her classmates. Silent reading in a first grade classroom is, as every elementary school teacher knows, only a relative term.

But as Danielle became a more fluent reader, her subvocalizations didn’t disappear. Their purpose, however, changed completely. Danielle no longer needed to hear the sounds of the words she was decoding in order to recognize them. Instead, she read aloud in order to enjoy the text, and to play with the sound of a character’s voice or tantalizing repetitions. Other children read silently and rolled their eyes in her direction.

For Danielle, written texts were invitations to play, sources of the audible play
dough in which she delighted. She was perfectly capable of reading silently, but she often couldn’t resist the invitation from the page. Her absorption in dramatic word play, improvisations, and the oral performance of poetry led to rich, time-intensive mornings of reading from which would spring her deep, textured familiarity with the written word. She and the other artful performers in the class engaged their mind’s ear when they read in a way that mocked the limited range of purposes I’d always connected with the term subvocalization. Yet these artful performers, as well as quiet, less performative children, began to take these hours of audible play into their inner languages of thought. The poems they wrote were filled with what Bakhtin would have called the “reverberations” of the poetry in which they’d been immersed for hours of rehearsals.

By early February Danielle selected poems for independent reading because of the performative qualities they saw within them. While some children selected quiet, unrhymed poems about relationships, Danielle chose poems which were filled with performative features: rhythm, repetition, rhyme, strong characterizations, and humor. She felt that they were a good match for her personality. She spoke of this habit in the exit interview I conducted at the end of the Poetry Project.

D: To me, I find poems like that [snaps fingers]. I have it - In a minute, I get a poem. It’s like - because I love beautiful poems. I like loud, I like quiet. But I really like the little bits of the loudish kinds in the middle because the - What do you call it? The low ones, the quiet ones, I’m not used to, because I’m not a quiet girl.

L: Right. So you kind of pick poems that match you and your personality.

D: Yeah! Or bouncing ones!
Danielle’s fascination with the performative qualities embedded in written text led to hours of close, recursive reading during rehearsals. This facet of her reading process does not fit the image of fluent reading as a time-efficient process that pervades textbooks in education. The concept of redundancy in Marie Clay’s *Becoming Literate* illustrates this image. Redundancy refers to the fact that readers find more information than they actually need to attend to while reading any particular piece of text. Fluent readers know how to use graphophonemic, syntactic, and semantic clues in order to make predictions about particular words or phrases.

Conventions of print such as capital letters, punctuation, and paragraph breaks also carry signals and act as organizers of text. Good readers constantly make use of these redundancies. The ability to make thousands of predictions - minute as well as weighty, conscious as well as unconscious - is a critical part of the reading process, part of the construction of inner control that is the focus of Clay’s book. It makes reading a far more efficient process. But the images of time and personal or institutional expenditures of it, as described in experts’ discussions of the reading process, revolve perhaps a little too frequently around the theme of efficiency. As we become fluent readers, one might think, we move only towards accelerated pace coupled with deeper comprehension.

The images of good reading one sees during the rehearsal process don’t fit the efficiency metaphor which has quietly dominated descriptions of the reading process since the 1920’s. The term “redundancy” loses its appropriateness when a performer chooses not to sweep through written text and instead, dwells inside it by choice, in order...
to make each word of the text breathe as if it were his or her own. Syntactic and semantic signposts are, of course, still there, but chunks of text cannot be brushed aside if one’s audience needs to hear it in its “published” form, coupled with movement and gesture.

Actors don’t move efficiently through a text when they begin to rehearse. Their way of coming to know and enjoy a text is different. They dwell in it. They let it seep into their metaphorical pores. Working together, a cast explores the worlds and characters within a play. Stanislavski described this concept in a way that mocks our notion of pairing reading comprehension with efficiency.

In a perfect piece of playwriting every word, every letter, every punctuation sign serves to transmit its own inner essence; an actor who is interpreting a drama in the terms of his own understanding of it, will attach to each phrase his individual shadings conveyed not only by the expressiveness of his body, but also by an artistically trained speech. Nor may we forget that each sound which forms a word, each vowel as well as each consonant is, as it were, a separate note which takes its place in the tonal chord of a word, it expresses this or that small part of the soul that filters through the word. (Stanislavski, 1968, 191)

Seeing the texts we write as scripts to be performed

By the end of first grade, Danielle was more than capable of reading silently and listening to the voice of the text in her mind’s ear. She read efficiently for one of her age. However, she preferred to read aloud, casting herself privately in the role of a dramatic reader, even when an audience was only present in her mind’s eye. Danielle also read aloud as she wrote, partly to recall what she’d just written, but more often, to catch the sound of a word, to savor a line, or to win the attention of the children seated around her. Children who preferred quiet surroundings while they wrote shrugged their
shoulders and moved away from her during Writing Workshop.

But the children who shared this trait moved closer. They didn’t mind the sounds of each other’s voices as they wrote. They knew that the peers seated around them would not only understand, but would also stop occasionally to serve as appreciative listeners and observers. As often as not, the words they spoke during these impromptu performances were accompanied by simple gestures and facial expressions - visible traces of reading comprehension and a composing process not limited to words alone.

Danielle read aloud as she wrote for dual purposes. Like most first graders, she sometimes skipped a word she intended to print while she was writing. At other times, she’d repeat a word or phrase. Reading aloud from time to time as she wrote served partly as a monitoring device to help her to catch these glitches. But it also helped Danielle to know whether or not she’d found just the right word or phrase for a poem.

L: I noticed something the other day when you were writing. You do a lot of talking-out loud as you write and I thought that was very interesting.

D: Well, I do that because I want to know what I wrote. Because, like, I’m not a quiet girl. So, like, I’m a loud-middle girl. So I read it out loud. I say, “Hey, this goes good. And I make a whole poem. And I have my own poem and then I just put it in my chapbook. If you don’t read a poem kind of out loud or stuff while you’re writing, you might not even know a word’s missing, and it might not sound good. And if you don’t read it over like five or three times, you don’t even know how it sounds. So you don’t know if you’re missing a word or if it sounds silly or it’s not right. It doesn’t make sense.

Danielle’s habit of reading aloud to test the sound of words or phrases is echoed in the descriptions of the writing process of many adults, including W. B. Yeats. One
biographer noted that Yeats “chanted his verse aloud as he wrote, seeking always the right word, which would convey his meaning and yet fit into the sound effect which he desired to create.” (Jeffries, 271) When Danielle was in third grade, I visited her school to conduct a follow-up interview. When asked what the most challenging part of writing was, her answer echoed Yeats’ concern with selecting just the right word, a trait we’d noticed when she was in first grade.

L: What was particularly challenging for you as a writer?

D: As a writer? (slowly, with emphasis) To get the right words to give you pictures in your mind. It’s—sometimes it’s hard. Sometimes it isn’t. [Friends seated with Danielle nod in agreement.] Like the poem I just wrote. It just popped into my mind and I started writing. That wasn’t hard. Sometimes, if you have something like my memoir, I kept on reading it (aloud) over and I did at least four drafts of it until I got it right. And you have to get the right words to show how the hair looked or how eyes looked and stuff.

Danielle’s fascination with the sounds of language and the natural world were part of her desire to write as well as to read and perform. While other children wrote about relationships, Danielle shaped detailed descriptions of things she’d observed or listened to. She loved capturing movement and sensation in print. She was also strongly influenced by her playful immersion in the performance of poetry written by others, especially her growing repertoire of story poems. While group discussions of poetry promoted the ways in which she thought about the craft of writing, lyrical and dramatic elements which went largely undiscussed in writing workshop - but which played prominent roles in performance workshop - began to appear in her writing.

These other streams of influence which appeared in her written work are evidence
of Cambourne's concept of "delayed spillover," brought into children's writing in this case, because of their immersion in poetry as performers. For example, rhyme was an element of poetry that Barbara tended not to discuss in reading or writing workshop because she knew how an early emphasis on it could shut down children's attempts to write poetry that stemmed from strong emotions.

Barbara didn't discuss rhyme often, but it was there in most of the poems children chose to perform. Working with rhyme each day in performance workshop required the ability to dig into a text and exploit or smooth its rhyming patterns as needed. When rhythm, pace, movement, and rhyme began to surface in the poems the children wrote towards the end of the Poetry Project, neither Barbara nor I were surprised. We'd seen evidence of delayed spillover in the "texts" of both videotaped dramatic performances and written poems in both of my pilot projects.

Danielle's first poetic uses of language turned up in her notebook entries about poems we had read together in class and those she'd rehearsed with friends. During the hour and a half reading phase of the three hour morning block for poetry and throughout the rehearsal time which followed, Danielle was immersed in the work of other poets. Like the other children, she seemed to inhale an attentiveness to word choice and imagery that increasingly found its way into her oral and written reader's responses. Most often, just a word or phrase would stand out. Occasionally, her written responses took the shape of poems.

On January 3, the first day of the 10 week Poetry Project, the children met on the rug and followed a schedule which remained in place for the entire unit. The new
schedule actually included familiar elements. It began with fifteen minutes of joyful immersion in the songs, rhymes, and story poems in their Jingle Books. The next phase of the morning focused around a shared reading session which lasted about half an hour. Instead of reading and discussing a story from a Big Book, Barbara would pass out a page of poetry to each child. These pages contained enlarged-print copies of the poems they would read and discuss that day in the whole group. Barbara also had the poems printed on the tall chart pad next to her.

Children received their own copies of each day's poems because it prompted them to pay closer attention to the texts. They could mark up a text, use highlighter markers and pencils to circle the words or images which had caught their attention, and make notes about personal connections or special features of the poem they wanted to write and draw about at length after they left the whole group setting. Allowing children time to mark up text as they listened to and discussed the poem helped them to be more articulate in their ongoing discussions and written reactions. Individual copies of poems would also be used later as part of the performance process, when children would learn to mark up their copies like actors to show how they planned to use their voices.

During each of the first days of the project, Barbara introduced several short poems that evoked strong visual images. The group discussion eventually focused on only one or two of those poems, but children were accountable for responding later - in drawing and writing - to a poem of their own choosing. Danielle selected the following haiku by Grace Lin on January 3rd, the first day of the project.
Everyone sleeping
Only the stars play outside
Beside moon mother.

She circled the last two lines of the poem while still seated on the rug with her classmates, but when Danielle returned to her table, she wrote about the image she’d seen when she closed her eyes and listened to her teacher read the poem aloud. “I saw that the stars were dancing in the sky and the moon mother was watching them.” Like everyone else, Danielle took her notebook home and read the poem she’d selected to her mother. They discussed the poem and Danielle recorded a sentence or two from her mother’s reaction in her notebook.

On January 31, Danielle wrote a poem which includes obvious elements of the poem Lin wrote. It shows her budding attention to word choice, especially those words which describe actions or sensations.

The Moon Mother

The little stars
are dancing outside
and the moon mother is watching them.
Then the mother says, “Go to sleep!”
And the little stars wink out.

Danielle’s ability to make unusual word choices is not uncommon among first graders. They are young and as yet unchecked by an immersion in conventional uses of expressive language. When they craft descriptions, six and seven year olds seize the most precise words they know and use them to great effect. Adult listeners and readers are often floored by the fresh precision of their images. Those of us who have been
immersed in conventional uses of expressive language for years struggle to achieve what young children often find in an instant. This facet of language development defies the neat, adult-superior progression upon which models of language learning are based.

On the second day of the project, Danielle responded to a poem by Issa.

\begin{quote}
Softly — \\
So that it may not startle \\
A butterfly — \\
The gentle wind passes \\
Over the young wheat.
\end{quote}

Again, Danielle was quick to imagine her way into the world of the poem through her senses. When responding to the poem, she wrote: “The wind is breathing h-h-h softly.” Under her entry, Danielle drew a picture of herself with the wind blowing through her hair. The following day, the class read “Dragon Smoke” by Lilian Moore and another poem about frosty winter air. While still seated on the rug, Danielle circled words and phrases which had, in the terminology of the class, stood out for her: breathe and blow, white clouds, with every puff, breath, and huff. She also drew a box in her notebook for collecting favorite words from the poem: Huff!, puff, breath, white, and blow. Then she wrote, “This poem is making me think of my breath breathing in and out and the clouds up in the sky and something is going inside of it and a dragon came and his throat (was) fiery.”

On January 31st, three weeks after she read and responded to the poems mentioned above, Danielle wrote a poem that reflected her interest in the image of seeing one’s breath on a cold day as well as her second attempt to capture the sound of the wind. “Softly” allows us to trace her fascination with capturing actions and sounds in print.
Softly
the wind is blowing
my hair
and it sounds like this: h h h
and I blow away: h h h.

On January 9th, the morning air was terribly foggy. After a harrowing ride to work, Barbara searched the overstocked file box we’d prepared prior to the holiday recess for a poem that would help children develop the habit of noticing their surroundings and attending to their impressions, a habit of pulling away what Virginia Woolf once called the cotton wool of everyday perception. She eventually selected Carl Sandburg’s poem “Fog.” Her choice didn’t surprise me, because I knew that she’d come to love the poem over the years. But I also knew that this particular poem and Barbara had an unsavory past. Barbara’s fifth grade teacher had - without reading or discussing the poem with her class - asked her students to memorize it. She then lined up the children in the hallway and, when their turn came, each had to recite Sandburg’s poem. The experience killed Barbara’s appreciation of unrhymed poetry for years.

During the whole group lesson, Barbara drew the children’s attention to Sandburg’s use of white space. Danielle’s impression of the space at the center of the poem, first shared aloud and later recorded in her notebook, helped the class walk into that white space along with her: “I noticed I got a quiet feeling because you have to be quiet when there’s no words in the middle.” We sat for a moment and listened to the poem again, pausing a second when we came to the white space. Afterwards, for a few seconds, the quiet in the room matched the thick silence of the fog outside. One week
after the poetry project began, Danielle’s oral and written responses were growing in length and expanding in type. She was gaining confidence in her gut-level reactions and, from immersion in rich daily dialogue about poetry, a keener ability to articulate what she’d noticed while reading and listening.

That morning began with a discussion of how Sandburg must have paid close attention to the sensations and impressions which surrounded him on a foggy day. Some of the children took his cue and made careful, detailed observations of a nearby object or scene during writing workshop. Danielle wrote about a begonia plant on the windowsill: “The plant is bending over me and it looks like it is touching me. The flower looks like it is hot pink and we found one red (flower), one flower dried up, (and) one leaf is crackly.” Looking out the window the next day, she wrote: “Outside I see geese’s feet on the grass and the snow looks like milk.” On March 3rd, long after her begonia entry was made, but during Barbara’s series of mini-lessons about looking for the seeds of a poem in one’s notebook, Danielle tagged her entry with a post-it note and wrote a poem.

Begonia

The delicate plant is bending
over me.
It looks like it’s touching me
with it’s pink petals
like a mommy’s pretty fingernails.

Time after time, Danielle’s written and oral responses to the poems she read revolved around her fascination with the sounds, sensations, and silence embedded in them. When we added performance workshop to the second half of the morning in February, alternating it with writing workshop, Danielle’s detailed listening to poetry
took on new dimensions. These new elements were, perhaps, attributable to the care with which we introduced the performance process. The children marked up second copies of their poems as if they were actors. They circled particular words or entire lines they wanted to emphasize. They underlined words which tripped them up and left them feeling as if their tongues were tied in knots. They also wrote brief reminders to themselves at the bottom of the page.

In response to the tree-bending weather outside on that first day of performance workshop, Barbara introduced Robert Louis Stevenson’s poem “Windy Nights.” The notes children wrote on their printed copies that day varied. Danielle circled the last letter, usually a consonant, in each line because she had a habit of chopping off the last consonant sound in words, a trait she calls mumbling in her reflections about performance. Although her pronunciation was partially attributable to regional influence, it was one which both her speech teacher and Barbara had brought to Danielle’s attention. She then circled several initial w’s she wanted to emphasize and added the words “boom bu bum” at the bottom of the page as a reminder about the poem’s strong rhythm. Finally, she made a note about using hand clapping to imitate the sound of the horse’s hooves.

One week later, on January 17, the class took its first “listening walk,” based on that day’s reading of Paul Shower’s picture book, The Listening Walk (1961). The children brought their notebooks along, and as they wandered across the wide patio in front of their school, they were as quiet as first graders possibly can be, and wrote about what they heard. Danielle wrote: “I hear the birds chirping and I (hear the) cars
zooming. The airplane sounds like thunder. I hear the airplane and it sounds like this:

ow ow ow ow ow ow. I hear people talking. I hear a leaf and it sounds like this:

krakkrak krak krak.” When the children clustered together to share the sounds they’d heard, we realized that most of the children had also made lists of the sights they’d seen. Two had written about the shiny, wet asphalt of the road and playground.

On January 20th, Danielle’s notebook entry, titled, signed, and given the shape of a poem, reflected the group conversation which followed the listening walk.

Rain

The rain looks like thunder
and I could see the sparkling road.

When the children began to make observations using hand-held magnifying glasses and the large screen microscope I brought to the classroom, the variety of the items which could be carefully observed and described during writing workshop multiplied. One morning, Danielle spent fifteen minutes looking at salt crystals and jotted down her observations in her notebook. Curiously, she gave this entry a title even though she insisted that it was a list instead of a poem. She would continue to give titles and by-lines to many of the so-called ordinary entries she made throughout the Spring.

Crystal

On the top of the crystal, one of the things looks like a bow and all the way down, something looks like a pineapple and one of the things looks like a pinwheel and on the top it looks like lace.

After seven weeks passed, the emphasis of the morning reading activities had shifted to oral performances, rehearsals, and publishing a printed anthology, but the
children still met for the first half of the morning to read, discuss, and write poems. On February 27th, they read “At Annika’s Place” by Siv Widerberg. Danielle’s reaction stems from the group discussion which followed. She wrote, “The poem lets me think of when I get treated like a baby. But I like being treated like at baby (at home) and when I’m at school, I like being treated like a grown-up and when I was in school, my friend Michelle called me Danny and I said to her, “Call me Danielle because I want to be treated like a grown-up.”

Three weeks earlier, she’d read “It Hurts” by lindamichellebaron. That day, Danielle wrote, “The poem lets me think of when I am playing with my brother and he gets hurt and my mom blames it on me.” For the first time, she began to tune in when other children read and wrote about relationships. Danielle wrote several meandering entries about her younger brother which reveal an older sister’s mixed feelings of love for and annoyance with her younger sibling. One of these entries was titled “When Me And My Baby Brother Play And Fight.”

The topic of everyday family tensions ebbed in and out of her writing again for a few days after reading “At Annika’s Place.” Before this interest passed, she wrote two “when” poems called “When I Forgot My Folder” and “Myself.” Her peers knew they were outstanding even before she did. They’d had similar moments in their own households. These poems hit quite literally so close to home that the other children told Danielle that they felt as if they could have written them, too.

Danielle broke a pattern of writing entries, but not poems, about family events and relationships that week. But the poems she wrote are also remarkable for the sense
of flow, and the rhythm and rhyme that give them shape. She’d read each poem aloud as she’d composed it, but was not thoroughly conscious of the ways in which she’d crafted each until she read them aloud to her teacher. They have a pace and a tension about them that comes more directly from her immersion in crafting oral performances of poems such as “Windy Nights” than it does from the discursive forum of whole group reading and writing lessons. Perhaps these sophisticated features of her poetry, evidence of Cambourne’s concept of “delayed spillover,” are what Bakhtin would have called a “silent responsive understanding” from the hours Danielle spent immersed in poetry as a performer.

Of course, an utterance is not always followed immediately by an articulated response......It can remain, for the time being, a silent responsive understanding...but this is, so to speak, responsive understanding with a delayed reaction. Sooner or later what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behavior or the listener. (Bakhtin, 1986, 68-9)

Danielle’s silent responsive understanding of pace, rhythm, and rhyme also found its way into two poems she wrote during the last weeks of the Poetry Project.

When I Forgot My Folder

When I forgot my folder
I didn’t know what to do.
I ran around the house,
I thought and thought.
I walked in circles, too.
Then I thought, “Maybe I should call my teacher.”
And I did.
She said, “It’s okay.”
I said, “Phew!”

165
Myself

When my mom says, “Get something,”
and I can’t find it
and it’s right there,
I get scared,
and I go downstairs
and I wonder
what’s going to happen.

Learning to craft oral texts

For our own relationship to our exterior does not, after all, have an immediately aesthetic character; it pertains only to its possible effects on others - namely on the immediate observers. That is, we evaluate our exterior not for ourselves, but for others, through others: (Bakhtin, 1986, 39)

Danielle was already accustomed to negotiating relationships with audiences of various descriptions when she entered first grade. The presence of an audience was a crucial part of the performative texts she crafted, whether they were geared to impress an audience of one or twenty-five. When she gazed into the eyes of the children seated in front of her, Danielle read faces. Were her friends enjoying her performance? What could she do with voice or gesture to get them even more involved? When she saw that they were involved, Danielle worked harder than ever to sustain that dance between the audience and herself. Early in the school year, she said that she liked to be “clapped at,” but like any artist, she primarily immersed herself in performance because she loved it.

The rehearsal forms she chose reflected both her experience and the outgoing interactive tendencies which had been part of her character and chemistry since infancy. While shy children began the rehearsal process by reading to the wall, Danielle wanted rigorous feedback from a “live” partner who would not mince words.
D: I don't like talking to a wall.

L: What (type of rehearsal) worked for you?

D: To like act out in front of one person. Because I get used to acting out in front of one person. Talking to a wall - I just don't feel comfortable talking to something that's not real. I don't feel right. I usually, like, go around and ask some people if they can do it with me. Because like, that's a person, like all those other people in the group who're going to listen to you. And then they can talk and say, "Well, you didn't do this right. This you should do better." Or, "This is good." A wall cannot talk! And you don't know anything from the wall.

Although Danielle possessed more tacit knowledge of the performance process than any other child in the class, she, too needed to develop ways of talking about her craft. Without the ability to frame her ideas in words, her ability to reflect and grow in her craft would have been hampered. Her growth as a performer as well as her ability to serve as a coach depended on whether or not she acquired a language to talk and think about her craft.

That movement from an unspoken sense that one has done well to the ability to be articulate about and manipulate one's craft is reflected in Danielle's notebook. On January 24, the children discussed rules for working together as rehearsal partners. Although a poster of rules remained on the easel, Danielle chose to frame her list of advice in her own words. List making itself was still a challenging new concept.

1-24-95 Advice for rehearsal partners
1. Help them have a good voice.
1. Listen.
2. Do not say, "You're not doing good."
1. Don't be a bad girl.

The children learned to mark up their texts to show how they planned to use their
voices. During the first three weeks that children experimented with this process, their remarks were often brief and somewhat cryptic.

2-2-95 Daily rehearsal notes for “The Flattered Flying Fish”
I need a different voice. I am good at the moves.

2-9-95 Daily rehearsal notes for “Fambly Time” (Greenfield)
Slow it down. Make a little bit of a voice.

Unless we asked her to elaborate, neither Barbara nor I could tell exactly what Danielle meant when she reminded herself to “make a little bit of a voice.” However, she knew exactly what each remark meant. She was learning to plan for and reflect upon her rehearsals. One week later, after five additional mini-lessons on marking up a text, Danielle marked up the text of “Visiting the Vet” by Freya Littledale in ways that show more precise planning.

2-16-95 Rehearsal notes for “Visiting the Vet” by Freya Littledale
Do it louder and do a voice and do moves.
[Arrow to line “My dog is trembling.” Marked “Soft (voice)”]
[Line underneath “by the door” marked “Do a breath.”]
[Arrow to end of line “So I am whispering in his ear” marked “Quiet.”]
[Arrow to last line “I am here, boy, I am here” marked “Serious.”]

By the time we entered the last three weeks of the immersion unit, we had the luxury of working towards publication as writers and performers for most of the morning. Danielle’s notes from this period are filled with reflective pieces and detailed plans about rehearsals. Some of the advice she offers is stated in ways that sound as if the lines came right out of a dialogue between two rehearsal partners. They did. Danielle’s partners were, in fact, working with her on enunciation while she, in turn, helped them match their voices and facial expressions to the mood of their poems. After
she wrote the following list of advice, she added a brief note about the steps she usually took as she moved through the rehearsal process.

3-1-95 Performance tips
1. You have to learn the words.
2. Do expression.
3. Do a little bit of moves.
4. Do not mumble.
5. Work hard.
6. Do the right voice for the poem.

When I do poems the first part I do is I do the words and the second part I do the expression and the third part I do the moves and the fourth part I work hard. By Danielle, seven.

After rehearsal time, Danielle and her classmates experimented for the first time with two column self-assessments. We wanted to encourage children to evaluate both the elements of their rehearsals which were going well and those that still needed work. After rehearsal partners worked together for ten minutes, we met on the rug with pencils in hand to share and extend these first-draft lists.

3-1-95 Daily rehearsal notes for "Fambly Time" by Eloise Greenfield
Good
Look at the camera.
Make my face come alive.
Look at the camera and do a voice.
Make my face come (a)live.

Bad
Don't mumble.
Do a good face.
Do it slow.

One week later, Danielle's reflections are even more precise. They also sound less like dialogue drawn directly from rehearsal talk than a child who has taken reflective practices into her inner dialogue of thought.

Entry date: 3-9-95 - Daily rehearsal notes for "Windy Nights"
Good
1. I did a good beat.

Work On
1. On the last part, I have to work on it.
2. I did it smoothly.  2. Slow down a little bit because
3. I could hear my voice the people can’t understand me.
4. I looked at the camera.

With a few notable exceptions, Danielle opted not to rehearse and film the poems she wrote. When I visited her in third grade, she talked about her love of acting and how the chance to portray the characters from her repertoire of story poems offered possibilities for dramatic play that were missing from some of the poems she wrote.

D: If you wrote a poem, you wouldn’t act it out. You really, um - I don’t know if you really could. If it’s kind-of a long poem, like, “Isabelle, Isabelle,” or “The Flattered Flying Fish” those you can act out. But you would be talking about somebody or something.

L: The story poems were easier to act out?

D: (nods) “Like if you’re looking at a ant and you’re writing about the ant, it’s a little hard to act that out. If you’re writing about “The Flattered Flying Fish,” that you can act out. Because it shows he [the shark] ate her, he made as if he liked her, he asked her to go to dinner, she gets dressed, and all that.”

L: Okay. When you have a character, you can play with the voice or how you’re going to make the character move or what his face looks like. When you’re just talking about a plant bending over you, with its leaves touching you, that’s a little harder to act out? [Reference to “Begonia.”]

D: (laughs) Um hum. ‘Cause you aren’t going to have the leaves bending over you and stuff. It’s hard to act out because it’s - It’s not - It’s very poetic and stuff to read, but to act, it’s really kind of boring.

Danielle developed the capacity to step back and use discursive forms of talk to assess her work. But she also loved to jump into fragments of performative texts which allowed her to demonstrate rather than to explain her meaning.
D: "Like, you go, "Isabelle, Isabelle!" [uses expressive voice]. You try to make it like, not like, "Isabelle, Isabelle." [speaks in a monotone]. It's not - You have to make it be a little bit like - something that people will like to hear. Like, if you have it in this low, boring voice, who would want to listen to it?"

L: You want to make it [your voice] suitable for the character?

D: Yeah! So people would say, "Oh, I like this poem. I'm going to listen to the person do this. I want to see how good she got it." You know? "She has a good voice. I like how she does it."

L: So...if you work with your voice in a special way and your face, they pay attention to the poem?

D: Yeah. People like it better. If you start doing hand movements, and start doing voices and stuff, then the people get interested.
CHAPTER VI

SARA’S SONG: FINDING A VOICE

When you’re a grown-up, you can’t be afraid to speak, ‘cause then people would think that you’re not very good. And they wouldn’t, like, apply you for a job or something like that... And maybe you’re hiding something that’s really important, but you don’t think it’s important. And you’re not going to say it? And then maybe they’re not going to think that you’re going to be good enough.

Sara, age 6, April 1995 - Exit interview

To whom can I be responsible, and why should I be, when you refuse to see me? ...Responsibility rests upon recognition, and recognition is a form of agreement.

Ralph Ellison, 1952, Invisible Man, 16

Missing In Interaction: Recognizing Sara

One night, when I’d been in Barbara’s classroom for almost three weeks, I combed through the pages of field notes and transcripts I’d collected. As I read, it became apparent that not only did a handful of children command the floor in whole class discussions with startling frequency, but some children’s voices were all but missing from these interactions. They spoke only when Barbara called on them and - at this point in the school year - had difficulty elaborating when she gently prompted them to say more. Even in small groups, where they seemed at ease, their companions were far more likely to speak while they played the role of nurturer or supportive listener. One of these children was Sara.
If Danielle reminded Barbara of her former self, Sara provided me with an image of what I must have been like during first grade: quietly happy, anxious about speaking in large groups, and usually flanked by an extroverted friend who made me laugh. I felt compelled to select her as one of my case studies, and yet I knew that in order to tell her story correctly, I would have to be careful. Obviously, the story of who Sara was could not be captured simply through an analysis of classroom talk. Her voice stood out in those initial notes and transcripts because it was missing. Sara and all that she offered her class hadn't been captured through my efforts to listen to what she said.

The ways in which she communicated had to be tracked in other ways: by observing her interactions, by trying to capture the ways in which she, in turn, was a keen observer of those around her, and by tracing the non-verbal and moderately verbal ways in which she interacted with friends. She was fortunate that her teacher, Barbara, was determined to help her develop a more elastic sense of who she was and could be, not only as a reader and writer, but also as a speaker. But because her silence tended to make Sara blend in with the crowd, it was also fortunate that her role as a case study - the subject of reams of notes - served as a vehicle that helped her teacher notice the subtle, inaudible network of messages sent by her shy students.

By the time I selected Sara as a case study, the class had come to accept my own quiet, non-authoritative role in the classroom. I sat next to children, scribbled notes, and made audiotapes. No one - not even the shyest children - seemed to mind when I listened in on conversations or sat and observed them. As I watched Sara watching others, assessing their needs, and then quietly helping them, I thought that she might someday
Sara didn't simply watch people. She read faces. She looked for the narratives in her classmates' gestures, facial expressions, and activities. If their narratives invited her participation, she knew how to jump in without taking over. Her ways of interacting, far from being the blank they seemed on the early audiotapes tapes I made, played a crucial role in the web of answerability that made her class a community.

In Democracy And Education, Dewey asserts that it is our myriad acts of learning to live in dialogue with others that constitute the pulse of society. Society exists in these acts rather than because of them. Although Sara struggled with shyness, her ability to read faces, respond to others, and exercise a keen sense of empathy were talents that made her vital to the microcosmic society of Barbara's class. Her ways without words reminded me that Dewey never limited his notion of communication to uses of the spoken word. In a sense, Sara's ability to observe, understand, and build common ground puts the communicative powers of the verbose to shame.

Society not only continues to exist by transmission, by communication, but it may fairly be said to exist in transmission, in communication. There is more than a verbal tie between the word common, community, and communication. Men live in a community in virtue of the things they have in common; and communication is the way in which they come to possess things in common.... Such things cannot be passed physically from one to another like bricks, they cannot be shared as persons would share a pie by dividing it into physical pieces. (Dewey, 1966, 4)

Shared narratives and new levels of understanding are, in fact, often woven among young children while they hold objects like blocks, dolls, or puzzle pieces in their hands. These everyday objects tap children's intentions and creativity. They open up...
possibilities for them to build stories together - the common ground of play. Charles Simic’s poem “Stone” plays with the notion that because objects held in the hand trigger strong memories, images, and ideas, enormous reserves of energy may lie deep inside them, ready to be radiated out through our imaginations. But the reader’s first action, stepping into the world inside the stone, would be impossible without the work of his or her imagination.

Stone
by Charles Simic

Go inside a stone
That would be my way.
Let somebody else become a dove
Or gnash with a tiger’s tooth.
I am happy to be a stone.

From the outside the stone is a riddle:
No one knows how to answer it.
Yet within, it must be cool and quiet
Even though a cow steps on it full weight
Even though a child throws it in a river;
The stone sinks, slow, unperturbed
To the river bottom
Where the fishes come to knock on it
And listen.

I have seen two sparks fly out
When two stones are rubbed,
So perhaps it is not dark inside after all;
Perhaps there is a moon shining
From somewhere, as though behind a hill -
Just enough light to make out
The strange writings, the star-charts
On the inner walls.

As children imagine their way into the narratives of play, they knit together treasured objects, valuable scraps, gestures, and language. The narratives they generate
and hold in common are built of more than just the spoken word.

Sara’s invitations to build common ground through play were usually extended without fanfare. Or for that matter, without words. A scene taken from the field notes I wrote in November was typical.

Jessica, a Korean child who is new to the school, has been in the country for just one year. This is her second school. She has spoken only a word or two since the school year began. Like a diminutive shadow, she tags along with girls who are oblivious to her presence, imitating whatever they write or draw. She is shy, reluctant to speak, and not quite able to reach out for friends.

Most of the girls treat her like a pet. They occasionally ask her to sit with them when the class gathers on the rug. They’re affectionate when they choose to be, but when the lunch bell rings, they forget that she exists. Sara does not. Although she’s often attached to her two best friends, she takes interest in scenes they seem not to notice. Today, as the other children line up for lunch, Sara stands by the coat rack and watches Jessica, who has brought a set of tiny plastic animals to school in her pocket: two horses, a lamb, and a black dog.

Jessica stands at the end of the line. No one turns to wave or motions for her to join them at a lunch table. Slowly, she turns away from the group, takes the set of animals out of her pocket and makes the two horses gallop along the edge of a table. Sara watches for a moment and then, without a word, walks over, crouches down, and grasps the figure of the plastic dog. “R-r-ruff! Ruff!” she growls and makes the dog romp alongside one of the horses.

For the first time that day, perhaps for several days, Jessica’s eyes light up. Without looking at Sara, she smiles and makes her horses whinny back at the dog. Laughing at the sound she has let slip from her mouth, she risks a moment of eye contact. The girls grin at each other and make their animals race back across the table. They’re in a world of their own until Barbara calls to them from out in the hall.

Quickly, they gather up the figurines, stuff them in their pockets, and leave the room side by side. Neither has spoken a word.

Sara engaged in small, unnoticed actions like this every day. Her quiet way of
generating connectedness played a dynamic role that complemented those played by her extroverted peers, children whose voices and actions commanded their teacher’s attention. The author Kim Chernin calls these quiet acts of community building the “politics of the small.” (Chemin, 17) Although they are usually carried out without an audience present to notice or applaud, these acts of engagement upset the norm. Their cumulative effect may be revolutionary. In the lives of individuals and communities, a few quiet norm-defying actions can set in motion powerful change.

...all our acts unfurl by knocking into other acts sent spinning on their way to effect yet others, in a vast chain of consequence. The small, it might be said, spins the threads that weave the net that catches the world. This world-net we cast, almost unknowingly, from our gathering together of individual acts, holds as a value that which is intimate, immediate, participatory, and personally engaged. When these values grow strong enough to address a disintegrating society, we will be standing face-to-face with a movement for social justice... (Chemin, 18)

Trust: Establishing the foundation for risk-taking

Even with limited uses of talk in formal settings, Sara was not without an important role in the life of her class. Once Barbara and I really noticed her, we took steps to honor Sara’s strengths. At the same time, we wanted to help her find ways of developing a more elastic sense of the masks she might wear as a speaker. But noticing her at all would have been difficult if I hadn’t seen my younger self reflected in her. I recognized Sara. I knew how easily she might opt out, choose to blend in with the crowd, and avoid the spotlight. She might never find herself in another place that challenged and supported her attempts to grow as a speaker. Studied approaches to talk - in both its communicative and performative functions - are seldom central to language
arts lessons in spite of the fact that we know that without a voice, every fine quality that children like Sara have to offer might be lost in the widening pools of worlds they will inhabit as the years go by.

Allowing children to opt out of talk in the official world of the classroom amounts to educational malpractice. We wouldn’t dream of not helping a child learn to become a better reader or writer. We help them develop the literacies they need to make their lives count and hope that they’ll be lifelong readers and writers. We treat their development as speakers as incidental.

However, one has only to think of the ways in which a certain form of recitation was implemented in 19th century grade school classrooms to know that simply forcing the issue of talk with a child leads to even greater instances of malpractice. Memorize this tonight. You’ll perform it for the class tomorrow. Wobbly knees, sweaty palms, an ocean-like roar mounting in one’s ears. There are ways of introducing children to performance that will make them avoid public forms of talk for the rest of their lives.

Trust could not be a more central issue. If Barbara had decided to launch her immersion unit in September, only performers like Danielle would have thrived. Without a shared history of trust inside their classroom community, children like Sara would not have taken the risks they did. Establishing the net that catches the world takes time. Barbara waited until January to begin her immersion unit. Of course, the Fall months were filled with chances to jump into text through improvisations, puppet shows, choral readings of story poems, and book talk. But these were elements which Barbara, with her infectious love of performance and the spoken word, knit gradually and subtly
into the life of the community. Within the relative privacy afforded by raucous recitations of story poems like Ogden Nash’s *The Adventures of Isabelle*, Sara began to use her voice dramatically long before the beginning of the Poetry Project.

By mid-year, Sara and her classmates had built a history together. They trusted each other and were ready to take on new experiences as performers and speakers. Their steps towards these roles required only the slightest nudge, if that. Children moved through the rehearsal process at their own pace. They discovered which types of rehearsals worked best for them. One child never grew comfortable in front of an audience that included people from outside his own classroom. In order to take risks as performers, he and many of the other quiet children needed to be surrounded by peers who knew them well, children who had practiced with them and were aware of the tremendous effort that had gone into their work.

But even that inner circle of an audience was a starting point. Initial successes fed the appetite with which children approached each new performance. Growing repertoires of experience helped them to select the poems that best suited them and gave them a new grasp of how they might use voice, gesture, and eye contact to invite an audience into a performance. Offering children these experiences at a carefully planned time and with a web of choices built in set the stage for their growth as speakers. Barbara and I had high expectations. Although it was impossible to opt out, experiences were tailored to fit the readiness of each child.
The Eyes of One’s Audience: Context creates miscues

Maybe they’re not really shy at home. They’re just shy around new people that they don’t know. So if you get to give them a chance, they could kind of maybe make friends, and then they’d speak out loud to you.

Sara, age six - Exit interview

Central to the issue of trust for Sara was the fact that when she looked into the eyes of an audience, she felt a sudden wave of vulnerability and fear. Being in the spotlight destroyed her otherwise keen ability to read what she saw written in the faces of others. The result was a drawing back of intent, a curling into oneself that was all too familiar. Shy children are born with the tendency to react this way to some forms of attention. When they walk into our classrooms, they may not have developed the sense of agency that allows them to deal effectively with the less-than-intimate audiences they face.

Sara’s apprehension may be a reflex that we all feel to some extent, but with which people deal differently. Some recoil. Some develop the capacity to entertain. They learn to manipulate the attention of others. But recall one portion of the advice Danielle gave to younger children. Naive trust of one’s audience is not the cornerstone of her remarks.

Your heart might be embarrassed. You might be embarrassed inside. Don’t show ’em. Because then people’d give you, like, “Oh no. She doesn’t want to do it. Get off the stage.” Or whatever.

If a fairly seasoned extrovert knows how tentative that relationship with the audience-as-beast can be, how can a quiet child like Sara slip past the fear that catches at her heart when she sees its collective eyes staring at her? How can quiet children move
beyond thoughts of mere survival and learn to enjoy their uses of the spoken word outside their innermost circles of friends and family? Danielle’s next lines suggest a possible solution, one born in Barbara’s classroom. There the audience was made up of peers who had gone through every phase of the rehearsal process with each other. Within that community of insiders who cared, it was possible to take risks.

... just think what the parts are and don’t get too frustrated. You know? And say the words. If you do a mistake, don’t worry. People won’t really make fun of you because they know you’re little and they know you. So just do the part you’re acting. And the people will clap for you. It doesn’t really matter if you make a mistake.

Sara read and responded to vast quantities of poetry during the immersion unit. She also wrote sensitive poems that helped her to sort out her thoughts and celebrate what she loved most. But the central story of her winter’s journey concerns the ways in which linking literacy to performance helped Sara to develop a public voice. Not Danielle’s voice, but one that was genuinely her own. Adapting a workshop-like approach to the performance of poetry articulated a process which, for Sara, desperately needed to be unpacked.

Her budding confidence as a speaker later extended to the roles she played in large and small group discussions. Whenever I interviewed her about how this shift in voice took place, she’d say “I got used to it.” That phrase, the self-comforting tone in which it was said, and the number of times she repeated it spoke volumes. Buoyed by her friends’ exuberant rehearsals and words of confidence, Sara began to enjoy performance. Barbara and I hoped that the seeds of confidence planted by months of classroom experience would stay with her in the years to come. Santayana suggests that
they might.

Perceptions do not remain in the mind, as would be suggested by the trite simile of the seal and the wax, passive and changeless, until time wears off their rough edges and makes them fade. No, perceptions fall into the brain rather as seeds into a furrowed field or even as sparks into a keg of gunpowder. Each image breeds a hundred more... (Santayana, 1900, 2)

Sara had another personal stake in wanting to take new risks as a speaker and performer. Her grandfather, a warm, outgoing man, is a character actor who is known nationally for the roles he plays on stage, in films, and on television. Sara loves him and idolizes his craft. By the end of our 10 week immersion unit, and again, when I visited her two years later, she said that she wanted to be an actress when she grew up. Neither Barbara nor I had a shred of the talent scout in our intentions. We weren’t out to find one or two special children in the class who had a gift for performance. We weren’t out to create two dozen Danielles.

Whether or not Sara pursues this dream, the understanding that accomplished verbal performances are the end result of hours of rehearsals, and that they, like finely written pieces, are constructs, will stay with her. The risks she took here and the experiences she constructed in word and gesture will become part of her inner dialogue of thought, and hence, part of all her verbal performances that lie ahead.

Perhaps Sara will feel enabled to approach performance on foot lighted stages, but she may also enter into the dialogue of business, education, politics, and community with the understanding that being part of any of these forums is within her reach. Performative ways with words, Bauman insists, allow us to win the necessary attention of any audience, large or small. Without bringing performative qualities into our ways with...
the spoken word, our ability to engage in dialogue with others will never be complete.

...the performer elicits the participative attention and energy of his audience, and to the extent that they value this performance, they will allow themselves to be caught up in it. When this happens, the performer gains a measure of prestige and control over the audience - prestige because of the demonstrated competence he has displayed, control because the determination of the flow of the interaction is in his hands. When the performer gains control in this way, the potential for transformation of the social structure may become available to him as well. (Bauman, 1984, 43-4)

One comment Sara made during our exit conference suggests that she knows that the confidence she began to build as a performer of poetry in first grade would be important in other arenas.

When you’re a grown-up, you can’t be afraid to speak, ‘cause then people would think that you’re not very good. And they wouldn’t, like, apply you for a job or something like that... And maybe you’re hiding something that’s really important, but you don’t think it’s important. And you’re not going to say it? And then maybe they’re not going to think that you’re going to be good enough.

Several minutes later, during the same series of exit interviews, one of Sara’s classmates, another Sarah, a child who was also hesitant to speak in whole group settings, echoed this pattern of thinking about how her experiences in Barbara’s classroom might affect both of them in the future.

L: Somebody else talked about being shy around an audience of strangers, like when the parents came to the Poetry Celebration at the end. They said what really helped (during our regular classroom rehearsals) was having a classroom full of people who were all in the same boat, who were all beginning to experiment with this.

SN: (nods) And people you know.

L: Why is it important that other people are there with you, taking
risks and taking first steps into performance?

SN: ‘Cause then, you like - By the time you get to high school, if you’re ever - If you want to take drama, you can’t do it.

L: If you haven’t had those first chances?

SN: (nods) You’d be like all shut up.

L: How does being with classmates help you open up? Instead of, like, (feeling) shut up?

SN: You know the people and it’s like, they’re not going to laugh because they know you really tried. Like, so even if you make a mistake, they won’t laugh. You know? Like people who you have - no idea about might laugh.

L: All they see is the performance?

SN: (nods) Like, but your partners see the work and stuff like that. So that’s how.

L: Why is that important for quiet people or shy people who usually don’t speak up in a group or don’t like to entertain?

SN: Because again, in high school, if they are called on to read, right? If the whole class is like doing one book? They’ll like - (demonstrates - clamps hand over mouth.)

L: - just clam up?

SN: (muffled voice) Um hum!

L: You have your hand over your mouth.

SN: Um hum. It’s like putting a lock on your mouth.

L: Why is it important for people, real quiet people, not to go around in this world with a lock on their mouths?

SN: (laughs, takes hand away) ‘Cause then if they wanted to say anything at all, they wouldn’t be able to get it out. Unless they had the key and we could get the code and stuff like that. ‘Cause
they’re like looking at the back (of the lock) and that’s where the code is. They’ll go tick-tick-tick (demonstrates child working combination for lock on her own mouth).

L: So maybe for you, the key or the code is having a chance to get used to it?

SN: (nods)

Diving into some speaking roles may always require more studied effort for either of these girls than it might for personalities who thrive in the spotlight. But given experience with the processes that help one to craft verbal performances, neither will be without a voice.

Performance: Apprenticeship in the art of impression management

...one can speak of a human being’s absolute need for the other, for the other’s seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity - the only self-activity capable of producing his outwardly finished personality. This outward personality would not exist, if the other did not create it: aesthetic memory is productive - it gives birth, for the first time, to the outward human being on a new plane of being. (Bakhtin, 1990, 35-6)

Sara’s first plunge into the performance of poetry came in a forum in which her voice could not be singled out. For months before the Poetry Project began, the class would gather on the rug of their classroom each morning for twenty minutes of singing and reading aloud jump rope rhymes, nonsense jingles, and story poems. Although the story poems were fairly complicated texts, the first graders seemed to take them in through their pores. They knew them by heart before a week was out. Later, they gradually connected the print on the pages of their Jingle Books to the words that had seeped into the marrow of her bones.

Sara took in more than just the words. In the midst of those raucous whole group
readings, she looked across the circle and saw the varieties of facial expressions other children were using. From either side, she could hear the variations in tone her two best friends were experimenting with. Sara began to imitate them, mirroring their exaggerated gestures, arching her eyebrows, and using her voice playfully. Later, her own style evolved, filled with the echoes and reverberations of others' words as well as the shadows of their gestures and uses of facial expression. Within these noisy, enjoyable meetings, the first and most subtle of apprenticeships began. They were a crucial, low-risk point of entry for many children.

Within that setting, the poems that first got Sara to swap her gentle, observant mask for that of a self-possessed, feisty heroine were Ogden Nash’s *Isabelle* poems. When Barbara and Danielle assumed Isabelle’s studied air of nonchalance in the face of danger, she did the same. Sara became the bold and fearless Isabelle. She had fun. It may have been a relief to step into Isabelle’s shoes.

The well-rehearsed flow of words in these early recitations also plunged Sara into the feel of a poem: its cadence, pace, and all the patterns that schooled her mind’s ear. As she stepped repeatedly between the lines of each story poem, its fibers were slowly woven into her own language. When she heard her voice writing those qualities in the air, Sara began to experience a different dimension of her public voice. This voice was confident and musical. Not hesitant. Like many of us who aren’t comfortable speaking in a crowd, the speech patterns that Sara used successfully in small group conversations broke down in large group forums.

If you’ve ever transcribed a conversation, you know that complete sentences are
almost the exception to the rule, an imposition of the written word on the spoken. There is a recursive quality to speech. People make false starts and then go back to revise their statements. They use sentence fragments, leave off direct objects, and rely on immediate contexts and gestures to help them convey meaning. All of this is normal.

But there are differences in style among speakers that make differences in writing styles pale by comparison. Barbara and Danielle have the knack of seeming to be at ease as they speak. They make relatively few false starts. The stories they tell are supported by an infrastructure of pace, timing, and expressiveness. They keep track of their audience’s reactions and use them to shape their on-going stories. In short, their speech patterns are performative. When they speak, others listen.

When I transcribed Sara’s conversations, there were noticeable differences in the ways in which she told stories. In public forums, she tended to make more false starts and used more numerous sentence fragments than she did in her “backstage” discussions with friends (Goffman, 1959). She stopped for lengthy pauses between statements and needed verbal and non-verbal prompts in order to continue. Sometimes even these weren’t enough. Public speaking did not come easily to her. Watching the ways in which her speech patterns broke down in front of large groups was especially painful for me to hear because I recognized exactly what was happening. Spontaneous talk in large group settings has never been my forte either. Far from it.

As I sat in on whole class meetings, I would scribble down what Sara did and said, but my peripheral vision was more than a little busy noticing how children strained to hear her words. I knew how quickly she lost her audience and how, in spite of her
teacher’s sensitive encouragement, her meaning was often lost, much of it left untapped, blocked by apprehension. She looked relieved to be out of the spotlight after she finished speaking. But she also looked disappointed with her own efforts and that broke my heart.

How does a child learn to assume responsibility for forging a relationship with her audience when everything seems to fall apart when the spotlight turns in her direction? Bauman insists that before we can assume responsibility for the ways in which we address an audience, we must internalize a standard against which our performance will be judged. Different contexts require specific types of performances (Bauman, 1986, 21). If we want a child like Sara to internalize a repertoire of such standards, she must be immersed in a classroom culture which pays attention to a host of speech genres and the art of impression management. As Lisa Delpit would insist, that immersion must include explicit instruction in one’s craft (Delpit, 1991). But above all, it requires inclusion in a community which does not reserve the role of accomplished speaker or storyteller for an elite.

The close study of a secondary orality, such as the performance of poetry, brings with it the chance to indulge in rehearsals, oral drafts, and revisions, practices whose names seem less connected to talk than they do to the writing process. But the study of talk as craft seemed the best route to take. We hoped that the facility with the spoken word Sara might gain during performance workshop would result in a new version of delayed spillover, one that complements that noticed by Cambourne. Perhaps Sara’s new-found confidence and ability to use her voice to publish the well-crafted words of
others would spill over into or infuse the ways in which she invested her voice in all the
discourse communities around her.

Unpacking the process: Sara learns to structure a front

Ten days after the Poetry Project began, we began to introduce specific lessons on
how poems might be read aloud. Children listened to Barbara read aloud from a poster-
sized copy of “My Favorite Word” by James and Lucia Hymes and watched her puzzle
over various ways of saying each line. They told her what sounded best. Barbara
explained that she needed to mark up her text in ways that would help her remember
their suggestions. She underlined a word here, circled a pattern of consonant sounds
there, and used a highlighter marker to accent portions where she wanted to raise her
voice. She returned to reading aloud and added a few other notes. Her manner was
playful, and her rehearsal notes highly idiosyncratic. However, her purpose was serious.
She was marking up her text in ways that would help her remember how she might
structure a performance.

Barbara invited the children to share her engagement with a poem. Obviously,
she was deeply engaged as a reader, but the responses she was jotting down were
altogether different than the readers’ responses they’d seen her write before. These notes
centered around the ways in which she planned to use her voice to publish a poem.
Within that first week, each child received his or her own copies of three fairly easy to
read introductory poems: “My Favorite Word” by Lucia and James L. Hymes, Jr. and two
untitled poems by Karla Kuskin. They began to mark them up in whole group meetings
before they set off to experiment with one of two ways of rehearsing: reading to the wall
or working with a partner.

Although Sara loved working with Sadaf and Danielle, her two closest friends, she liked to begin the rehearsal process in relative privacy. She read to the wall. Because the method had been demonstrated and explained in mini-lessons, no one considered it odd to sit face to face with a shelf of books, a coatroom door, or a wall and read aloud. It was simply a way for young readers as performers to get comfortable with written text: decoding lines, wading through the linguistic pitfalls of reading it aloud, and listening to the sound of one’s own voice reading expressively. An audience was present only in a child’s imagination. Sarah N. once explained that she imagined that the small particles in the cinder block wall she spoke to were the faces of an audience.

L: Why is talking to a wall important for you?

SN: Because there are little things (points to speckles in cinder blocks) that make it almost like it’s more than one block or whatever, right? So I feel like it’s actually an audience...a huge audience, like in high school.

L: In the cinder blocks? Right. It’s a sea of faces, it’s a sea of speckles.

Within that private setting, Sara began the rehearsal process. She didn’t remain there long. After four or five minutes, she’d rush to join her friends and the trio would begin it’s symbiotic life. Sara would initially sit off to one side, watching and listening to Sadaf and Danielle. Like a shadow, she mouthed their words and mirrored their gestures before she added notes about their style to the margins of her printed text. Her performative friends were soon at her side, curious about what she had written.

Sara was good at finding the words to describe what Sadaf and Danielle
generated as they took first turns at shaping oral drafts. They used her remarks as the basis for the performer’s notes they added to their own texts and notebook pages. While Sara played the role of articulator, Sadaf and Danielle’s notes often grew more detailed than her own. Sara’s notes often reflect the trio’s collaboration: We worked on this. We need to work on that.

Sometimes, especially during the first two weeks of performance workshop, neither Barbara nor I could read all the cryptic notes, lines, and symbols the children wrote in the margins of their poetry sheets. At other times, even when we could read what they’d written, we could only know from our knowledge of the context exactly what the children meant. Recall how Danielle reminded herself to “use a little bit of a voice.” We knew that these early notes would give way to the ability to make more articulate comments and use a more consistent, if idiosyncratic, shorthand. What was important during the earliest days of performance workshop was that the children knew what their notes meant. They were learning to think about how they might structure an oral interpretation of text.

Sadaf and Danielle, in turn, provided more than models for Sara to shadow and assess. Although she liked to sit to one side mirroring their gestures and mouthing their words, Sara turned to them for support and advice when it was her turn to perform. They were members of the same team. Sadaf and Danielle needed no encouragement to take on the role of supportive coach for their friend. Both might have coped better than did Sara with the presence of an audience, but they had some inkling of the intensity of her fear. They witnessed her shift from confidence to apprehension when she moved from
private to public circles. Once Sara confided to Sadaf that she was happy that her own mother was coming to school that day to serve as a reading volunteer. When she left the classroom to read in the hall, she said, she wouldn’t have to feel afraid. Sadaf nodded and put her arm around her. “I know,” she said. “I know.”

Sadaf and Danielle genuinely wanted to help Sara learn to face her audiences and perform. Her admiration of their performative strengths also made them feel needed. Going beyond the fuel of mini-lessons on supportive partner behaviors, both girls slathered on praise, applauded her progress, and pointed out small, specific elements of performance she might work on next. Sara drank in every word of their encouragement. None of it seemed overstated to her. She also appreciated the fact that she was an essential part of their trio. She was acutely aware of feeling needed, or not, by others.

When asked what had helped her to approach the oral performance of literature, she refers to the roles played by her friends in school and her younger brothers at home.

Danielle began to play the role of coach during the first week of performance workshop. At that time, all the children were still using one or both of the poems Barbara had introduced in the mini-lesson as the subject of their rehearsals. Sara initially wanted to rehearse the same poem her friends had selected, an untitled poem about a lion written by Karla Kuskin. (Kuskin, 1980, 68) Danielle read it in a commanding voice, exploiting the words roaring and boring by teasing a growling sound out of their /or/ pattern. Her performance sent Sara and Sadaf into fits of laughter.

But try as she might, Sara couldn’t put fierce sounds into her own voice. Danielle encouraged her to try the softer voiced poem about a house cat relaxing in the sun.
Sara did it so well that the other girls began to rehearse it, too, mirroring her cat-like movements. Although the brief notes Sara wrote that day do not begin to encompass all that happened during their rehearsal, they do show that the trio talked about how they might use their voices to publish the poem. Following Barbara’s lead in the previous day’s share circle, Sara also added a brief reflection.

1-10-95 Rehearsal Notes: [“My Favorite Word” by Lucia and James L. Hymes] Various words, phrases circled, stanzas bracketed as small portions for practice.

1-11-95 Rehearsal Notes: [Karla Kuskin’s untitled poem about a lion] Ending sounds in each line emphasized: uuu, eee, rrr, uuu, eee, rrr]. Unfinished note: I practiced - [page two] It is loud like a lion and some of the words rhyme like king and thing and roaring and boring. It is hard talking like a lion for me because I’m quiet. Special words saved: King, thing.

1-12-95 Rehearsal Notes: [Karla Kuskin’s untitled poem about a cat and Lucia and James L. Hymes “My Favorite Word”] I noticed that we know the words and motions and we are going to practice a little bit more!

On the following Monday, Barbara introduced Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Windy Nights.” The children spent every rehearsal period that week working on this considerably more complex poem. They patted the rhythm on their knees as they listened to Barbara read it aloud and helped her mark up her poster-sized text. Barbara then gave the children their own copies and asked them to jot down notes, and to circle individual words or entire lines - anything that would help them think about how they might use their voices. She reminded them that they would probably need to spend the first day or two with the poem just getting to know the words.

As she listened to Barbara read “Windy Nights,” Sara wrote a notebook entry that
reveals how she was beginning to pay attention to the sounds embedded in poems. She was already thinking ahead to her own rehearsals. Of course, her response was just what we hoped this particular poem would trigger. Sara and Danielle, who had few problems reading the text, began to mark up their copies as performers that morning. Danielle jumped immediately into an initial oral draft while Sara listened and assessed. When Danielle emphasized every /w/ sound in the poem to create the mood of a windy, mysterious night for her listeners, Sara looked at the text, noticed what Danielle was doing, and pointed out the pattern.

During rehearsal time, the girls jumped from jotting down reminders, back to rehearsing a few lines, and then back to talking and writing again. Each time they returned to the text, Sara and Danielle were able to exercise a more conscious sense of control over their performances.

1-16-95 Rehearsal Notes: [R. L. Stevenson’s “Windy Nights”] It is a loud poem and I noticed the clomping sounds. WW sounds, bum-bum. W-w-w. Like an owl.

During the next week, we wanted to help children build more bridges between the ways in which they analyzed and responded to poems as readers and the ways in which they began to assess their possibilities for performance. Barbara began the week with Nan Fry’s poem “Apple” because of the intriguing sounds the children could find - and exploit - within it. We cut up several varieties of apples, listened for the sounds they made as they split open, and found the dark stars locked inside them. Then we cut up all the apples into chunks and tasted each one.

Sara’s notes showed two kinds of response: she made extensive use of
performer's notes, showing the sounds she wanted to exploit, and then added a one line reader's response. Even this note shows an emphasis on listening to the sounds embedded in a poem. Experience with framing oral drafts was helping Sara to do more than articulate how she planned to rehearse. She was also developing an ear for the voice of the poem itself. Performance was helping to shape the reader-as-musician.

1-23-95 Rehearsal Notes: “Apple” by Nan Fry
[Note at top of page]: Sound alive, not dead. [Other notes] Sound mysterious. Slow down. No stop here. Soft. Slow. Soft. [Circled or underlined: Center, star, white, bite, ripened, stretches. Many entire lines circled during first few read-throughs in whole group.] [Reader's response] I noticed that it makes a sound like people walking in the snow - crunch, crunch, crunch. And I found out that the poem was quiet.

1-24-95 I know the words well. But I have to work on the voice. And put some words...and I need to make my voice alive. My voice clear.

Sara reminded herself to “sound alive, not dead.” Her choice of words bears explanation. The word “dead” as a descriptor had entered the class lexicon a few days earlier in an exchange between two rehearsal partners. The incident stemmed from the fact that first graders do not mince words. Their arresting, inventive uses of language are usually a gift when it comes to reading or writing poetry. However, one morning, an exasperated six year old girl looked into the eyes of her quiet rehearsal partner and told her that she had a dead face.

Barbara and I hurried over to the tearful, angry pair. As we pried the story of what had happened from their jumbled words, we looked at each other over the tops of the children’s heads and sighed. Two sorts of lessons obviously needed to be added to performance workshop. The first was one we had already touched on, but one which we
desperately needed to address again. Partners need a protocol for working with each other, making observations, and suggesting ways to improve. We were reminded that it's necessary to cycle back to these lessons over and over again.

The second type of lesson stemmed from the fact that the child who made the "dead face" comment had honestly been grappling for a way to make her partner begin to use facial expression. Sara, a wonderful observer of others, who wanted to develop the ability to perform, had mirrored the expressions she saw on the faces of her friends. She quietly adopted others' facial expressions and used them to school herself about ways of structuring the "front" she presented to others when performing poetry. Other children needed more explicit lessons. They were completely unaware that their faces did not show the emotions they thought they revealed. Barbara calmed the girls and reminded them of a basic, but unwavering class rule: they were to always try to treat other children in ways that they would like to be treated. Then she asked the quiet child to sit with her for a few minutes and mirror her actions. Her partner and I were invited to stay and watch.

Several mini-lessons later, mirroring was well on its way to becoming a staple and extremely popular rehearsal device in Barbara's classroom. We later found that it is a common rehearsal device. Although Barbara and I resisted it, and perhaps because we resisted it, too, the word dead also became a permanent part of the children's rehearsal vocabulary. Even a sensitive child like Sara found it just too apt not to use. However, she applied it only to herself: her own face, her own voice.
Audience concerns: the circle widens

In February, as Sara began to prepare poems to perform in the class’s Friday afternoon poetry parties, she became aware that her close-knit trio of rehearsal partners would no longer be her only audience. She jotted down notes about remembering to look at the audience or slowing down so that people could understand what she was saying. Although she was still extremely soft-spoken, Danielle and Sadaf told her that at long last they could hear her when they stood several paces away. Their flattery worked as a prompt. After their praise, Sara reminded herself to speak up.

2-2-95: Rehearsal Notes [Excerpts from Wild, Wild, Sunflower Child, Anna by Crescent Dragonwagon and “Some Things Don’t Make Any Sense At All” by Judith Viorst] Alyssa and I have to slow down. I need to look at the audience. I’m good at my voice because I am sort of loud.

2-16-95: Rehearsal Notes: [“The Flattered Flying Fish” by E. V. Rieu] Work on the mood and the words and face the audience.

Sara was also getting accustomed to another sort of audience. We began using the camera to film children as they rehearsed - alone or in pairs - at the beginning of February. Some of the first graders, including Sara, had trouble looking directly into the impersonal lens of the camera in spite of the fact that many of their parents had camcorders at home. In school, they were just beginning to feel comfortable looking at an audience composed of clusters of their friends. With live audiences, their eyes could roam from one face to another. They could respond to the expressions they saw written there. Now we were asking them to maintain a focused, intimate look at a blank, glassy lens.

Help arrived in the form of another student innovation. Danielle told Sara that
when she looked into the lens of the camera, she pretended that it was an ice cream cone.
Sara was intrigued. She and several other children who’d been listening in gave it a try.

It worked. Students who had been reluctant to look into the camera now gazed directly
into the lens and smiled. Their faces reflected a delicious sense of ease and an intense
desire to be there. At the same time, the ridiculous nature of the device made them laugh
and take their self-consciousness less seriously. Like the dead face phrase, the ice cream
cone concept spread like wildfire. Sara included it in a list of performance tips she wrote
for younger children towards the end of the project.

Children’s innovations continued to move beyond the scope of inventive uses of
language to include other ideas that made rehearsals easier. Within two weeks after
filming began, six year-old Richard rolled up a blank sheet of 8½ x 11 inch paper into a
cone shape and began “filming” his partner’s oral drafts of Louis Carroll’s
“Jabberwocky.” The rest of the class, including Sara’s rehearsal group, immediately
adopted the practice. They didn’t need the feedback of actual filmed clips as much as
they needed a device that helped them to focus their energies and project a public sense
of self. Now they didn’t have to wait for an adult to help them.

Although my researcher’s role made it imperative for me to continue to videotape
rehearsals, I knew that the children didn’t really need me to put film in the camcorder
each morning. They still vied for chances to film oral drafts, but an empty camcorder or
paper cone cameras also helped them to envision themselves in special roles as speakers.
Sitting in front of a paper cone camera, Sara projected a more formal, audience-
conscious sense of self. She constructed a “front” to match the performative role she was

198
playing.

Sara also began to zero in on particular technical problems that stood in the way of elevating her performance of a poem from one that could be appreciated only by a close circle of friends to one that would hold the attention of a crowd. The chance to do this well was motivation enough for Sara to do battle with the few roadblocks that still stood in her way.

2-28-95 Rehearsal Notes
"Fambly Time" by Eloise Greenfield
I am trying to not stumble on the words, like the list of things the family is going to do.

"My Favorite Word" by James and Lucia Hymes
I am going to work on the yeses, how much yeses, and work on the words.

Six weeks after she introduced performance workshop, Barbara asked the children to write a series of tips they might pass along to younger children who were about to embark into similar waters. Sara’s entry shows that she was no longer an outsider to the process of constructing performative ways with words. Although it wasn’t easy for her, she was beginning to feel at home in the territory.

3-1-95: Performance Tips
1. Be brave, not scared.
2. Concentrate on what you’re doing.
3. Do not be silly.
4. Read the poem. Do not try to memorize it first.
5. Match your voice to the poem.
6. Try to echo your partner’s lines.
7. Take a chunk at a time.
8. Do not gallop through the poem.

One week later, Sara wrote similarly detailed lists of rehearsal notes as she prepared for her performance at Friday’s poetry party. One of Barbara’s earlier mini-
lessons had stressed the notion of creating a two-column chart which allowed one to assess both one's achievements and those facets of a performance which still needed work. Sara's ability to articulate her intentions is far more sophisticated than it was only several weeks before.

3-7-95 Rehearsal Notes: “Windy Nights” by R. L. Stevenson and “Poem” by Langston Hughes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Work On</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know my expression really well.</td>
<td>My face needs more expression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the words very well.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I concentrated on the right mood of the poem.</td>
<td>I have to make my face alive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make “Windy Nights” loud.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft: “I Loved My Friend”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3-9-95: Rehearsal Notes: “Windy Nights” and “Poem”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Work On</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voice - My voice is very good.</td>
<td>Face - My face is dead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the words very good.</td>
<td>My expression is like not alive!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not mumble because mom helped me not to mumble.</td>
<td>My motions need more motions or else everyone will be snoring.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sara's grandfather visited the classroom towards the end of our immersion unit. Although the children enjoyed listening to him read aloud three of Sara's favorite poems, they were most impressed by something he said about the early years of his career, when he took voice classes in New York. They talked about it for days after he left. Imagine a twenty-one year old, someone really old, taking years of voice classes. Years! It made the weeks they'd spent in rehearsals and thinking about how they might use their voices look tame. They were thoroughly impressed.

During her follow-up interview, Sara discussed the advice her grandfather had given her about feeling nervous in front of an audience.
S: He’s taught me to face the crowd and don’t look away. And if you’re a little nervous, just look kind of above their heads, like you told us at the poetry project (party) [Note: Audience at the final poetry party was composed of parents]. And speak loudly, ‘cause there’s hardly any microphones (on stage), only one right here (in the middle).

L: When you were in first grade, you told me that you wanted to be an actress.

S: Yup.

L: Can you tell me about that?

S: Well, I had mixed feelings about it at first, because I didn’t know how to perform, because I was in kindergarten. And when I came into first grade, the poetry really helped me a lot, so now I really want to be an actress.

L: How did the poetry help you?

S: Like saying it out loud to everybody. And writing in it (marking up the text as if it were a script), so you kind of know what you’re talking about. And re-reading it. So I guess that would help.

A refrain emerges: I got used to it

In March, Sara began to use one phrase whenever she spoke or wrote about her growing confidence as a performer. The words “I got used to it” became her refrain, a quietly celebratory phrase she used time and time again to describe how she had come to feel at home in the territory. It was at once self-comforting and self-congratulatory in its tone.

3-1-95 Performance this year
When I just started our Poetry Party (Project), I was as scared as a bunny rabbit. But now it changed because I got used to it.

3-2-95 Visitors came in (the classroom) and I was a little bit scared when the visitors talked to me. But when I got used to it, I was not scared at all
when they talked to me (about) acting. I like acting because my grandpa acts and you get to be how you want.

3-3-95 "Poem" (first draft)

I want to be
an actress when
I grow up
because my grandfather
is and I am
used to it
and I think
I'll be great!

(Crossed out last three lines:
And I wonder what it's
like to be in front
of 101 people!)

3-21-97 Final Interview

S: Well, when I was just going up and performing, it was hard, because everybody was looking at me and being so quiet. But then I got used to it, so it got easier.

L: Why was it important to have a chance to get used to it?

S: 'Cause I want to be an actress when I grow up, so have to get used to saying stuff in front of people.

L: How did you get used to it?

S: Well, at my home, I was given a book and I would read it out loud, and my brothers, they make up poems for their, like, classes for extra work, so I read them to the family.

L: Was there anything we did in school that helped you get used to performing?

S: Yeah, because sometimes we would memorize poems, um, and then we'd recite them, just like you have to memorize a script and then recite it. Just like that.
Goffman used the theater as a metaphor for looking at the ways in which people present themselves and play various roles during the course of their everyday lives. I have adopted his metaphor for looking at the ways in which children learn to take on new roles as speakers. However, one facet of his metaphor is problematic. Goffman wrote about a single continuum bordered by two extremes: people who are completely "taken in" by their own performances and those who feel removed from or "cynical" about the roles they play (Goffman, 1959).

...the performer may be moved to guide the conviction of his audience only as a means to other ends, having no ultimate concern in the conception that they have of him or of the situation. When the individual has no belief in his own act and no ultimate concern with the beliefs of his audience, we may call him cynical, reserving the term "sincere" for individuals who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance. These extremes are something a little more than just the ends of a continuum. Each provides the individual with a position which has its own particular securities and defenses, so there will be a tendency for those who have traveled close to one of these poles to complete the voyage. (Goffman, 1959, 18-19)

Neither extreme offers us an accurate way of describing the complex network of ways in which children perceive themselves as speakers on the various stages they already inhabit or on the stages which they would like to explore. During the poetry project, Sara learned to try on a variety of masks she could wear on both stages for performance and in public forums for discursive talk: coach, performer, listener, and active participant. She needed to have the ways in which one goes about wearing each of those masks demystified. Although Sara felt intimidated by the spotlight, she wanted to learn how to take on new roles. She was not cynical about the fact that she was a quiet person. She knew that the roles she already played in her inner circles of family and
friends had overwhelmingly strong, positive characteristics.

But Sara also knew that she wanted more. She could distance herself enough from the variety of masks she currently wore to know that there were others that she needed to try on. Her intentions reveal her capacity for introspection, curiosity, and courage. Not cynicism. The fact that she hadn’t already pursued these ends was not because she intended to play the role of one missing in interaction for the rest of her life. It was neither a matter of believing whole-heartedly in her quiet mask nor feeling detached from it but purposefully and cynically wearing it anyway. Sara’s desire to try on new masks emerged in a complex inner dialogue which was answered by the ways in which Barbara structured her classroom.

Goffman’s metaphor comes from the etymological root for the word person, or persona, which is traceable to the word for mask, and, by extension, to the role or roles one plays in life. Instead of confirming Goffman’s focus on a single mask, Sara’s intentions suggest both a fluid sense of the word mask and a whole electric network along which she, or any of us, might travel in a lifetime. Her sense of self in the classroom was not made up of one mask, but an evolving repertoire of masks. The extent to which Sara was especially conscious of this desire to learn to try on other, more performative, masks made her especially intriguing.

A fluid sense of the masks one might wear as a speaker is perhaps most amenable to being tapped before the heightened self-consciousness and peer pressure of later years emerge. Or before a child has accumulated a repertoire of discouraging experiences. In Barbara’s class, the message Sara consistently received was that the repertoire of roles
she played could be extended and that someone was there to show her how.

**Multiple sources of spillover feed the creation of text**

Danielle’s writing and dramatic way of reading revealed a child who was captivated by the sights, sensations, and voices around her. Her literacy events were aurally rich. Although she preferred to read and perform story poems that allowed her to step into character, the poems she wrote were infused with both performative qualities and her fascination with the sounds around her. Sara’s ways of reading and writing were different, drawn less from the sounds and sensations in which she was steeped than from her habits of sensitive reflection and observation of others. As the quiet member of a loyal trio composed of two extroverts and herself, Sara provided an emotional balance to the group’s chemistry. Just as her style of interaction complemented theirs, her habits as reader and writer also offered a balancing presence. If Danielle liked to talk, Sara loved to listen and reflect. If Danielle wrapped herself in sound, sensation, and outspoken characters, Sara read and wrote poems about friends, family, and scenes outside the classroom window. Her interaction with the page was wrapped in the same sensitive habits of reflection and observation that characterized her interactions with her peers.

Sara’s pursuit of connectedness was even obvious in the way she sat down to read. Like a giant six-legged creature, she, Danielle, and Sadaf would squeeze back to back onto one black bean bag chair during independent reading time. Sara snuggled down and read quietly while her companions subvocalized, gestured, or nudged her to listen to turn around and listen or help decode a word.

Even when Sara read about or observed things which were seemingly removed
from the topic of people she cared about, they triggered thoughts about relationships.
The topic colors almost every page of the notebook she kept that Spring. In any writer’s
notebook, one can discover his or her obsessions. Sara’s attention, we discovered,
almost always wound back to the subject of her friends and family, especially her
younger brothers, Sam and Max. Like any child, she had conflicting emotions about her
siblings. But the overwhelming sense one gets from reading the numerous entries she
wrote about them is that of an oldest child whose younger siblings are at the center of her
life. As a first grader, instead of writing the phrase “my baby brother,” she repeatedly
and poignantly referred to each as “my baby.”

Sara was also drawn to the ways in which poets capture the tiny, important details
that others overlook. When she read poetry, she collected boxes of special words and
phrases in her notebook, a response ritual the class first practiced in December when they
were immersed in a study of William Steig’s books. When Sara shared her response
notes with friends or in whole group meetings, she also stopped to jot down words others
had noticed. Neither this quiet, collegial facet of her literacy nor her penchant for
noticing details was a surprise, given the ways in which we had seen her study her peers,
read their faces, and interpret the narratives they shaped in play.

It is difficult to separate the study of the ways in which Sara grew as a reader
from the ways in which she grew as a writer. Indeed, it is difficult to separate a
discussion of these two strands of her literacy from a discussion of her growth as a
performer. All three were so intertwined that, for instance, even a discussion of how
Sara’s ability to decode text cannot be separated from her aurally rich, joyful immersion
in an abundance of poetry as a performer. She was never asked to do a phonics exercise based on the words or sound patterns in a poem. She did, however, spend hours immersed in reading and rereading each text she performed. Every sound pattern embedded within a poem was part of the music Sara studied and learned to play with. Recursive patterns of reading helped her to construct performances, but at the same time, Sara’s intimate knowledge of texts-as-performer had a profound impact on other facets of her reading. She read, spoke, and wrote with far greater fluency at the end of the project than she had at the beginning.

Although the reading of and discourse about new texts in reading workshop always paralleled the amount of time spent in rehearsals, the impact of time-intensive, intimate connections with making a few texts breathe cannot be discounted. In reading workshop, Sara learned to listen and respond to poems in a variety of ways. She acquired the words to help her describe what she noticed in them and became familiar with the tools poets used to craft words. She stretched her ability to listen for the range of emotional connections and memories a poem sparked. Sara learned to find her own pulse in poems written by others.

Eventually, the ways in which she had come to know poetry as a reader spilled over into the ways in which she wrote poems of her own. But because she was also immersed in poetry as a performer, the poems she wrote towards the end of the project were also infused with a spillover of performative features. The most arresting of these was her ability to re-enter a moment as a virtual performer. She stepped into her own memories and the moments she discovered in others’ poems and used the details she
gathered there to give her later poems a pace and emotional clarity that made her audience feel them in their bones.

**Creating the context for spillovers**

During the first week of the Poetry Project, we concentrated exclusively on the children’s immersion in poetry as readers. We began with short poems that triggered strong visual images. Sara and the other children closed their eyes and described the images each poem made them see. Later, they wrote and drew about those images in their notebooks. Even Sara’s earliest responses reveal her fascination with careful word choice and a tendency to think of her siblings.

1-3-95 **“Winter Moon” by Langston Hughes**

How thin and sharp is the moon tonight  
How thin and sharp and ghostly white  
Is the slim curved crook of the moon tonight.

Response: It gives me a picture of a crescent moon and it was so sharp it was like a needle.

1-4-95 **Haiku by Issa**

Softly -  
That it may not startle  
A butterfly —  
The gentle wind passes  
Over the young wheat.

Response: [Words circled: startle, gentle, and butterfly] Young (circled here, not in text) reminds me of my baby (brother) when he was very young and I was very gentle to him. [caption for drawing] This is him in the hospital.

Sara’s fascination with the way poets use details to create stirring visual images and ideas that resonate in the lives of distant readers continued to grow. The “regular
entries” she wrote in her notebook, as well as her reader’s responses, began to sound like poetry. Barbara pushed her students closer to their individual spillover points in the third week of January by urging them all to be skillful observers.

In Writing Workshop, the class began to take detailed inventories of the sights and sounds around them. For an entire week, Barbara’s mini-lessons centered around an idea sparked by what Donald Murray once wrote about his behavior in grade school. He was a day-dreamer. Instead of paying attention in class, he often found himself looking out the window. We urged the children to do the same, to gaze out the window or examine special plants, stones, mineral, and shells in the classroom. We pointed out existing notebook entries in the class which had been triggered by careful observations. The children set out to watch and listen with notebooks, pencils, and crayons in hand.

Barbara’s lessons on observation branched out to include the microcosmic world. She helped children learn to use magnifying glasses and a large-screen microscope to notice the intricacies of the world which weren’t readily accessible to the eye. In both large and small-scale observations, we kept Murray’s remarks about day-dreaming in mind. Not only should children record the tiny details they noticed with all their senses, but they should also be open to the other connections, images, and memories these observations sparked. The habits of careful observation introduced that week became part of each child’s ordinary range of options for Writing Workshop.

Sara’s early written observations were packed with poetic features: distinctive images or sounds, unusual word choices, unconscious uses of alliteration or entire phrases borrowed from poems she loved. Because whole-class discussions in Reading
Workshop still centered on the ways in which poets use particular tools to craft their work, Sara’s writing focuses on these details and images for several weeks rather than on reflections about her family.

1-6-95 “Firefly” by Elizabeth Maddox Roberts

A little light is going by,
Is going up to see the sky,
A little light with wings.
I never could have thought of it,
To have a little bug all lit
And made to go on wings.

Response: [Word circled: light] Little gives me a strong picture of one little lightning bug lighting a little bit and it looked like fire.
[Note Sara’s unconscious use of alliteration. Reconfigures alliterations used by poet]

1-9-95 Observation: writing workshop
The plant is curled with pink and light green and a dark green light part and the flowers are hot pink and the leaves are thick and (they have) jagged edges. [Observed plant with Danielle, who later wrote the poem “Begonia”]

Sara cycled back to her early responses and observations in February and March when she looked for seeds of poems within the patterns of her notebook obsessions. In some instances, her entries required only minor revisions such as line breaks before she published them as poems. The following series of notebook entries shows how the powerful images in a poem by Natalia Belting spilled over into and infused the language which Sara used for weeks to describe the winter scenes she saw outside her classroom window.
1-9-95 "Poem" by Natalia M. Belting

The dark gray clouds,
the great gray clouds,
the black rolling clouds are elephants
going down to the sea for water.
They draw up the water in their trunks.
They march back again across the sky.
They spray the earth again with the water,
and men say it is raining.

Response: [Circled: great gray clouds, rolling] It gives me a picture of big
gray clouds. They looked like elephants all over (the sky) and one
elephant (was) squirting water.

Several days after Sara read and responded to Belting’s poem, she and her
classmates took a listening walk around the neighborhood. Although it was early in the
afternoon, the school and all the nearby homes were still wrapped in fog. The children
were subdued. Most seemed startled by the sounds, trucks, and cars that emerged from
the depths of all that whiteness. They jotted down lists of impressions when we stopped
in front of the school and then continued their entries indoors. Although Sara had not re-
read Belting’s poem, the image of fog as a large gray cloud is central to her entry.

1-12-95 Observation: Writing workshop
The fog is thick. Fog is one big gray cloud covering the land. You can
see nothing. All you can see is a cloud and you can hear the birds
tweeting and down Bee-Be (?) The white glimmering snow shines. And
the cars rustle by.

When Sara revised this entry two months later, she shaped a poem which
followed Belting’s pattern of posing a series of short, one-line statements followed by a
two-line final observation. Although she consciously paralleled the phrases “all you see”
and “all you hear,” she was not aware that her poem mirrored one of the patterns in
Belting’s poem.

Fog

The thick fog covers the land.
All you see is a big gray cloud.
All you hear are birds tweeting
and the cars rustle by.

Images from Belting’s poem continued to infuse Sara’s imagination. Eighteen days after she responded to that poem and more than a week after she wrote her entry about the fog, Sara looked out the window during Writing Workshop and began what she thought would be a “regular” entry filled with ideas and impressions triggered by the cloudy winter day. The poem she wrote is made up almost entirely of words, phrases, and images from Belting’s poem.

1-27-95 Writing Workshop: Observation (first draft of poem)

The Big Gray Clouds

Big gray clouds
look like elephants
all over and the dark
rolling clouds
look like
elephants all over
the sky.

Anyone who reads Sara’s poem now might think that she turned back to Belting’s poem and copied certain words and phrases. But I was there. I saw her gaze out the window for seven or eight minutes until she seemed to get an idea. She wrote quickly and soon filled a notebook page. She never turned back to re-read Belting’s poem. Later that morning, when I asked her whether she had perhaps re-read that poem the night
before, Sara looked puzzled. She hadn’t read it since the day she wrote her first response.

When young children adopt words from favorite poems and claim them as their own, they are telling the truth. Like Sara, they take precious words and images to heart. When they write, these words and images spill onto the page. Perhaps their capacity for learning languages far more readily than adults is reflected in the fact that their minds seem so able to drink in all the echoes and reverberations of others’ words. The important words children dwell in as readers, writers, and speakers infuse their imaginations. They become part of a child’s own language and part of his or her ability to perceive.

Murray’s day-dreaming habits, once linked to jotting down ideas in a notebook, may have appealed to Sara because they helped her class learn to treasure the worth one might find embedded in quietness. The “quiet” thread that links her entries about fog, rolling clouds, and apple poems continued to surface in a series of poetic observations of the snow. With minor revisions, each of the following entries was published later as a poem.

1-11-95 Writing workshop: Observation
Snow comes down slowly and quiet as the fog and it covers the land (with) white. The snow looks like sparkles falling out of the sky.

1-16-95 Writing workshop: Observation
It is as quiet as the rain falling from the sky at night when everybody (is) sleeping and it is the middle of the night.

While children wrote or drew about their memories and observations in Writing
Workshop, they also took note of each poet’s use of special words during Reading Workshop. Sara circled or underlined words and phrases in several short poems while she sat in the whole group setting. Then she wrote more extensive observations about her favorite poem after she pasted it into her notebook. Her responses, if initially brief, reveal her ear for poetic detail, her knack for original descriptions, and a nascent performer’s fascination with the sounds of words.

1-10-95 “Cat in Moonlight” by Douglas Gibson

Through moonlight’s milk
She slowly passes
As soft as silk
Between tall grasses
I watch her go
So sleek and white,
As white as snow,
The moon so bright
I hardly know
White moon, white fur,
Which is the light
And which is her.

Response: [saved words: slowly, sleek, moon, bright] It gives me a picture of a cat and the moonlight. The milk is the moonlight at night.

1-13-95 “City Lights” by Rachel Field

Into the endless dark
The lights of the buildings shine,
Row upon twinkling row,
Line upon glistening line.
Up and up they mount
Till the tallest seems to be
The topmost taper set
On a towering Christmas tree.

Response: [saved words: shine, twinkling, glistening, taper, towering, and shiny (with markers around it like rays of light)] It gives me a picture of a
building (that) was shiny-bright. And it was night on Christmas Eve.

1-25-95 Untitled poem by Hitomaro

In the ocean of the sky
Wave-clouds are rising,
And the ship of the moon
Seems to be rowing along
Through a forest of stars.

Response: [Saved words: wave-clouds, stars, ocean, sky.] It gives me a picture of a moon that looks like a ship and an ocean with waves touching the sky. And the sky has millions of stars and birds. They glide around the sky.

The Emergence of a writer’s voice

Sara wrote her two most powerful poems after the class began to read poems about relationships. As her responses to these poems began to accumulate, two patterns emerged. She wrote frequently about her brothers, what it felt like to be an older sister, and what the presence of younger siblings meant in her relationship with her parents.

And, like many other children, she also needed to write about loss: moving away from a beloved cousin or missing her great-grandmother.

When Sara first brought one of her younger brothers into her writing in early January, we saw Sara as a caring older sister.

Response: [Words circled: startle, gentle, and butterfly] Young (circled here, not in text) reminds me of my baby (brother) when he was very young and I was very gentle to him. [caption for drawing] This is him in the hospital.

Two weeks later, the class read Judith Viorst’s poem “Some Things Don’t Make Any Sense At All.” It’s perplexed young speaker seemed to give Sara permission to discuss her ambivalence about having younger brothers. She might have shared her
mixed feelings with her parents, but until she read Viorst’s poem, Sara always talked to us about her little brothers with uncomplicated affection. In the first entry she wrote after reading the poem, Sara jumped from a reference about her brother as her baby to noticing that the speaker questioned why his mother bothered to have another child. In her second entry, Sara again refers to her brother as her baby, but makes a more pronounced connection between her feelings and those of the speaker. That week, she literally took on the voice of the speaker by performing the poem.

1-18-95 “Some Things Don’t Make Any Sense At All” by Judith Viorst

My mom says I’m her sugarplum.
My mom says I’m her lamb.
My mom says I’m completely perfect
Just the way I am.
My mom says I’m a super-special wonderful terrific little guy.
My mom just had another baby.
Why?

Response: [words circled: super-special wonderful terrific little guy, baby, why, and (title) “Some Things Don’t Make Any Sense At All”] Baby reminds me that I have a baby (brother) and I noticed that “Why?” has a question mark. The question mark shows how he feels.

2-16-98 Rehearsal Notes [“Some Things Don’t Make Any Sense At All”] I did (performed) this poem because I have a one year old baby (brother) and I was thinking maybe the baby in this poem was one year old and I was trying to show people how I feel about two brothers.

During the early part of February, the children read several poems which dealt with the more tumultuous moments in the day-to-day relationships between family members. Sara began to look more carefully at which moments which triggered her most ambivalent or angry thoughts about her siblings.
2-2-95 “It Hurts” by lindamichellebaron

Sometimes their words 
smash my brain 
like rain beating cement 
and that’s why I cry.

Even though I know 
that only sticks and 
stones crack bones, 
sometimes their words smash rain 

through cracks to my brain, 
and I can feel it all seep 
deep inside... 
and it hurts 

That’s why I cry.

Response: [circled words: sometimes, smash, why, know] I noticed that sometimes has two words in it and know has a silent letter and in why has a silent h. When my mom or dad yelled at me, it hurt like the boy or girl in this poem. Even if Max did it he blames it on me. I get yelled at.

2-14-95 “Go Away!” by lindamichellebaron

Somehow I’m always 
in the way. 
I’m always sent somewhere 
to play. 
Or told to go and watch tv.

Is it them? 
Or is it me?

Response: [Circled phrase: Go away!] This poem reminds me of when Sam, my one year old (brother) was born, I got sent to play or watch tv and I felt that I was not in the family anymore! When I had another baby (brother), I felt sad, but I didn’t speak or cry.

When she shared these private thoughts with her classmates, Sara got a warm response. Even the children who didn’t have siblings seemed to have wondered their
way into these same emotions, thinking about what their families would be like if another child arrived. Richard told Sara that her entry sounded like a poem. Part of her last line was, in fact, unconsciously borrowed from a poem called “When My Dog Died” by Freya Littledale. But Richard was right. Sara’s response did have a certain new energy that begged for further attention. But before she felt ready to work on that poem, she spent a month responding to poems others had written about both the comforting and difficult parts of relationships.

When the class read “At Annika’s Place” by Siv Widerberg, most of the children wanted to talk about moments when their parents were too busy to listen to them. For others, the poem invoked a need to write about a grandparent for days. One child pointed out that it’s not good if parents always treat their children as if they’re grown-ups. Sara agreed. Her response to Widerberg’s poem touches on both the times when she appreciates being treated as a grown-up and the comforting times when her parents treat her as if she were still very young and perhaps not an oldest child.

2-27-95: “At Annika’s Place” by Siv Widerberg

At home at Annika’s place
they talk to you
like you were big
“What do you think?”
“What’s the best way, do you think?”
“What do you think we should do?”
And then:
“Really.
Do you mean it?”
“Maybe so.”
“Well, you’re right about that!”
Or:
“No-o-ow, I wonder really
if that’s right...

I wish it was like Annika’s place
at our place.

Response: This girl wonders why she’s getting talked to bigly and I circled “What’s the best way, do you think?” because they have question marks. When I’m hurt or sick I get treated like a baby and when I’m good they treat me like a grown-up. My parents treat me sometimes like a baby, but I do not mind.

Widerberg’s poem and the discussions that surrounded it led Sara back to her primary obsession: her very normal feelings of ambivalence about having siblings. On February 28 she wrote a notebook entry, stopped to read it, and realized that it sounded like a poem. She immediately turned her page and began a second draft. As she wrote, she applied what she knew about line breaks and made more revisions than she had for any previous poem. Her previous attempt at giving a voice to the lion in Karla Kuskin’s poem finds a new home in a description of her own emotions and inner voice. A key phrase from her performance notes also infiltrates her discussion of her role as older sister.

2-28-95 Writing Workshop: “Poem” (first draft)
When my second baby was born, I felt like roaring like a hungry lion, but now I feel better about him and I am there for him if he got hurt.

2-28-95 Writing Workshop: “Poem” (second draft)
When Max was born
I hoped the next
baby would be
a girl but it
was not a girl and
I was sad and
cried because I really
wanted a girl
But then I
got used to my
brothers.

Sara was drawn back to her obsession the following day. While others gazed out the window, she sat at a table, turned her thoughts inward, and wrote a poem that dealt with her relationship with her mother and youngest brother. Although Sara didn’t realize it, that poem was only a stepping stone to a more powerful one she would write a week later. Note that this poem includes a phrase (“I was very gentle”) she first used in a reader response entry on January 4th.

3-1-95: “Poem” (first draft)

When I get
in trouble I
cry if mom
yells at me
loud but now
I hardly get in trouble
and I was very
gentle to Sam.

Sara now had a sizable collection of entries, poems, and reader responses that revolved around her role as the older sister to two brothers. The next week, Edie Ziegler, Closter’s staff developer, visited the class and sat with Sara for twenty minutes. They pulled out a list of all the comments Sara had written about her brothers and began a rambling conversation. Which words or phrases are especially strong? What comments have others made about your poems and entries that stand out in your memory? Tell me more about this entry. Instead of serving the shorter term goal of instructing Sara about this or that element of craft, Edie’s conversation took the much wiser course of
provoking fertile ground for further writing. She knew she was talking to a child who was standing on the brink of writing an important piece. Her consideration made Sara stop to consider the power of her own words.

The next day Sara wrote the first draft of a poem that made her classmates ask her to read it to them several times. She published it two days later with only minor revisions. The poem includes a phrase that originated in Littledale’s poem, but more intriguingly, it also shares that poem’s subtle pattern of movement from public areas and masks to a private space and the chance to take off the masks one wears around others. Sara has taken in these fragments and made them wholly her own.

3-8-95: “Me and My Brothers” (first draft)

When my second brother was born
I felt like I was not in the family any more.
I got sent to play or watch television. But
I didn’t speak or cry.
I went to (my) bedroom and looked at my baby pictures. Mom and Dad were holding me. I wondered if they would ever take care of me again.
"When Sam Was Born" (second draft, published 3-10-95)

When my second brother was born,
I felt like I was not in the family anymore.
I got sent to watch television or play,
but I didn’t cry or speak.

I went upstairs to my bedroom
and looked at my baby pictures.
Mom and Dad were holding me.

I wondered if they would ever
take care of me
again.

Like many first graders, Sara also wrote about loss: moving away from a beloved cousin, the death of her great-grandmother, or the fearful if wholly imagined possibility of the loss of affection. Parents are sometimes startled to find that their six year-olds want to write about, indeed, sometimes become temporarily obsessed with writing about, the losses in their lives. But writing gives children one way to deal with overwhelming emotions. Listening to poems about grief also strikes deep chords and opens up ways for children to talk or write about the loss of someone who truly loved and was loved by them. When the children in Barbara’s class shared their poems about loss with each other, not one child felt ill at ease.

Sara’s poems about the loss of her great-grandmother and the series of poems she wrote about her role as the oldest child in her family share common touchstones. They were all triggered to some extent by her initial reading of two poems about the loss of a pet: Freya Littledale’s “When My Dog Died,” and “My Thoughts” by Meghan Shapiro, one of my former students. Sara read both poems during the first week of February.
Words and phrases from each, circled here in her reader’s responses, continued to find their way into her poems for the next eight weeks.

2-6-95 “When My Dog Died” by Freya Littledale

When my dog died,
I didn’t cry.
I didn’t even speak -
not one word.
Then I found his collar
in the closet.
It was made of thick red leather
with a brass buckle.
I held it in my hands
and then I cried
and made his collar wet.

Response: [Circled lines: “I didn’t cry. I didn’t even speak -” Wrote: “It is sad” in a caption bubble next to these lines. Circled “And then” in second to last line.] I noticed that I didn’t repeat and then - Both started with a Dee and a Eee. A very sad poem. (Circled word: cry) This reminds me when my great grandma died and I cried a lot.

2-7-95 “My Thoughts” by Meghan Shapiro, age 6

I thought
and thought.
When am I
going to die?
Because my dog died
And my heart fainted away.

Response: [Circled repeating lines] It is sad. [Begins draft] Great grandma My great grandma died. This poem reminds me when my great grandma died. I cried because I loved her a lot. [Second page of entry: continues to gather memories about her grandmother.] “Ice Cream” She brought me to the store and I carried my allowance in my pocket and the coins jingled in my pocket and I sat right by her and she and I ordered a milkshake and when I think of her I get sad and my blanket feels like her.
“My Great-grandma” (Second draft, published 3-95]

My great-grandma was the best great-grandma
a girl could have, so gentle.
She died
and I cried.
I looked at the stars
and wondered,
“When will I die?”
CHAPTER VII

CHRISTINA’S SONG: THE WRITER

Most of the basic material a writer works with is acquired before the age of fifteen.

Willa Cather

One of the problems with poetry in the modern age is that it’s become separated from the spoken word. When you ask students to read a poem aloud, you find they have no idea of the rhythm of the language, its flow, inflection, and pitch. They do not understand that stress and tonality are instruments of meaning. Is the fault wholly theirs? Poetry has strayed far from its origins in song and dance. With its gradual retreat into print and currently, into the academy, it is in danger of becoming a highly technical and specialized linguistic skill.

Stanley Kunitz

In contrast to my first two case studies, Christina had absolutely no intention of trying on the masks of a performative speaker. She was much too busy writing. Whenever Barbara announced that it was time for performance, Christina would roll her eyes, sigh, and slap her notebook shut. The look on her face told us that her complicity was marginal at best. If she had to rehearse, she would select poems that would make her friends smirk, like Shel Silverstein’s “You Need to Have an Iron Rear” or story poems like Louis Carroll’s “Jabberwocky” that allowed her to blend a show of bravado with an enjoyable plunge into word play. Not poems that suggested a sensitive soul.

But when she wrote, she was a figure right out of Lessons From A Child (Calkins, 1983). She poured out her heart to the page and begged to be allowed to return to the
classroom to write during lunchtime. Barbara and I wondered if any good would come from insisting that, yes, she did have to put away her notebook. She had to try on the masks of a performer. While the intensity with which she identified herself as a writer would have made her a fascinating case study in and of itself, her reluctance about entering Performance Workshop frankly made me nervous. Would she show me that asking some children to try on performative ways with words would prove to be an empty or even an injurious experience? Or might she offer me a less expected lesson?

The observations I made of Christina that Fall had already shown me what a complicated child she was. When she spoke with adults or wrote, she seemed confident and assertive. But when she sat in whole class meetings, she rarely said a word and blushed miserably whenever she was called on. Public forums brought her too close to revealing the child who stood just behind her self-selected mask of bravado, one who preferred to be quiet and in whom there were alternating but powerful tides of shyness and striking independence.

If her lack of voice on my early audiotapes initially made her seem like Sara, that was an illusion. Sara was shy in large group settings, but she was also quick to seek out the company of a few close friends. Given the choice, Christina sought out the page. She nurtured that relationship in school far more than any other. Although the mechanics of writing were still as laborious for her as they were for the other children, she constantly looked for times and places to sit alone with notebook and pencil. She also wrote at home, even at times when, as she told us, her parents thought she was in bed. Her constant yearning to sit apart and converse with the page made her unique - a poet in
our midst. Yet she was also entirely like her peers, a curly-haired first grade girl with sparkly brown eyes, a wry sense of humor, and a circle of close friends.

Christina’s conversations with the page were filled with the same sense of ease she seemed to feel when she spoke with adults. Especially adults who cared about writing. During our interviews, her reserve disappeared. She was always anxious to talk about the craft she knew we both loved. I only wish I could have had her sense of self-assurance when I was her age. As we talked about writing, it was obvious that we each felt quite comfortable with one way of working with words, where the page was our first audience. But we were also somewhat ill at ease in the other, where the concept of audience meant that numerous pairs of eyes would actually turn in our direction. Being surrounded by flesh-and-blood audiences threw us both off. The people who met us in public forums met strangers who were out of their element, strangers we were just getting acquainted with ourselves.

Christina still seemed outwardly content with her lack of involvement in the official world of classroom talk. She coped with her fear of speaking in large groups through fairly conscious avoidance strategies. She chose to sit to Barbara’s extreme left when the class gathered on the rug, and looked away or down when Barbara posed questions. However, she was deeply if quietly invested in every lesson that helped her to explore and enjoy the world. If anything could be depended on to drive her past her self-consciousness, it was her keen sense of curiosity. If she had a point to make or a vital question to ask, she raised her hand and waited for Barbara’s attention. But if her own intentions did not provoke her involvement, she did not and would not offer it out of a
general sense of obligation to participate. As I watched her, I had to smile. The mask of the good girl was one in which she thankfully had no interest.

This is not a tale of heart-stopping transformation. Christina did not develop a sudden interest in or a lifelong commitment to the performance of poetry. But neither is this a story of one child's rejection of performative ways with words. Christina moved from reluctant, mumbling-level involvement in our initial whole group recitations of *Jabberwocky* to barely self-conscious filmed drafts of her favorite poems. But through her love of writing, Christina also led us back to Dewey and all that he wrote about the impact of aesthetic experience on ways of coming to know. She made us pay attention to the ways in which being immersed in the sounds of written language can play a crucial role in the development of a young writer.

Hearing poetry performed, and using her own voice, gestures, and facial expression to shape similar performances, had as profound an impact on the ways in which Christina wrote as did her intensive immersion in poetry as a reader. Aesthetic and esthetic experience merged during rehearsals in ways that they could not during the class time devoted to reading and writing. Performance put both a musical and a physical dimension into Christina’s experience of poetry, linking our work in the classroom to the poetry of ancient bards and street performers, modern hand-clapping games, jump-rope rhymes, and the years of bedtime stories and songs she had heard at home. Performance made the walls of the classroom permeable to the rhythms and pulse of poetry in the world.

Christina's immersion in the performance of poetry was eventually drawn into the
conversations she had with the page. When performance workshop began, Christina dragged her feet and gave Barbara wary looks when it was time to rehearse, but her hesitancy soon gave way to a grudging sense of surprise. Even though Christina would continue to describe herself primarily as a writer, she was quick to recognize and appreciate the new networks of sound that began to filter into and feed her writing process.

Talking to the page

10:20 a.m. The air in the classroom smells of apple juice and Cheetos. Christina and Alyssa sit at a table sharing crackers and talking about their after-school plans. After a few minutes, Alyssa leaves to read a big book with another friend while Christina sweeps the crumbs off their table and grabs her spiral-bound notebook. Pencil in hand, she opens to the page she was writing before snack time, re-reads the top half of the page and begins to write furiously. When she glances up, she realizes that more than a few minutes have passed. Snack time is over, and almost all the other children have gathered on the rug. Christina pushes in her chair and hurries to join them, but leaves her notebook open, ready for her return.

Christina’s most constant companion during first grade was her notebook. When she wrote in it, she spoke to it as if to a friend. Even when she used it to respond to the poems she read in class, she tucked asides and other fragments of dramatic conversation into the text. These conversations weren’t directed at any reader other than herself. She simply liked to write as if she were talking with the page. Ideas, words, and entire phrases from the poems she read and discussed spilled out into her entries, penciled-in traces of the echoes and reverberations of other’s talk.

Christina’s notebook was her confidant. Even when she seemed at her most reserved in public forums, she could always confide in the page. During the first part of
January, she informed it repeatedly that she wanted to be an archeologist when she grew up. The thought of this child, who already viewed herself as a writer, going on archeological digs in order to unearth artifacts from ancient civilizations reminded me of Seamus Heaney's poem, "Digging." (Heaney, 3-4) In it, Heaney compares his work as a poet, one who metaphorically digs into his own consciousness with a pen, to the work of his father who cut turf with a spade. In first grade, Christina used a pencil to do her digging.

1-4-95 Untitled poem by Onitsura

A trout leaps high —
   Below him, in the river bottom,
       Clouds flow by.

**Response:** [circled 2nd and 3rd lines] I (was) thinking about a quiet wood (and) the deers drinking water from the river. I remember that one day, me and my dad were walking and I saw a deer. He was drinking from the river and as I walked by, he looked up and tried to say, "Bye-bye! See you later!" ...I really want to go to camp. I love animals... I want to discover. I feel sort of happy. It is fun.

1-5-98 "Dragon Smoke" by Lilian Moore

Breathe and blow
   white clouds
       with every puff.
   It's cold today,
       cold enough
to see your breath.
Huff!
   Breathe dragon smoke
today!

**Response:** [circled: white clouds, with every puff, to see your breath] The blowing wind makes your breath blow like drifting clouds and that is how dragon wind insisted (existed). I love dragons and swords and stuff like that. I want to find stuff like that and you could see under the ground how
the old days (were). I think that they used (to have) much different thing(s).

One week later, Christina decided that she wanted to become a doctor instead of an archeologist. When she read “Eagle Flight” by Alonzo Lopez, his last line, “My heart flies with it” reminded Christina of her own dreams. She drew that line into the entry she wrote in response to Lopez’ poem. Her habit of borrowing words and lines was much like Sara’s. When she wrote, she frequently and sometimes unintentionally used fragments of the poems she had taken to heart. The words of other poets were becoming part of her own frames of thought.

1-16-95 Reader’s response [text: Eagle Flight by Alonzo Lopez]

An eagle wings gracefully through the sky.
   On the earth I stand
   and watch.
My heart flies with it.

Response: [Circled: gracefully, my heart flies with it] I like how that word sounds. I dream of being a doctor. Please call me Dr. H____. I want to be a bird doctor. I have medicines in my bedroom. I thought I wanted to be a scientist, but from (watching) Dr. Doogy Houser I decided to be a doctor. But actually, I want to be a person’s doctor. I can’t believe I love it so much. It is great. My heart flies with being a doctor and helping other people.
   (signed) Dr. H_____ from School

During the second half of the morning, Christina’s class began writing workshop. The entries she wrote in response to what she read were rarely separated from the entries she made as a writer. Instead of keeping reader’s responses in one notebook, and her assortment of entries in another, the children used one thick spiral-bound notebook for both purposes. Perhaps especially because we were in the midst of an immersion unit,
we wanted their lives as readers to feed every aspect of their lives as writers. The same
would hold true during performance workshop. The notes children wrote to themselves
about what their own rehearsal, or how they helped a partner, were made as entries in the
same notebook.

Christina's entries had especially elastic boundaries. Her reader's responses, like
the one listed above, often flowed right into the draft of a poem or an invocation like the
entry below. If she didn't finish whatever she began to draft during reading workshop,
she had plenty of time to resume her work as part of writing workshop.

1-16-95 “My Dream” (first draft)

As I watch my room,
when it look like
almost a hospital,
and I dream of being
a doctor. But why?
I wonder. Because
it is my personality,
what I want to be.
So let my dreams
come true.

Christina's entries occasionally shifted from her dramatic, conversational style
into song lyrics. Unfortunately, she insisted that she would never sing these lyrics in
school. She wanted to wait until she got older and could form her own rock band. Some
entries, like the one printed below, ended with only one or two lyrical lines.

1-8-95 “Cat in Moonlight” by Douglas Gibson

Through moonlight’s milk
She slowly passes
As soft as silk
Between tall grasses
I watch her go
So sleek and white,
As white as snow,
The moon so bright
I hardly know
White moon, white fur,
Which is the light
And which is her.

Reader's response: [circled: slowly passes, soft, sleek, white, as white as snow, moon, bright, I hardly know] [Saved words: sleek, soft, snow, slowly, silk] This reminds me of Max. He is black and white. He looks like (a) skunk. He is my cat. He feed him. I clean his litter box. Does that smell bad! I don’t like to clean it, but I have to. You can’t have everything you want, you know. So I tell you, you can’t have everything. The end.

Other entire entries, like the one Christina wrote on January 12th, were written purposefully as song lyrics. They usually went on at length, were printed in bold letters, and featured one illustrated phrase on each notebook page. These particular lyrics also foreshadowed a particularly intensive three week period of writing.

1-12-95 “Grandma” (first draft of song lyrics)

Grandma, grandma, come
to me, grandma.
Grandma, come to me.
You’re up ahead where
the world is bright. Grandma,
grandma, come to me.

“Grandma” was a precursor to the series of entries, poems, and songs Christina would soon write about the death of her maternal grandmother. For some reason, this series was triggered the day we read Nan Fry’s poem “Apple.” Christina seemed to love the lesson. She and the other children munched on chunks of apple, listened to the crunching sounds they made, and watched us slice open several apples to look for the
stars. When she wrote a response, she let her thoughts drift from the crunching sounds of that morning to a special winter's walk she took with her father.

1-23-95 Reader's Response to "Apple" by Nan Fry
She was imagining that when you cut an apple in half you see a star. Ch-ch-ch-ch, k-c-k-c-k-c-pom-pom-pom. The poet was thinking about what is inside an apple and that is a star. I love apples. Do you? The picture that I get is me walking into the snow. It reminds me of when I go into the woods and it is snowing. I go with my dad. It was so beautiful out that night. This is my picture. It was about 10 degrees. It was like the wind was cutting into me.

Later that morning, Christina stood near the window, stared at the cloudy winter sky, and began to write a poem in which she used words from the Natalia Belting poem we had read over a week earlier.

1-23-98 Writing workshop: observation
Watch the great big clouds,
watch the great big e - (unfinished)

Suddenly, Christina abandoned her poem and began to write an entry about the death of the grandmother she had nicknamed Coco when she was very young. For days afterward, almost anything she read reminded her of her loss. Her mother asked about the extent to which her six year-old daughter seemed to be dwelling on death, but Barbara assured her that the run of entries and poems she was writing fit a familiar pattern.

1-23-95, 2nd entry One thing that really touched my heart was when my granny died. That was so - just - I don't know. And I miss her so much. I can't say how much I miss her. It is just so sad to me I (made up) a song for her when she died. It goes like this. Sh. I wish I was with you. That was the song I made. I played it in (on) my piano. I love you, Coco.
From your Annie Coco. Love, Christy. [dedication for drawing] To Coco, Love Christy
1-23-95, 3rd entry Titi and Mia and Guagui and Daisy are fine and me, I miss you, Coco, very much. I can’t believe that you died. One day I will be with you. I love you. From -

1-23-95, 4th entry My hero. I miss you so much. I think about you every day and miss you.

1-23-95, 5th entry To Coco: Everybody misses you, Coco, even me, very much. You are my favorite one, Coco. [caption for drawing: You and me together always.]

Two days later, Christina read “Waves” by Ralph Fletcher and “The Sea” by Andrew Park. She was especially struck by the concept of a wave of sadness in Fletcher’s poem. It made her think about the trips to New Hampshire she and her parents used to make with Coco and how thoughts of her grandmother’s death brought on a wave of sadness. As she finished her response, an idea for another song crystalized. By this point, the pattern was familiar. Poems that touched her deeply invoked poems or songs of her own. Christina wrote as if listening to words only she could hear. She finished her first draft of lyrics for her new song without stopping once to notice what was going on around her. When she finally did look up, her classmates had lined up for lunch.

1-25-95 Reader’s response [text: “Waves” by Ralph Fletcher]

I think that the person (who) was looking at the ocean was a very good writer. At the bottom of the poem where it says “a wave of sadness” it makes me think (about) when me and my mom and dad go (went) to New Hampshire. We don’t go there often any more. That is near where my grandma’s house is. We go there maybe four times a year. And also I have a sadness of when my grandma died. That was a wave of sadness. One thing that really, yes, really, that I will never forget for as long as I live. Oh, oh, yes! Oh, oh, yes! I will never forget, Oh, I will never

235

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
forget, I say.
It is when the good
times go.
And that is
the ocean.
Let the good times roll!
Let the good times pass.
Let the good times roll.
Oh, yes!
Let the good time(s) roll.
Watch the clouds,
I say, the - [unfinished 1st draft]

Christina happened to be standing at the window that day because Barbara had just launched a series of mini-lessons that encouraged children to daydream and observe, and to use the impressions sparked by these sources to feed their writing. One week after Christina wrote “Let The Good Times Roll,” Barbara introduced a two-week series of unrhymed poems about loss, partly in response to the entries Christina and other children had been writing to mourn the loss of grandparents, pets, and friends. She encouraged the children to take their habit of close observations one step farther: into the memories that kept calling for their attention.

We began with one of our favorite poems by Langston Hughes. When Christina read it, she was again launched into one of her multi-paged responses that ended four pages later, in the first draft of a poem. She was intrigued by Barbara’s emphasis on the close observations of details: those in front of her, and those waiting to be unlocked in her memories. The idea of using the details she found when she closed her eyes and stepped into her memories in order to craft sharper descriptions was one Christina put to use immediately. She worked at finding ways to let her readers see and hear her grandmother.
1-30-95  "Poem" by Langston Hughes

I loved my friend.
He went away from me.
There’s nothing more to say.
The poem ends,
Soft as it began -
I loved my friend.

Response: [Note: Began to write one response in a caption bubble, but then kept adding layers, resulting literally in layers of response.] The part that I remember of my grandma is the dark blue veins on her forehead and on her hands. She died. I miss her so much. There is not any more to say. I love her. It makes me sad because my dog and my grandma died. That’s all I can think of. Now one more thing. To her: I love you. From your Annie Coco. Love, Christy. I hope you like it. My heart flies with you, Coco. I miss you. We all go a (at) least for a 106 years.

[3rd page] Her hands is (as) soft a(s) snow. Her face as soft as a rose.

[4th page] The only thing I remember of my grandma is the dark blue veins on her forehead.
Her hands is (as) soft as snow.
She talked so clearly and sweetly. She died.
Why? Now even that (though) she is not with me,
I love her very much.

One week later, the class read “When My Dog Died” by Freya Littledale and “My Thoughts” by Meghan Shapiro. Again, Christina wrote volumes. She was obviously incorporating Barbara’s lessons on close observations and details, but she would not or perhaps could not discuss her writing process with us. While she wrote and grieved, she sat apart from the rest of the class and rejected all overtures - adults and peers - for writing conferences. She wanted to be left alone. She needed to speak with the page.
When my dog died,
I didn’t cry.
I didn’t even speak -
not one word.
Then I found his collar
in the closet.
It was made of thick red leather
with a brass buckle.
I held it in my hands
and then I cried
and made his collar wet.

2-7-95 Reader’s response [Circled: I didn’t, I didn’t, not one word, it was made of thick red leather, and then I cried, and made his collar wet.] I call my dog stupid. I call my dog idiot. But I know (that) one day, I am gonna regret it. Why is it (that) I hate him? He is a pest. Sometimes [2nd page] I wonder how do dog(s) feel? Do they feel good or bad? And I had a dog that died. I did not feel it until I found his collar, the dark, silk(y), warm collar. Then I cried. He was a poodle. [3rd page] His dark blue eyes is (as) blue as the sky. Please come down again! Just come down. I know you remember me. I was three. You were four. I remember you very much, especially your dark blue eyes. You loved very much to play with me. [4th page] Remember we used to take walks to Coco? What did your Mom look like? Do you remember? Well, I know you love them. It is your life up there somewhere. I also know you know I love you. [5th page] As I look at my baby (pictures), I miss they (the) old times when Coco used to be around and when my dog died. Why did this happen to me? I want to know. Please tell me. Someone, but not anyone. Just mommy, please. [6th page] My fish, my cat, my dog, my grandma. Why did they die? But I know that they’re somewhere under the stars. Why is this? I don’t know why. I love all of you.

By the time Christina wrote her response to “My Thoughts,” she was ready to write her own poem. In the entries that flowed out of this poem are echoes of conversations as well as traces of other poems she had read.
I thought
and thought.
When am I
going to die?
Because my dog died
And my heart fainted away.

Response: [1st draft of poem]

Poem

My heart fainted away when my grandma died.
I didn’t cry. I didn’t even speak.
But then I went into her closet.
I found the most beautifullest jewelry.
I put it near my face and cried.

I will never forget her. I wish her will come back again, but I
know her spirit is with me and one day I am gonna be the Grandma
someday, not any day, but one day, a special day when my kid grows up. I
want to be a good mommy.

When I am I gonna die? My grandma died. I really miss her
very much. She was the best grandma in the world. I love her very much.
I can’t say. [caption for drawing: Together, you and me]

Perhaps Christina found it difficult to talk about her love for her grandmother, but
she was obviously using the written word to find a way of paying tribute to and mourning
her. After a three week period of writing only about her, Christina’s thoughts gradually
began to include others. One poem that seemed to prompt that shift was “Since Hanna
Moved Away” by Judith Viorst. (Viorst, 1981)

Since Hanna Moved Away

The tires on my bike are flat.
The sky is grouchy gray.
At least it sure feels like that
Since Hanna moved away.
Chocolate ice cream tastes like prunes.
December's come to stay.
They've taken back the Mays and Junes
Since Hanna moved away.

Flowers smell like halibut.
Velvet feels like hay.
Every handsome dog's a mutt
Since Hanna moved away.

Nothing's fun to laugh about.
Nothing's fun to play.
They call me, but I won't come out
Since Hanna moved away.

Viorst's knack for adding gentle notes of humor to poems about the serious turns in a child's life caught Christina's attention. She began to think about a friend who had moved away. Later that morning, she wrote a poem about him. Echoes of Langston Hughes' "Poem" and Viorst's "Since Hanna Moved Away" filtered into her work.

2-14-95 Reader Response [text: "Since Hanna Moved Away" by Judith Viorst]
[Circled or underlined: Grouchy gray, Chocolate ice cream tastes like prunes, flowers smell like halibut, they call me but I won't come out. Also underlined last line in every stanza, the refrain "Since Hanna Moved Away."] My connection that I have is when my friend moved away. His name was Gregory. This was my best friend in nursery (school). The teacher's names were Miss Kinsey (and ?). The poet repeats, like the r's.

2-14-95 Writing workshop: Entry (first draft of poem)
When Gregory left I just sat in my seat and I think twiddled my thumbs. When I got home, I sat in my chair and stared at the street and thought if I was going to see him again. There's nothing more to say. I love(d) my friend. Now chocolate tastes like squid.

Christina's notebook became her sanctuary, her backstage, the place in which she felt comfortable with taking off the masks she usually wore in public settings. Besides
writing letters, poems, and songs to her beloved grandmother, Christina also used her notebook to write an important letter to Emily Dickinson. One morning, we read both Emily Dickinson’s “I’m Nobody” poem and Emily, a picture book biography of the poet’s life by Michael Bedard (Bedard, 1992). Christina was mildly intrigued by the idea that Dickinson never came out of her house, but she was completely captivated by the fact that she had finally been introduced to a woman who not only loved to write poetry, but who also preferred to keep her own counsel. Other people would have called her shy.

Christina couldn’t wait to write to her. There were topics they needed to discuss. She and her friend Ann had been trying unsuccessfully to verbally confront a group of boys peers on the playground for over a week. Their attempts had set off waves of inner turmoil that Christina was anxious to talk about. Her reader’s response became a five-page letter. While writing to Dickinson, Christina reveals more than a few traces of the struggle between her bold and shy selves.

**Poem by Emily Dickinson**

I’m nobody! Who are you?  
Are you nobody, too?  
Then there’s a pair of us — Don’t tell!  
They’d banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!  
How public, like a frog  
to tell your name the livelong day  
To an admiring bog!

**Response:** This (poem) could be the letter [mentioned in the picture book] that Emily gave the little girl. There might be another letter. She is not stupid. I like to write like she did. She said, “I am proud to be quiet.” She is trying to say that loud people are as good as quiet. It matters what you are inside, not what you are in (on) the outside. It is your spirit.

[3rd page] Well, if you are, why are you? Would you tell me? I wonder. Do you wonder how I am? Well, if you do, I'll tell you a little about me. Well, one thing. I am not quiet. Are you? Well, I like to fight with other people. Do you? Or are you scared? [Draws line separating above text from next three lines] Well, I repeated some words. Do you notice that? I did (it) on purpose. I want to sound like a poet.

[4th page] I love to write. I know you do, so I am telling you. I do like to write. Do you really have a sister? Well, I don't have a brother or a sister. You never went out. How did you live? Were you from Mars that you did not have to breathe? I am surprised. Did you write poetry? Well, I do sometimes. Did you write it always? Why did you stay in your bedroom? Well, I stay there a lot. I write a lot of (about) being a doctor. Were you ever one? I want to be one because I want to help people. So back (to) what I was saying.

[5th page] Well, I think I have a reason to be grumpy when Ann spilled my glitter, don't you think? Ooooh! Was I mad! Why did she do that? Do you know? I was sad because my mother spent a lot of money (to purchase the glitter.) But we are still friends.

Christina and Ann, who indeed remained the closest of friends, soon went to work on a list they called “Our Plan To Get The Boys.” Apparently, several boys in the class had been teasing them about which lunchtime soccer team was the best: their own,
which included only boys, or Christina’s, which included both girls and boys. The girls’ written plans, a partial reflection of their two-day top secret strategy session, were unfortunately lost during a lunch hour recess, but their importance was abiding. These sketchy notes served as a springboard for intense, conspiratorial conversations, which, in turn, gave the girls a way of rehearsing for an upcoming verbal confrontation on the playground. I had never seen first graders use writing as a way of rehearsing for any type of confrontation, but this device seemed to help Christina. When I visited her in third grade, she was using her notebook to rehearse in writing for what she felt would be an inevitable verbal confrontation between herself and the lunch monitors.

Christina’s struggle between her bold inner voice and her more hesitant public voice was also evident in the ways in which she participated in her book club. When the balance of power in her group stayed in check, she was happy. She laughed along with her friends, initiated new tangents to conversations, and stayed thoroughly involved in the book. But when the balance tipped in favor of a bossy personality, she swallowed her frustration for days or weeks until she could take it no longer.

Her boiling point might have included lengthy inner tirades, but she actually said little to confront the child who was irritating her. Christina was unaware of this. She perceived the slightest verbal spat as an event of monumental proportions. But the fact that she had actually confronted an assertive peer was, in fact, an enormous achievement, one whose worth was hard to gauge in terms of words spoken.
Intertextuality and pop culture: Fads in writing workshop

As soon as her students began to write poems, Barbara included them in the material the class read in the shared reading circle. If a poem were written by a peer, it was far more apt to spark a class wide fad for writing similar poems than were poems written by adults. Christina was as much influenced by the popular culture of the classroom as anyone else. As soon as she heard a classmate read an especially clever poem, she opened her notebook, and began to write a similar poem.

The first poem written by any child in Barbara’s class that winter was Matthew’s poem, “Snake.” Although he was as dramatic a speaker as Danielle, Matthew insisted that Barbara read his poem to the class. When she did so, she exploited all its /s/ sounds, made the ending seem a bit mysterious, and marked up her text to show how she had used her voice. Matthew approved. To his enormous satisfaction, every child in the class begged for a copy of his poem.

Snake

by Matthew

A gold, dark, quiet snake,
passing the green grass,
passing the flowers
as they rise.

Barbara used her voice to publish Matthew’s poem. By doing so, she made the tension she felt embedded in its lines more accessible to her listeners. The idea of weaving dramatic tension into a poem was introduced in such a way that it made Christina anxious to try it herself. She began a first draft of her own snake poem later
that morning. However, she used numerous details that allowed her to slow down the
moment and immerse her readers in the tension of a spectator who watches a snake for a
considerable length of time.

Snake

As the dark snake
ripples through the gardens
and spots the bug and
grabs it with his mouth, then eats it
little by little, then swallows
it. I see the bug
jumping in its stomach.

Christina later revised this draft for inclusion in the class anthology. In her
revision conference, Barbara asked her which phrase sounded more exciting: “As the
dark snake ripples through the gardens,” or “The dark snake ripples through the garden.”
Christina chose the later because, as she said, the former sounded “more like a story than
a poem.” Barbara also told her to think about eliminating some of the “ands” or “thens”
in the piece. They just didn’t sound right. Somehow, they took strength away from the
poem. While most first graders would have been mystified by these remarks, they were
pitched exactly at the level Christina found challenging.

Christina headed back to her seat, revised the first two lines, and then read and re-
read the poem repeatedly to see where she might exclude an “and” or a “then.” When
she returned to the poem a month later, she repeated the same process in order to revise
the line breaks she had selected. By that point, the class had also studied special ways of
physically shaping poems to match their subject. Christina took two long, thin strips of
paper onto which she’d printed every line of her poem, tore them at the desired places,
and played with a new arrangement of lines on her paper.

The Snake

The dark snake
ripples
through the garden,
spots the bug,
grabs it
with its mouth,
and eats it,
little
by
little,
then
swallows
it.

I see the bug jumping
in its stomach.

Revisions based on a series of repetitive read-alouds had also been introduced through mini-lessons in writing workshop. Many children had adopted the technique. They read aloud, listened for what sounded right, then made the minor revisions that they, as first graders, were ready to make. The device appealed tremendously to Danielle. Christina adapted the practice to fit her preference for reading silently and listening with her mind’s ear.

She also enjoyed reading, performing, and listening to poems that made her laugh. In addition to her abiding love for any poem by Shel Silverstein or Jack Prelutsky, Christina was taken with a poem her classmate, Christopher, wrote about going to the barbershop. His poem, like Matthew’s, set off a fad that lasted for several days. Whenever it was read aloud, it sparked a surge of rowdy camaraderie.
My Haircut

by Christopher

I got a new haircut.
Me and my mom went.
The guy was shaking my head around,
like this way
and that way.
I got dizzy.
I took off the coat and towel
and ran!

Christina listened to Christopher’s poem and felt a sudden inclination to write a poem about going to the beauty parlor. As she wrote, she stopped frequently to reread and smile. In places, she seems to have breathed in elements of Christopher’s poem, but she made them her own. When she revised the poem in March, she read it silently to find what sounded right. On the spur of the moment, she added three extra lines. Her classmates liked the addition.

The Beauty Parlor (second draft)

When I go to the beauty parlor,
I feel like just running out of there.
The people switch your head this way
and that way.
They brush your hair hard,
as if you were a dog
and make you sit on a booster seat.
Then they take a comb
and brush your hair down
over your face.

If you’re lucky,
you wind up looking
like a monkey.

The next day, Christina repeated a similar process when she revised a very
different poem. After she read her first draft of “Grandma” repeatedly, she told me that the beginning sounded just right, but the ending bothered her. Instead of trying to work the knots out of the existing lines, I told her that I sometimes just folded my paper, so that my eyes couldn’t see the lines that bothered me any more. Then, when I re-read, I tried to listen for what should come next. Christina re-read for a while, added two new lines, and hurried to show her draft to Barbara.

Grandma (second draft)

The only things I remember of my Grandma are the dark blue veins on her forehead, her hands soft as snow. She talked so clearly and so sweetly. She died. Why? It’s a black hole in my heart. Nothing is the same without Grandma.

Revision was not the only area of writing workshop in which Christina had firm ideas of what worked best for her. She also had distinctive ideas about the surroundings that helped her to write. For instance, she insisted that she liked to write in dark, quiet places, free from intrusive adults. Because writing conferences weren’t her cup of tea, I tried to make the most of observations and set aside time to ask her about her writing process during interviews. During her exit interview, we spoke as one writer to another. She volunteered more about her views on writing than she might if she had seen me primarily as a teacher. The topic of what type of surroundings worked best for her came up first.
L: When you write, I’ve noticed that you prefer to sit alone and that you’re kind of quiet as you write.

C: Well, if you give me the choice - If you said, “Hey, look. You can write anywhere in the world you want,” I would say, “Okay. I’ll write on the computer. I want it to be dark in there. And I want it to be quiet. If you come in here, I’ll just take you out the same way you came in.”

L: It doesn’t seem to me - Even with as many choices as you have in Mrs. Cullere’s room, there is no place that is both dark and quiet for you to go to during the school day. I mean, you can go out into the hall, you can find a quiet corner -

C: Well, that’s also good, but I prefer dark. Like, I’d turn off all of the lights in here. I would like that.

L: How does the darkness help you when you’re at home writing on your computer?

C: Well, it like - It just gives you an idea faster.

L: I like to write at night, because then the house is quiet and all the daytime distractions are gone.

C: Yeah! Sometimes when I do, I go to sleep, but then I get back up, so it’s nice and quiet.

L: Really? Do your mom and dad know you get back up?

C: Eh-h. Maybe. Don’t want to find out!

-When I tried to ask Christina about her writing process, she spoke for a few minutes about the ways in which a pattern of recursive reading helped her to stay focused. But then she quickly steered our conversation back to the subject of environment. She reminded me of how central environment is to a good writing workshop. If a productive environment isn’t established and maintained, then a teacher’s best intentions and most insightful lessons are lost.
Christina’s insistence on having a very quiet place in which to write made
Barbara and I revisit our attention to quiet writing time. We established two quiet tables
for children who needed prolonged periods of undisturbed time for writing. During
certain low traffic portions of the day, children could also opt to work out in the hallway.

L: Some people in our classroom do a lot of talking out loud [as they
write] and they listen to what they write as they write it on the
page.

C: Well, I do that, too. [Note: Christina re-reads silently while she
writes.] But what I do is like: five words, read it, five words, read
it, find words, read it.

L: How did you know that was something that really worked for you?

C: Well, because you can hear what you wrote and if you don’t know
what you wrote, you can’t write anything else. Because what if
you have - Maybe you’ll think, “I’m writing about a cow now.”
And then you go to the bathroom. And then you come back.
“Now let me write about a horse.”

L: So your train of thought gets lost.

C: [nods]

L: Well, what do you do in school to help you concentrate, because
you can’t be totally alone. It’s hard to find a place to be totally
alone and quiet.

C: Well, I would say, like, to the teacher, “Can I go out into the hall
to write?” Or if the teacher said to the class, “If you go one peep,
you’re going to [the principal’s office]” if they talk.

L: When do you find that you need to have a writing conference with
a teacher?

C: Well - Only when I’m desperate.
Permission to mess up: A writer enters performance workshop

3-12-95 Performer’s Notes: Well, I have changed, because I was shy. I didn’t want to do nothing with this at all, but now I have changed a lot. I face my fear to be shy. I felt kind of nervous. I learned how to make a poem better. I remember the mood. I don’t need the poem on a paper. But now I know the voice in poems. Now I write poems myself, about five poems with a little help. I used to have a dead face. And Mrs. Cullere helped me (to) have an expressive face.

For both Christina and Sara, the raucous whole group readings of story poems that took place at the opening of the day were a crucial, low-risk point of entry to the performance of poetry. Both girls initially dreaded the prospect of facing an audience. They were convinced that they would find rejection or disdain written in the eyes of their audience members. But like many quiet children, Christina also had extremely high expectations for her own verbal performances. She got as nervous about speaking in large group discussions as she did when she performed poetry.

Educators have traditionally divided uses of the spoken word into two main categories. They insist that our verbal contributions to conversations should be referred to as a form of talk. Talk is exercised for communicative purposes. Recitations of poetry belong to a different category: performative public speaking. However, these distinctions allow us to sidestep an issue which makes a world of difference to shy children. We exercise performative features of speech nearly every time we speak. Parameters are set by convention for every type of conversation we enter and every conversation is, to some degree, a performance. A child who lacks dexterity with the performative features of speech stands to lose her audience. She may not even know how to go about entering large group conversations by making initial bids for the
attention of those around her. Shy children learn about the gamesmanship that structures conversations from the point of view of one who stands on the outside looking in. They know that many varieties of talk require performances they do not know how to give.

When Christina was asked to think about the prospect of speaking in large groups, she made a familiar assumption. She and most of the other quiet children in the class thought that their audiences would laugh at them. They would focus on their inevitable mistakes and laugh. Given these assumptions, it seemed natural that Christina initially wanted to opt out of performance.

Well, firstly, at the poetry celebration, when I was on my way, I was, like, so nervous. I thought I was going to mess up. Then once I was there, and I was second, I - I felt a little better. But I just remembered that everybody else was going to be doing it. And that’s what helped me, even in the classroom, that everybody else was going to be doing it and it’s okay to mess up.

The understanding that “it’s okay to mess up” came from being part of a classroom in which every child’s development as a speaker received as much attention as did his or her development as a writer. Everyone was in the same boat, taking on new challenges. Children like Danielle who were already gifted speakers learned to serve as coaches. They needed to look at ways to help their peers learn the craft they took for granted. Children like Christina, who loved to write, helped their peers think about revision.

Most of the children who were hesitant about speaking or performing in class could have been mistaken for extroverts at home. Learning to negotiate a relationship with a wider audience was difficult for Christina partly because the trust and love that
were the basic underpinnings of all her performative moments at home could not be
counted on with strangers. Although Barbara paid a great deal of attention to
establishing bonds of trust in her classroom, Christina felt quite vulnerable when she first
began to rehearse.

C: What was uncomfortable for me was that when I was rehearsing, people were looking at you like - [demonstrates: stares with intensity]. It was like - They just looked at you, so real!

L: M-m. When you write, your audience is far, far away... They’re not sitting there looking at you.

C: (nods emphatically)

.....

C: When I was little, I also used to tap dance in front of my aunts. I used to be quite good. But (in first grade) that wasn’t family. It wasn’t like - Well, you knew them, but, it wasn’t really like - You don’t - You know them, but you don’t know them inside, really.

Time and time again, other quiet children echoed her words. A basic level of trust had to be established before they would take any risks. Even then, they needed ongoing support and explicit instruction about the ways in which they might negotiate a relationship with their audiences. Only when she felt assured that everyone was involved in risk-taking would Christina begin to apply the same draft-like processes she used so readily in writing workshop to the ways in which she crafted the spoken word.

Then she gave herself permission to mess up. Indeed, one of the things Christina seemed to find comforting about writing was that one’s early mistakes could be revised before they met public scrutiny. She thought that every phrase she spoke should be equally polished. She never stopped to consider the generous latitude which she, as a
listener, offered other speakers on a regular basis. Sarah N., another quiet child, who
was quick to identify herself as both an artist and a writer, echoed Christina's worries
about messing up whenever she held the floor.

SN: I'm nervous to get up in front of an audience, even if it's people I
know. It's like - It's like (they're saying), "You're nervous?
You're scared?" [tone of disbelief]

L: Do you understand why you feel nervous and worried?

SN: [softly] Yeah.

L: How come?

SN: Because if you make a mistake, they're going to be like -
[demonstrates people laughing behind their hands and pointing] -
out in the crowd. They're going to try to hold it in, but they're sort
of snorting.

L: That's how you feel. You feel that they're going to be laughing at
you?

SN: [nods]

L: And that they're going to remember it for seventy years?

SN: [nods, laughs]

L: Well, really it's like - They don't remember it -

SN: - not for that long!

L: For some people, it feels like a really big deal to make a mistake.
And other people feel like, "Eh, no big deal. So what."

SN: [gestures to Danielle, who nods and laughs, recognizing herself]
She would like - If someone asked her (to go) up on a stage, she
would go running up onto the stage. Me, I would just be sitting
there until someone got me and I'd do it. I'm not going up there
until I have to. Until I really, really have to!
L: Because of that feeling you get inside?

SN: [nods yes]

L: We just didn’t ask you to get up and perform a poem. We did a lot of rehearsals. We did partner rehearsals, small group rehearsals, talking to the wall... Why do you think we did that?

SN: That way you get used to it.

Selecting a mask: the comfort of the loud

Christina was given to selecting loud, fairly raucous poems for performance. While she exercised independent work habits when she wrote, she usually preferred to perform poetry when accompanied by another child. If she could face an audience along with a friend, she would take on the voices of adventurers or wise-acres through the poetry of Shel Silverstein, Jack Prelutsky, and Judith Viorst. Just as there is safety in numbers, there is also safety in the masks of silliness and swash-buckling. For shy children of either gender, wearing these masks is often preferable to reading quiet, sensitive poems which require them to show vulnerability in front of the wider-than-family audiences they are learning to face.

Because she was so anxious about the prospect of looking out into the crowd, Christina preferred to enter the rehearsal process by reading to the wall. There, she could mark up a text and experiment with ways of using her voice without seeking the approval of a partner. When she finally did join forces with someone else, Christina often found that there were unanticipated elements of craft that she still needed to work on. One of these was the challenge of making her face actually reflect the emotions she thought she was conveying.
Barbara helped Christina learn to mirror her exaggerated expressions one raised eyebrow at a time until attention to so particular a thing as the use of one's own facial muscles had moved into her realm of conscious control. Weeks of explicit instruction which centered around mirroring needed to take place before some quiet children could even begin to anticipate their appearance in the eyes of an audience. Most of these children had previously coped with the possibility of being in the spotlight by unconsciously shutting down all the expressiveness in their faces, a reflex which allowed them to disappear into the crowd. In the absence of other coping mechanisms, this mask helped them to survive.

Barbara helped these children to move away from the phenomenon they called having a "dead face" by learning to consciously manipulate their facial expressions in order to frame and maintain the attention of the crowd. Extroverted children like Danielle had previously taken this aspect of their ways with the spoken word for granted. Once they were made aware of what they already did so well, Barbara could help them learn to coach other children. Quiet children mentioned the strategy of mirroring more than any other when they were asked about how they learned to face an audience. It was the single rehearsal skill that Christina mentioned during her exit interview.

Your face is part of what you're saying and if you just go like that (demonstrates dead face phenomenon), it gives it no - It's like a blank page. Like the poem is - Your face is a page, but if you put in expressions, then it's like you write on the blank page... [Demonstrates concept through a dramatic reading of Shel Silverstein's "You Need To Have An Iron Rear."]

Christina also needed to work on remembering to maintain eye contact with her
audience members. Danielle’s idea about pretending that the camera was an ice cream cone was a device that she found especially useful when she was being filmed. But in order to practice looking at an audience instead of at the blank lens of a camera, she tried to look directly into the eyes of her partners. At first, this required their concerted efforts. She and the partners she usually selected were all working against habits of looking down or away, reactions which allowed them to disappear in the crowd instead of holding its attention. When they first tried to maintain eye contact with each other, they had to work their way through a nervous, giggly stage. After that stage was exhausted, they could talk about eye contact productively.

By the end of the poetry project, Christina was able and, at long last, willing to write about her rehearsals in great detail.

3-1-95 Rehearsal Notes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Good</strong></th>
<th><strong>Working On</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face</td>
<td>Motions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>[Practice] one chunk at a time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work together like on the face and the motions.</td>
<td>Eye contact on people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On my face, not just a dead face.</td>
<td>[Do] not smirk a lot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stay eye contact, right on eye.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Intertextuality: New sources of spillover**

Christina had a running argument with children who were especially fond of acting. She considered acting less of an art than writing. When she wrote, she felt as if she were in charge of the creative process. She spent hours alone with her notebook, and devoted far more time to revision than is usual for a first grader. The recursive qualities of reading and writing only made them more interesting. However, when she thought about performance, Christina’s patience with time-on-task wore thin. She found the
repetitive nature of framing oral drafts more than a little irritating.

L: What was the most difficult thing about rehearsing a poem?

C: Well, it isn't that easy because one, you get bored of going, "Okay, okay, okay." Over, over, over. "I'm tired of that. That's it, teacher. I'm not going to do it again." Like when - If you keep on practicing a poem, it's like, "Look. I'm tired of hearing these words. I don't want to hear them again. I'm going to blow out my ears if I hear them again!"

Given her attitude about the repetitive nature of rehearsals, she was the last child I expected to have something positive to say about the performance portions of our immersion unit. I thought that she would have denied the changes Barbara and I watched unfold during the weeks she spent in rehearsals. If she could not consciously point to ways in which performance had helped her, we thought that perhaps the effects of swimming in this particular pool of language might be lost. We feared that she would not take her experiences in the oral performance of poetry along with her when she moved to other classrooms.

Our worries were misplaced. Not only did Christina recognize specific ways in which her immersion in the performance of poetry fed her life as a writer, but she was also eager to talk about them. Much to her own surprise, she found that the words and ideas in which she'd been immersed during those hours of rehearsals were beginning to play a critical role in both her writing and in her inner language of thought. She brought up the topic during her exit interview when I questioned her about the on-going argument she was having with Danielle.

L: I'm curious about something you said last week. You said that for you, writing is a lot more enjoyable than acting. Can you tell me a
little bit more about that?

C: Well, like, even though some people think, “Ooh! The first day of school. Yea! We’re going to rehearse!” I think that writing - You can have the chance to, like, make up your own thing. You don’t have to go by that - Like, because before, in “I Loved My Friend,” [a poem she rehearsed at length and performed] there are, like, some words that I don’t think go there.

L: What words would you take out if you were writing that poem instead of Langston Hughes?

C: Um... “There’s nothing more to say.” Because, like, it [writing] makes you go into your own world of making your poem come alive for you. Not what somebody else did. Like you - You don’t have to say, “This is the way I have to have it. This is the way - That’s what the judge said I have to put.”

L: You want to be the one who makes up the poem itself, the one who chooses certain words and makes the poem up out of your own feelings and experience?

C: Yeah, yeah! It’s not like the judge says, “You’re going to jail if you don’t have it the way I want it to be!”

L: Ah. What do actresses and actors do that is creative? I mean, they’re not just taking lines off the page and reading them in a flat voice. They are creating something, the way writers create something. [During last week’s discussion with Danielle, Christina could not articulate her thoughts about this.]

C: Well, they create - create like what - how they want to act the poem.

L: Tell me a little bit more about that.

C: They like don’t just go, “Look at the paper. Look! Oh, look at the paper. It says how you have to act this.” It doesn’t, like, do that. It like - You can like create your own way of - Like, you don’t have to say, “Look. On this piece of paper, the author wrote. ”This is how you have to write (act) it. You have to put your front foot there, and then your back foot there. Put your hand up in the sky.” It’s - You can create your own motions for it.
L: Mm-hmm. And to some extent, you can shape the mood a little bit to suit how you understand the lines. But - for you, writing is still better?

C: [nods]

L: Can you tell me a little bit more?

C: Because you can go, like, into a world and you can write a poem. And from writing the poem, you know how to act it. It isn’t like that you just put, “Okay, this is how the poem goes. This is how I have to do it.” It’s like you write the poem the way you like it. And you act it the way you like it because you are the writer. You’re the writer and you can do it any way you want.

L: And you can choose the world.

C: [nods]

L: I think it would be interesting if, in our class, we had a conversation about this. Because there are some people who feel like they would rather sit and write and there are other people who would much rather be performing a piece that’s either already written or a story where they know the story line and they can make up the words.

C: Yeah, because - Well, acting - I don’t think it’s fun because you can - You don’t like have - In writing, you don’t have to, like, rehearse to get it straight. You might have to, like, work on it a lot, but you don’t have to keep working, like, for a year, keep working on it. I mean, it doesn’t take a year to write a book.

L: Mm. It can.

To make it magical

[Poetry] is the most difficult, solitary, and most life-enhancing thing that one can do. It’s a struggle because words get tired. We use them. We abuse them. A word is a utilitarian tool to begin with, and we have to recreate it, to make it magical.

Stanley Kunitz

Christina was correct in saying that, for her, writing was a process that seemed
not to require much rehearsal. Most of the poems she wrote were nearly finished when they were first drafts. The revisions she did later amounted to minor adjustments when compared to the varieties of revision that older children and adults go through. Young children lack the life experience which tends to make adults acquire layers of standardized descriptive language. The ways in which young children use language are often startling and fresh.

When adults write poetry, we have to peel away layers of commonplace language in order to achieve what young children do so readily. Their words aren't tired yet. When young children also have ample time in which to immerse themselves in the language of poetry as readers before they begin to write poetry of their own, the spillover that results will be rich, indeed.

During her exit interview, Christina's conversation also touched on her writing process.

L: How do you get your ideas when you sit down to write?

C: Well, I mostly get my ideas like if I'm in a quiet place. I like when it's dark. I'm trying to write something and like, nobody's around. It's just like now, like it's much easier to write because there are only four people in here.

L: I agree. I like quietness around me when I write. It helps me go into my own world.

C: Yeah, it' not like - 'Cause you get interrupted if everybody's talking, because like you might want to put an A and you put a B. Because you, like, your mind gets all mixed up from what they're saying.

When Christina returned to speaking about performance, she linked the ways in
which she had been immersed in poetry as a performer to the impact which that
immersion was having on her inner language of thought.

L: Some people in the class have been talking about how they go
around the house doing some of the poems, especially the story
poems.

C: Yeah, I can't get them out of my head! Like I go, “Twas brillig!
And the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe. All mimsy
were the borogroves and the mome raths outgrabe. Beware the
[pause] Babberwock, my son!” I - I make up words for it.

L: Well, if the author (Lewis Carroll) made up words, you can make
up words, too, I guess.

C: Yeah, the - No, like, I do that, “T’was brillig and the slithy [pause]
Joves did gyre and gimble in the wabe. All mimsy were the
borogroves and the mome raths outgrabe.

L: So you look for the beginning letter of either the whole word or
that syllable and you change it a bit, play around with it?
Especially for that poem, that would be good. What else do you
do?

C: I like to say [to the story poems], “Get out of my head! I’m in
school. I’m not supposed to be doing this now!”

The spillover of words, habits, and rhythms from their 10 week immersion unit
stayed with Christina. She was still talking about these phenomena when I visited her in
third grade.

L: During first grade, you gave a lot of time to something else. In
addition to composing poems on sheets of paper, you gave a lot of
time to performances.

C: I think that helped us, like, um - Acting it gave us thought to
writing it.

L: How did that work? Tell me more.
C: Well, um, once we - Once we, like, would - Say we knew a poem, like Isabelle, or something like that? That got caught in our head? And we just would, like, know what to write... You knew how to put the poem you were writing about. Or you knew words, or phrases you could write.

L: Okay, acting it out helps you think about what you’re writing?

C: Well, acting it out - It’s - It feels like you’re there doing that exact thing. But if you’re just writing, it’s like - It’s like a blank picture. You can’t really understand it. But if you act it out, it’s like a clear picture and you can see everything."

L: The way you’re talking about it, it’s almost like a poem is a place.

C: Yeah! Yeah.

.....

C: Performance workshop helped me understand what I was writing about, because before I did that, I thought I was just writing about one thing. And then if I acted it out, it got the picture into my head. And then it helped me, like, get what I was - what the poem was actually about. It was like a sandwich. And when I just read it to myself, [it was] like the first layer of the sandwich. And I acted it out with different people. Then I got to the second - I got to the peanut butter on the bread. It just made you feel what that person was feeling at that moment when they wrote that.
CHAPTER VIII

ANSWERING THE CHILDREN

When I first withdrew from my research site at Tenakill School, I was stung by the absence of children's voices. My office was much too quiet. I was accustomed to being part of a lively community of first graders and wondered, as I sat before a keyboard, how I could possibly convey to others what the children had taught me. As I plunged into the business of re-reading notes, listening to tapes, and categorizing excerpts from transcripts, the silence of my room was gradually infused with the voices of children, the chance to listen to them more carefully, and the promise of time to be answerable to the lessons they taught me.

I hope that readers will hear the voices of the children portrayed here as a symphony - or perhaps as many symphonies - rather than as three solos. The parts they play may differ, but their differences in texture and tone are the very qualities that continue to help their voices to complement each other. Within the inclusive context of Barbara's classroom, the "loud-middle girl," her quiet, nurturing friend, and the child who loved to write learned to recognize and use their individual strengths. They also helped each other unpack aspects of literacy and orality which may have previously struck them as daunting.

Danielle, the child who reveled in performative talk and gesture, learned to exploit her ability to craft performative texts and became both an inventive writer and a
supportive coach. Although some technical aspects of the reading process slowed her down, she was able to tap her knowledge of the musical possibilities of written language and use it to make places for herself in groups she longed to join. Her delight in exploiting these qualities of written texts taught her peers to weave a sense of Rosenblatt’s reader-as-musician into their reading processes. When her friends spoke about their fear of facing an audience, she was also able to acknowledge their difficulties and share strategies that helped her.

Don’t be embarrassed to act out or anything. Just go out there and just -
Your heart might be embarrassed. You might be embarrassed inside.
*Don’t show’em.* Because then people’d give you, like, “Oh no. She doesn’t want to do it. Get off the stage.” Or whatever.

Danielle reminded her friends that, within the walls of their classroom, it was safe to take one’s initial steps into performance. A supportive community surrounded them. Within that world and while the sense of the masks they might wear as speakers was still fluid, the children recognized that their need for each other’s voices, efforts, talents, and trust was absolute. The selves they were constructing were, as Bakhtin said, truly gifts of the other.

If you do a mistake, don’t worry. People won’t really make fun of you because they know you’re little and *they know you*. So just do the part you’re acting. And the people will clap for you. It doesn’t really matter if you make a mistake.

The confidence gained by stretching their capacities as readers, writers, and speakers during first grade influenced the children's images of themselves in ways that we hoped would enable them to stake claims for themselves in the broader circles of community they would encounter later in their lives. The courage with which Sara
explored new dimensions of her voice and pursued contact with a widening circle of audience members continues to inspire me. While she and her classmates learned to recognize the strength of her nurturing ways and talent for writing, she also realized that all the fine qualities of those who are missing in verbal interaction stand in grave danger of being overlooked or misjudged by the world.

When you’re a grown-up, you can’t be afraid to speak, ‘cause then people would think that you’re not very good. And they wouldn’t, like, apply you for a job or something like that... And maybe you’re hiding something that’s really important, but you don’t think it’s important. And you’re not going to say it? And then maybe they’re not going to think that you’re going to be good enough.

Sara’s quiet way of observing others and being answerable to what she read in their faces and gestures was a constant reminder that communication is a matter of more than just words. There were networks of interpersonal communication that Sara knew better than her more talkative peers. If I were to revisit this research with another group of children, I would work at finding ways to help them recognize and develop their ability to knit these subtle ways without words into their repertoires of communication skills.

Christina entered Performance Workshop dragging both feet. She was surprised to find that her immersion in publishing the rhythms, tones, and textures of poetry with her voice began to infuse her writing process. Although Christina may always love writing more fiercely than performance, she learned that a writer’s conversation with the page is, as Bakhtin suggests, not a two-part transaction, but one furrowed with echoes of all the written, spoken, and performed utterances she has come to know. Her realization
that her ability to write was profoundly changed by her immersion in the rehearsal and performance of poetry was also an admission of interdependence on the voices of others and the musical qualities of language they were able to discover together.

I think that helped us, like, um - Acting it gave us thought to writing it...... Say we knew a poem, like Isabelle, or something like that? That got caught in our head? And we just would, like, know what to write... You knew how to put the poem you were writing about. Or you knew words, or phrases you could write. It feels like you’re there doing that exact thing. But if you’re just writing, it’s like - It’s like a blank picture. You can’t really understand it. But if you act it out, it’s like a clear picture and you can see everything.

Many children were startled by the idea that face to face forms of communication rely on subtle uses of gesture and expression almost as much as on words. Rehearsal devices such as mirroring helped them match their gestures and facial expressions to the character of their message. When speaking of this phase of the rehearsal process, Christina walked into a powerful metaphor.

Your face is part of what you’re saying and if you just go like that (demonstrates dead face phenomenon), it gives it no - It’s like a blank page. Like the poem is - Your face is a page, but if you put in expressions, then it’s like you write on the blank page.

Although she was pleased with the changes in her writing, Christina still felt that performance was not a legitimate part of the official world of school. One doesn’t come to know through voice and gesture here. One studies. One learns to talk about a book or poem in school. That’s quality talk. One doesn’t dive into performance, not on a regular basis, even if Dewey would insist that such experiences would offer an unparalleled way of weaving aesthetic and esthetic experience into literacy education.

I can’t get them [the story poems] out of my head! Like I go, “Twas
brillig! And the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe. All mimsy were the borogroves and the mome raths outgrabe. Beware the [playful pause] Babberwock, my son!” I - I make up words for it.... I like to say [to the story poems], “Get out of my head! I’m in school. I’m not supposed to be doing this now!”

Christina’s suspicion of performance as a way of coming to know is rooted in a lack of trust that predates the efficiency movement of the 1920’s. It stems from ancient Greece, when poets were not isolated individuals whose work was read by a select few. Instead, the works of the society’s great poets were memorized and performed before large audiences. The complete engagement of an audience, what Havelock referred to as their “total engagement” or “emotional identification” was a central way of coming to know one’s literary heritage. (Havelock, 1963, 159)

There was, of course, a potentially negative side to the total emotional surrender of an audience. A child’s literacy education seldom paired the experience of coming to know poetry as a listener or performer with rational discourse about or analysis of these same works. When Plato insisted that poets were not to be included in his new republic, he essentially discarded one form of literacy education in order to usher in an emphasis on making rational thought central to lessons in literacy and orality. If one wished to move an audience, one should do so through skillfully crafted rhetoric and a sound knowledge base.

Traces of our lingering mistrust of aesthetic and esthetic experience as ways of coming to know can still be found in what we might presume are the least likely places. The rhetoric of the writing process movement presented the child as writer as a communicator rather than as an artful composer of text. (Dyson, 1993, 16)
members helped writers move towards clarity by offering their questions and comments. More recent research into the roles of the spoken word in classrooms also revolves around teaching children how to step into numerous patterns of careful, rational discourse. The term “quality talk” seldom embraces performative ways with words along with the invaluable tools of literary analysis.

Until one child interrupted my attention to these points of view, I regarded the vision of my mentors as absolute. When my class met in a share circle, audience members usually offered questions and comments to each author. My shared reading lessons sometimes revolved around ways of helping children spin their way into differentiated patterns of book talk. But there were other moments. There were times when our response to a child’s work was to simply gasp, smile, or burst into applause. There were times when we launched into days of improvisation, puppet shows, story telling, and debate. And whether I recognized their talents or not, I suspect that artful composers of oral texts must have been in my classroom all along.

In spite of the ways in which readers, writers, and audience members have sometimes been portrayed in professional literature, I believe that teachers who pay careful attention to the crafts of reading and writing will be among the first to recognize - and then to pay closer attention to - a strand of the language arts that has stood at the periphery our attention for quite some time. The process of coming to know through performative ways with words is a craft that has been awaiting our attention for years. Performative oral texts have percolated past the doorways of schools and into children’s talk through the dual influences of popular culture and the rich linguistic and cultural
heritages of our students. It is time that we welcomed them into the heart of our
classrooms, so that all children can explore the rich possibilities of the spoken - as well
as the written - word.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


*Drama as Education: An Argument for Placing Drama At the Centre of the Curriculum*. Harlow, England: Longman Group, 1982.


Ede, Lisa and Andrea Lunsford. “Audience Addressed / Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy.” College Composition and


... Writing: Teachers and Children at Work. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1983.


“Reading Problems That Challenge Attention.” The Elementary English Review. 3:4, April, 1926. 105-7.


James, Joseph. *Miscellanies, Moral and Instructive in Prose and Verse. Collected from Various Authors for the Use of Schools and Improvement of Young Persons of Both Sexes*. Philadelphia: Joseph James, 1787.


“Quantitative Study of Oral English In The Primary Grades.” Teachers College Record. 20 (1919): 265-274.


Stone, Clarence. First Grade Seatwork for Silent Reading. Saint Louis: Webster, 1927.


Walker, James. The Melody of Speaking Delineated; or, Elocution Taught Like Music, By Visible Signs, Adapted to the Tones, Inflections, and Variations of Voice in Reading and Speaking. London: Printed by the author. 1787.


APPENDIX A

SEQUENCE OF LESSONS AND POEMS

FOR READING, WRITING, AND PERFORMANCE WORKSHOP

Day One: Tuesday, January 3

Reading:
- Haiku ("Everyone sleeping") by Grace H. Lin
- Haiku ("Moon caught") by Satoshi Iwai
- "Winter Moon" by Langston Hughes

Mini-lesson: Focus on the "picture" in your mind. Acknowledge and name variety of responses: personal connections, word choice, mood. (One child told us that Grace Lin's poem "felt so quiet.")

Performance: No formal lesson
- Jingle books, story poems (whole group)
- Introduce: "The Microscope" by Maxine Kumin

Writing: Notebook entries, completion of projects

Day Two: Wednesday, January 4

Reading:
- Haiku ("A trout leaps high") by Onitsura
- Haiku ("A little child") by Issa
- Haiku ("Softly —") by Issa
- Haiku ("The face of a dragonfly") by Chisoku

Mini-lesson: Focus on the "picture" in your mind. Acknowledge and give names to variety of responses: personal connections, word choice, mood.

Performance: No formal lesson
- Jingle books, story poems (whole group)

Writing: Notebook entries, completion of projects

Day Three: Thursday, January 5

Reading:
- "The Toaster" by William Jay Smith
- "Dragon Smoke" by Lilian Moore
- "A Modern Dragon" by Rowena Baston Bennett

288
Mini-lesson: Focus on the “picture” in your mind and mark up text to “notice” poet’s use of special words that trigger that image. Continue to acknowledge and name other responses: personal connections, mood, etc.

Performance: Jingle books, story poems (whole group)
Writing: Notebook entries, completion of projects

Day Four: Friday, January 6

Reading: “Fireflies” by Mary Ann Hoberman
Verse from “Firefly” by Li Po
Haiku (“Shiny little bugs”) by James Harper
“Firefly” by Elizabeth Maddox Roberts

Mini-lesson: Focus on the “picture” in your mind, mark up text to “notice” poet’s use of special words. Continue to acknowledge and name other responses: personal connections, mood, etc.

Performance: Jingle books, story poems (whole group)
Writing: Notebook entries, completion of projects

Day Five: Monday, January 9

Reading: “Poem” by Natalia Belting
“Fog” by Carl Sandburg

Mini-lesson: Description of lesson on pages 59-61.

Performance: Poem: “My Favorite Word” by James and Lucia Hymes

Mini-lesson: Struggling with saying the words early in the rehearsal process. Barbara and I model supportive partner talk. Begin to videotape rehearsals and reflections on each clip.

Rehearsal comment from Danielle: “I slide these words together, like: Yes-yes-yes-yes-YES! I get the words first. Then I add my face.”

Story poems: Introduce “The Adventures of Isabelle” and review “I Wonder Why Dad Is So Thoroughly Mad” by Jack Prelutsky.

Writing: Day-dreaming with a notebook nearby.

Mini-lesson: described previously

Make observations outside the classroom window. Collect detailed descriptions. Let daydreams take you where they will.
Day Six: Tuesday, January 10

Reading: “Cat in Moonlight” by Douglas Gibson
Mini-lesson: Poets play with sound. Track patterns of sound by marking up copies. Teach kids to read with their pencils. Color code chart copy. Draw boxes to save special words. Children notice associated, tactile images or mood created by phrases: “soft as silk” and “slowly passes.” Some write extended personal connections.

Performance: “My Favorite Word” by James and Lucia Hymes
Mini-lesson: marking up text as actors to show how you plan to use your voice. Role play good coaching practices: encouraging each other. Initial clips filmed. Emphasis on what child did well. Walk each through self-assessment talk.

W eek books, story poems (whole group)

Writing: Cultivate careful uses of descriptive language, drawing
Mini-lesson: Use of large-screen microscope, descriptions.
Rotation: Groups of three come to what will later be the Discovery table to use microscope. Examine up to three items: torn paper, salt crystals, feather. Make notebook entries about observations.

Day Seven: Wednesday, January 11

Reading / Performance: “One Thing You Can Say About Roaring”
“If You, Like Me* by Karla Kuskin
Mini-lesson: Watch videotaped performances of children performing Kuskin’s poems. Discussion and written responses: How did those children use their voices? Focus on specific word-for-word, phrase-for-phrase examples. Mark up poster-sized text and allow time for children to mark up individual texts to show how they might use their voices when rehearsing these poems.

Define choices for rehearsal time: Partner rehearsals or reading to the wall. Select one poem, play with the sounds, help each other write self-assessments. Optional prompt on easel: I did _____ and _____ well. Now I want to work on _____.

Notebook responses: about rehearsal, sounds in poems.
Jingle books, story poems.

Writing: Cultivate careful uses of descriptive language, drawing
Remaining children use large-screen microscope. Others write variety of entries. Many stand near window, making observations or find something to examine with or without use of magnifying glass. All outstanding projects completed.
Day Eight: Thursday, January 12

Reading: “The Snake” by Karla Kuskin
Mini-lesson: Similar to lesson on Tuesday, January 10.
Performance: “One Thing You Can Say About Roaring”
“If You, Like Me” by Karla Kuskin
Mini-lesson: Helping your partner to zero in on a few phrases.
Experiment with use of voice in isolated section of poem.
Launch rehearsal time by defining choices: Partner rehearsals or reading to the wall. Select one poem, play with the sounds, help each other write self-assessment. Optional prompt chart on easel:
I did _____ and _____ well. Now I want to work on _____.
Jingle books, story poems (whole group)

Writing: Model practice of making detailed observations.
Notebook entries focus on making detailed observations. Some children use microscope again.

Day Nine: Friday, January 13

Reading: “January Deer” by A. R. Ammons
“City Lights” by Rachel Field
Mini-lesson: Poets play with sound. Track patterns of sound and distinctive word choice by marking up copies: Read with your pencil. Color code chart copy. Draw boxes at bottom of notebook page to “save” special words.
Performance: “Windy Nights” by Robert Louis Stevenson
Mini-lesson: Mark up text to show how you might use your voice during rehearsal.
Jingle books, story poems

Writing: Mini-lesson on brain-storming

Day Ten: Monday, January 16

Reading: “Snake” by Matthew R.
Mini-lesson: Barbara publishes Matthew’s poem with her voice, exploiting pattern of /s/ sounds embedded in text. Class celebrates writing and publication of first poem. Discussion of mood, repeating consonant pattern. Instead of writing about Matthew’s poem, many children write similar “sound” poems.
Performance: “Windy Nights” by Robert Louis Stevenson
Mini-lesson: Marking up text as a performer. Children share experiences of yesterday’s rehearsals. Brief performer’s notes (self-assessments) added to notebooks.

Writing: Many children return to drafting poems started earlier today as
Day Eleven: Tuesday, January 17

Reading: “Eagle Flight” by Alonzo Lopez
“Snail” by Federico Garcia Lorca

Mini-lesson: Mark up text as a reader, notice word choice, sense of distance in certain lines: Where does he stand back? Where do you feel up close? Sandwich pattern in one poem.

Performance: Choose one poem, or section of a poem, to polish

Mini-lesson: Focus on noticing two things you do well, and one aspect that needs improvement. Barbara and I model partners helping each other listen and assess.

Later, we introduce “The Flattered Flying Fish” by Rieu

Writing: The Listening Walk by Paul Showers

Mini-lesson: Gathering the sounds around us. Write down letters or descriptions that help us remember the sounds we hear. Read The Listening Walk. After brief discussion, class takes notebooks along for quiet walk around school on a foggy day. Children rest on front patio area of school to record sounds. Later, they share their lists of sounds. Children encouraged to “borrow” interesting sound words from peers. Note: Two children have already begun to insert sounds or sound words into their reader’s responses. Entries pointed out at end of share circle.

Day Twelve: Wednesday, January 18

Reading: “Some Things Don’t Make Any Sense At All” (Viorst)
“Mice” (Fyleman).

Mini-lesson: Children notice lists built into each poem, mark up text to bracket off list areas, underline or circle special words, phrases, question or repeated statements. Lengthy personal connections sparked by Viorst’s poem.

Performance: Mini-lesson: Repeat January 17 lesson

Writing: The Listening Walk by Paul Showers

Mini-lesson: Children listen to story again, construct two columns on notebook page to contrast the sounds they collected to the way Paul Showers wrote the sounds he collected. Children encouraged to stand by window to record sights and sounds they observe.
Day Thirteen: Thursday, January 19

Reading: “Poem” by William Carlos Williams
Mini-lesson: Notice how Williams arranged his words on the page. Use of white space. Children also mark up copies to notice special words. Many write about a “sneaky” or “quiet” mood.
Performance: “Poem” by William Carlos Williams
Mini-lesson: Children watch videotape of child rehearsing this poem. Child in video reads from chart copy of poem, but is experimenting with using her voice to highlight cat-like stretching sounds. Children asked to find one or two words that videotaped speaker stretched and then to try it themselves. Children move into own rehearsals, using this poem.
Writing: Extension of Wednesday, January 19 lesson.

Day Fourteen: Friday, January 20

Reading: Time given to extended rehearsals and writing.
Performance: Children prepare for Friday afternoon poetry party.
Writing: “Rain Song” by Langston Hughes
Mini-lesson: Observing on dreary, rainy days. Class read, responded to Hughes poem, noticed patterns of repetition, /s/ sounds, collected boxes of certain words. Discussion turned by teacher towards idea that Hughes was writing about a day like the one outside our classroom window. Contrast mood in Hughes poem to mood of most people on overcast, rainy days. Mention of artist observing street, brick wall patterns of oil and water stains, finding beauty there. Observations of scene outside classroom window. Many children write poems as entries.

Day Fifteen: Monday, January 23

Reading: “Apple” by Nan Fry
Mini-lesson: Apple activity precedes reading of poem. Teacher slices up several varieties of apples. Children look for dark star inside each, taste and describe different crunch, taste of each variety. Then group reads poem together with eyes closed, talks about sounds, images, and personal connections. Texts marked up as readers. Many children now underline a line that has evoked a strong personal connection, one they can write about later.
Performance: Setting goals for the week.
Mini-lesson: Focus on need to zero in on just one poem per week.
Writing: “Magnifying Glass” by Valerie Worth
Mini-lesson: Observing tiny details
Day Sixteen: Tuesday, January 24

Reading/Writing  
Haiku ("In the waters deep") by Tina Poirer  
"Magnifying Glass" by Valerie Worth  
Mini-lesson: Lesson described in "Frameworks" chapter.  
Children continue to examine, write, and draw about items in Discovery table bins at tables during writing time, rotated once.  
Some children leave tables to use magnifying glasses to look closely at carpet, plants on windowsill, etc.

Performance: Helpful uses of critique  
Mini-lesson: Supportive partner behaviors. Re-emphasize pattern of noticing two things a partner does well, and then zeroing in on one aspect that still needs work. Barbara and I role play. Lesson ends with class brainstorming second list about "How to be a good partner." Partners rehearse 11:00 - 11:30.  
"Jabberwocky" introduced in whole group story poem time.

Day Seventeen: Wednesday, January 25

Reading/Writing:  
"Poem" ("In the ocean of the sky") by Hitomaro  
Mini-lesson: Focus on an image, then day-dream. Children now write many-layered descriptions on their own. Emphasize need to let yourself drift from one image to another until you find something that moves you: a memory, an idea, or an image that wants to be a poem.

Performance: Match your voice to the mood of poem.  
Mini-lesson: Barbara invites children into her own rehearsal process. Using the first two verses of "Jabberwocky" as her text, elicits their opinions, advice about several uses of voice. Marks up poster-sized copy to remind herself about their advice.  
Jingle Books: review of "Isabelle" poems and "Jabberwocky."

Day Eighteen: Thursday, January 26

Reading/Writing  
"The Sea" by Andes Park  
"Waves" by Ralph Fletcher  
Mini-lesson: Described in "Craft Lessons" section  
Children follow poets' examples of zeroing in on one powerful image, but need teacher's help to "see" each image in these poems clearly. Children close their eyes, focus on each image, share what they see. More than half the children write poems as responses.

Performance: Repeat of Wednesday, January 26 lesson.  
Day Nineteen: Friday, January 27

Reading / Performance: Learning to hear the sound of your own voice
Mini-lesson: Matching voice to text. Help children to avoid common tendencies to race or shout. Use of everyday, modulated voice. Partners practice on rug using excerpts from “The Microscope” by Maxine Kumin. Barbara demonstrates reading of excerpts in rushed voice and with an overly loud voice. Children describe listener’s dilemma: “I can’t tell what you’re saying!” Extended rehearsal time for practicing this exercise, as well as to return to the poems they need to rehearse for today’s poetry party.

Writing: Reading aloud to “hear” what sections still need work
Mini-lesson: Using draft of “Floorboards,” a poem I started to write during yesterday’s reading and writing lesson, I read my draft aloud, talk about parts that still sound unfinished, and ask for opinions as I redraft. Children turn to own drafts before finding a place to write. Perhaps reading them aloud over and over again will help them continue a poem or revise it.

Day Twenty: Monday, January 30

Reading: “Poem” by Langston Hughes
Mini-lesson: Children close eyes to listen to poem several times. Strong memories, emotions evoked. After marking up text briefly to show “sandwich” pattern, children write long personal connections and poems which they later share. Begin poetry posters to publish images they associate with favorite poems.

Performance: Taking stock, being accountable
Mini-lesson: Checklist collected on what poem each child will work on this week. All poems (or parts of poems) used for performance now self-selected. Children set goals for first two days. They are familiar with rehearsal practices and work productively. Many oral drafts rehearsed and taped. Children stop to reflect on each draft, then draft again during taping process.

Writing: Looking for seeds of poems in earliest entries
Mini-lesson: Not all children are ready or need to do this. Some are already deeply involved in writing long entries and poems about family members or friends. This exercise helps less focused children to find their best ideas. They re-read a passage to look for missing words, extend images, re-write prose-like text as poem. Two children use drawings as starting points.
Day Twenty-One: Tuesday, January 31

Reading: “For A Bird” by Myra Cohn Livingston
Mini-lesson: Similar to Monday, January 30 lesson
Children mark up texts, then write extended entries about personal connections evoked by the poem.
Performance: Stopping to reflect between each oral draft.
Mini-lesson: Barbara and I role play partners rehearsing, affirming what went well, zeroing in on specific area(s) that need work. During rehearsal time, we circulate, listen in, and comment on the types of partner talk and “noticing” that we hear. Share two instances of good partner feedback during brief share time.
Writing: Preparing for a revision conference
Mini-lesson: Finding something specific to discuss with teacher, such as a line, a word, or a phrase you love, or lines where you feel as if you are getting lost. Learning to ask for help in looking for the seed of a poem. Barbara and I role play using my notebook entries. Lesson helps enormously. Children are prepared for conferences and behave in focused ways while they write.

Day Twenty-two: Wednesday, February 1

Reading/Writing “Poem” (“I’m Nobody...”) by Emily Dickinson
Emily (picture book biography) by Michael Bedard
Mini-lesson: Learning about Emily Dickinson
Children’s responses vary enormously. Quiet children write pages about her and then launch into talk about themselves. Others write brief entries then move on to write poems of their own.
Performance: Setting goal for today’s rehearsal.
Mini-lesson: Children reflect, write two lines about what they are already good at and what they needed to work on in this poem in order to be ready for Friday’s poetry party.

Day Twenty-three: Thursday, February 2

Reading / Writing “It Hurts” by lindamichellebaron
“basketball” by Nikki Giovanni
Mini-lesson: Writing about times when you feel upset
Children mark up texts briefly and save boxes of special words, but talk and write at length about personal connections.
Performance: Writing “Rehearsal Notes”
Mini-lesson: Rehearsals notes are our adaptation of Director’s notes, the list of comments and suggestions about a performance that a director gives members of a cast. Given the supportive
environment the children were in, we wanted them to move towards becoming their own directors and write reflective narratives on their work. Barbara and I modeled this process, then showed how we stopped before, during, and after rehearsals to amend our notes.

Day Twenty-Four: Friday, February 3

Writing: Concentrated work time.
Entire morning given to writing own poems, student-teacher conferences. Quiet rotation through centers for each table during writing and conferencing time. Break for snack-time and group performances of story poems. Many children use the Discovery table and write entries based on their observations.

Day Twenty-Five: Monday, February 6

Reading/Writing “When My Dog Died” by Freya Littledale
Mini-lesson: Similar to Thursday, February 2 lesson
Performance: Using “echoing” to move beyond “Stage One” rehearsals.
Mini-lesson: Barbara asks Danielle to sit with her and concentrate on echoing her uses of expression in “The Flattered Flying Fish.” Children have already listened to Barbara use this device with their peers and were anxious to have it introduced in a whole class lesson. Whole class practices echoing technique for thirty minutes. Rehearsal contracts signed for the week.

Day Twenty-Six: Tuesday, February 7

Reading/Writing “My Thoughts” by Meghan Shapiro
Mini-lesson: Writing about loss. Poem selected in response to entries children made about some form of loss. We compared the last two poems we read about loss (February 6 and February 7) briefly, but concentrated on personal connections. Reading this poem sent them back into their subjects. Some children finally wrote poems that they had been writing around for days. Conferences revolve around the “almost poems” scattered throughout their notebooks.
Performance: Looking at rehearsal notes written by peers
Children also sign rehearsal contracts (weekly goals) devised yesterday.
Day Twenty-Seven: Wednesday, February 8

Teacher absent: Regular plans held for Thursday.

Day Twenty-Eight: Thursday, February 9

Reading: "Last Word" and "Lessons" by Richard Margolis
Description of lesson in "Craft lessons" section
Performance: Last-minute check up notes before poetry party
Mini-lesson: Children write brief rehearsal notes before rehearsing
for tomorrow’s poetry party.
Writing: Preparing for a revision conference
Mini-lesson: See notes for Tuesday, January 31

Day Twenty-Nine: Friday, February 10

Reading: "Some People" by Rachel Field
Mini-lesson: Similar to lesson on Tuesday, February 7
Poem chosen in response to talk and entries about peer conflicts as
well as entries about best friends, family members, etc. Responses
almost all center around poetic personal connections..
Performance: No formal lesson. Rehearsal time for poetry party.
Poetry Party: 1:15 - 2:00 p. m.
Writing: Extending entries begun in reading workshop
Mini-lesson: Poll taken on how many children needed time to
extend the entries they had begun as reader’s responses earlier that
morning. Everyone needed more time. Children who have not
written about relationships before write extensive entries.

Day Thirty: Monday, February 13

Reading: Morning schedule interrupted.
Performance: No time for formal lesson. Children search for new poems
to use as material for this week’s poetry party. Each
confers briefly with teacher as she adds the title of his or
her poem to her chart. Twenty minutes rehearsal time.
Writing: Large group writing and drawing activity similar to
Discovery Table experience. Two children have brought in
items they got this weekend and are anxious to add them to
the Discovery table. There is such interest in the sumac
branches and deer skin that Barbara makes an impromptu
whole group Discovery session using these materials,
encouraging detailed drawings, written descriptions, and
personal connections or day dreams sparked by these items.
Day Thirty-One: Tuesday, February 14

Writing: Children write valentines for parents, complete Poetry Posters.
Performance: Extended time for rehearsals.
   Barbara and I confer with children, focusing on uses of echoing and mirroring devices to help each other through Stage Two rehearsals.
Reading: “Go Away!” by lindamichellebaron
   Mini-lesson: How do poets show rather than describe a speaker’s hurt and loneliness. How could you show how you felt in a poem about a relationship? Two student drafts used as examples.

Day Thirty-Two: Wednesday, February 15

Reading/Writing “Since Hannah Moved Away” by Judith Viorst
   Mini-lesson: Poets use different voices to write about a subject.
   The gentle humor in Viorst’s poem contrasts to the more serious poems about loss that the children read a week earlier. Children mark up texts to show refrain and poet’s use of unexpected words. However, most of response time is now actually writing time. Reading a poem sends them back to writing about one or two subjects of individual importance.
Performance: Extended time for rehearsals.
   Barbara and I confer with children about uses of echoing and mirroring devices to help each other during Stage Two rehearsals.

Day Thirty-Three: Thursday, February 16

Reading/Writing: “The Moon is a Daddy to the Sun” by Andrew Park
   Description of lesson in “Craft lessons” section.
   Poems later selected for last set of Poetry Posters
Performance: No formal lesson. Extensive conferences focus on individual reflections on oral drafts.

Day Thirty-Four: Friday, February 17

Reading: “Moonlight Night: Carmel” by Langston Hughes
   Mini-lesson: Learning about the life of Langston Hughes
Performance: Poetry party in late morning (afternoon assembly)
Writing: Using “Post-It” notes to tag poems in notebook.
   Mini-lesson: Selecting, reflecting on best poems. Adding these poems and illustrating them in chapbooks.

[Mid-Winter Recess: February 20 - 24]
Day Thirty-Five: Monday, February 27

Reading  "At Annika’s Place" by Siv Widerberg

Mini-lesson: Children mark up texts to show changes in style, including a conversation section, and a separate, wistful section. Children debate over how they like to be treated at home. Extensive writing in response to both the poem and the debate.

Performance: Extending rehearsal notes.

Children write extended rehearsal notes for one poem at the end of rehearsal time. Notes shared, further extended in whole group.

Writing: Peer review of almost finished poems by Sara

Day Thirty-Six to Forty-Nine [February 28 - March 17]

Note: During the last three weeks of the poetry project, the morning was devoted to working towards publication in both writing and performance workshop.

Writing: Pushing towards revision and publication goals

Mini-lessons: Center around child’s finished or all-but-finished poems in notebooks. Every child needs to look back at these poems, re-read them, add a word here or there, etc., in order to get them ready for their readers. Bringing a child’s poem into the whole group mini-lesson each day creates a climate that helps everyone look at their work again. Children also use this time to fill their chapbooks with the poems they have written.

Publications: Teacher-student conferences, collection of final drafts. Barbara and I collect and type final drafts of poems. Children draw pencil outline drawings on galley copies, then make multiple then collated copies of complete volume. Children color own final copy as gift for parents. Friday poetry parties continue. Children select poems on Monday mornings, rehearse for approximately forty-five minutes a day, and videotape oral drafts. They also select own poem to practice for the final Poetry Celebration.

Day Fifty: March 17

Lisa Bianchi withdraws from research site, returning only to tape in-depth interviews with case studies. Children resume regular daily schedule, but continue to rehearse twenty to thirty minutes each day. Final celebration held at a child’s home on March 29, 1995.
APPENDIX B

SOURCES FOR CHILDREN'S POETRY

Anthologies:


Collections by individuals:


Poetic Picture Books


APPENDIX C

REPERTOIRE OF STORY POEMS

"The Adventures of Isabelle" by Ogden Nash

"The Scroobius Pip" by Edward Lear, completed by Ogden Nash

"Jabberwocky" by Louis Carroll

"The Microscope" by Maxine Kumin

"The Flattered Flying Fish" by E. V. Rieu

"Smart Alec Oration" (anonymous)

"hist whist" by e. e. cummings

"The Stolen Child" by W. B. Yeats

"The Fairies" by William Allingham

"The Changling" by Leah Bodine Drake

"Nathaniel's Rap" by Eloise Greenfield

"Lawanda's Walk" by Eloise Greenfield

"Speed Adjustments" by John Ciardi

"Train Song" by Diane Siebert

"Garage Song" by Sarah Wilson

"Windy Nights" by Robert Louis Stevenson

304

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.