

# PIPPY AND THE REFLECTIVE TURN: A MODEL FOR PEDAGOGICAL THINKING

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"Reflection" is potentially the most overused and most elusive term in the writing teacher's lexicon. It has achieved the status of professional vitamins and vegetables: it's good for you and you can't get too much of it. But the kind of reflective thinking that John Dewey described is too rich and stimulating for a regular diet. Dewey's notion of reflection suggests an intermittent intensity that emerges from quiescence or action. It is more goal-oriented than a recollection of experience and more open-ended than a portfolio letter. "Reflective thinking is always more or less troublesome because it involves overcoming the inertia that inclines one to accept suggestions at their face value; it involves a willingness to endure a condition of mental unrest and disturbance" (13). In this paper I will refer to reflection as the reconsideration of teaching practices with the intention of questioning the "face value" of experience.

As a teacher educator, I am interested in the onset of this mental unrest, which I refer to as the "reflective turn," and how this unrest is sustained through writing. It is one thing to recall a teaching moment, to review a journal entry, or to play back an audiotape, but genuine reflection is unlikely unless they are seen or heard differently, through a conscious or unconscious re-orientation to the initial record, through making the reflective turn.

Having made the turn, what sustains reflective thinking? Writers, especially under time constraints, grasp for closure, which Dewey says is antithetical to reflective thought. How can writing extend reflective thinking to exhaustion?

My personal model of reflective behavior is Pippy, a seven-pound Papillon, who patrols our backyard. John Dewey might object to sharing this distinction with a tracking dog, a being for whom a chair is nothing more than "a thing to be smelled, or gnawed, or jumped over" (17), but there is a thoroughness and discipline in Pip that Dewey would have to admire. Dewey's own examples of reflective thinking suggest that no experience is too mundane to yield reflective insight. He models reflection by speculating on the quickest method to cross Chicago for an appointment (68-69). Dewey's pursuit of a shortcut is no more noble than the pursuit of a squirrel, Pippy might argue.

Papillons were called "dwarf spaniels" by the European nobility over seven hundred years ago, serving as house pets. They received their name from a later mutation that made their large, fringed ears erect to resemble butterfly wings. Pip has also evolved toward pursuits in the wild. She has a consuming interest in the hefty red Michigan squirrel, a relentless fascination that reminds me of reflective thought.

When squirrel sounds drift in from the backyard, Pip usually leads our three Papillons in the charge. Chasing the brazen intruder to the nearest tree, she stays two inches behind it the whole way. I seriously doubt she wants to catch the squirrel, which is nearly her size. She loves the pursuit and the reliving of the pursuit more than the capture.

Pippy is a scholar of smells. She experiences them with the intensity of the initial chase. As soon as the squirrel is treed, she turns around and puts her nose to the ground. I call this her "reflective turn." She goes back to the beginning of the chase, picks up the scent, and retraces the entire course across the yard with her nose. This is how I conceive reflection: reliving an experience or problem in a different modality or perspective, in this case the olfactory one. There is complete concentration in this ritual; it is as intense in the olfactory mode as it was previously in the kinesthetic one. Although it is an instinct, it is not universal to dogs, only to dogs with a craze for tracking.

Pip's antics portray the persistence and recursiveness that is essential to reflection. Despite never having caught a squirrel, she delights in returning and reviewing the experience with as much intensity as the chase itself. While human beings may find the recollection of previous experience intrinsically rewarding, we do not habitually re-orient ourselves to the original event, let alone investigate with different sensory apparatus.

## **Process, More Than Product**

The first thing I learn from Pippy is that reflective writing is a method more than a rhetorical construction. Her satisfaction is gained from understanding the squirrel and the squirrel scent, not from the capture or the kill.

Peter Elbow's *Embracing Contraries* is a seminal text on reflective writing. Elbow differentiates a method from a product when he describes the "Doubting and Believing Games." The method "doesn't tell us how to make final decisions, it only tells us what preparatory activities or processes to go through before entering the world full of consequences"(268). To play this game, which is really a reflective strategy, we must first assent to a proposition and imagine all its implications and then critique it with equal vigor. Elbow asserts that we have more often been schooled to critically refute than to whole-heartedly believe, but they are together the two hands of inquiry. "Is criticism of Plato of any use if the student has not first fallen in love with Plato? And where weak students have trouble getting it at all, many strong students learn to 'get-it-but-not-really-get-it': they learn, as it were, to understand something and summarize it competently—even in writing, without genuinely experiencing or feeling its force" (285). If we accept in turn the contradictory premises that Plato is a genius and that Plato is a self-indulgent dreamer, we will better understand Plato, even though in the process we contradict ourselves shamelessly. I will return to the Doubting and Believing Games later as a way into pedagogical inquiry.

In the same way, reflective writing is valued for its thorough process, rather than as an eloquent, coherent, and inevitable

product. Every writing task in my writing pedagogy class ("Writing for Writing Teachers") has a reflective value as well as an intrinsic value. Writers gain provisional understanding about teaching and reflection, as well as contextual learning about genre, voice, and revision. Memoir encourages reflection on past teachers of writing, the web caucus establishes reflection on secondary level writers, the exploratory essay establishes reflection on a question for inquiry, and the multigenre research paper foregrounds reflection as multiple viewpoints in pedagogy. By responding to each of these as reflective tasks, I hope to reinforce a habit, a persistent discipline not unlike squirrel tracking.

### **Memoir: The Ownership of Topic**

Pippy's next lesson is that we reflect on the things that interest us. Or in Pippy's case, that obsess us. Teachers are motivated to reflect when they are invested in the subject of reflection.

Both preservice and inservice teachers may object that lack of time prevents reflection. Yet even in an information-saturated environment, we find time to reflect on the things we care about. In every competitive sport we have the technology of instant replay, so that golfers and hitters can study their swings, divers can examine their tucks and water entry, and pass defenders can study their footwork against shifty pass receivers. Political commentators reflect relentlessly and sometimes prematurely on the words and movements of world leaders. Wall Street analysts struggle to interpret the long range patterns of the stock market. We are driven to reflect on matters of consequence to us.

Teachers become invested in reflection when it concerns subjects well known to them, such as their own literacy development. Composing a literacy memoir allows them to reflect on their "lived curriculum" (Yancey 18), the product of their learning to date. They can recall some of their memorable teachers of writing and reflect on their impact. We know what a

powerful influence these former teachers have on each professional generation (Ritchie and Wilson 70).

The lived curriculum of traditional schooling may be a particularly powerful influence on so-called "non-traditional" students. As a commuter school, Eastern Michigan University, where I teach, has its share of this population, ranging roughly from twenty-five to fifty years old. Between thirty and thirty-five per cent of the candidates for teaching credentials are post-baccalaurate; a few of these are my baby boomer contemporaries. Sometimes positive associations with a traditional curriculum have drawn them into teaching. Their favorite teachers may have been the exacting ones, who had no tolerance for personal writing or the split infinitive. Their first reflective move is to interrogate those teachers in a literacy memoir.

A memoir entitled "The Agony and Ecstasy of School Writing" establishes the goal of reflecting on the lived curriculum. It stakes out time to reflect and establishes ownership of the experience. It invokes the most potent memories of school literacy, it places the writer in an expert role, and it asks the best of all reflective questions: why? Why was it "agony" or "ecstasy"? By engaging both the time and ownership Atwell postulates for an authentic writing experience (74), memoir summons more motivation than other reflective writing. As an academic exercise with the self as audience, reflective writing often seems less than authentic to students. Memoir appears as a more authentic genre with an external audience.

Beth recalled how she had come to an advanced placement class as an intruder and was quickly put in her place with a "D-" on her first draft. The teacher had been "very explicit in outlining my shortcomings. It would be simple to just 'fix' it," Beth had supposed.

My second attempt at producing an acceptable essay improved my grade to a C. I was stunned. It was beginning to feel as though signing up for the class was a big mistake. My mother encouraged me to stick with it and began

working with me on my next assignment. The paper was returned to me again buried under red ink, with a slew of new criticisms that were apparently overlooked on my first essay. Now I was searching for things like "dangling participles," "subject-verb agreement," and "tense." As near as I could tell nothing was dangling, disagreeing or tensing in my paper. My mind was swimming as I began my revision. . . .

The sensations of cognitive overload and terror result from the teacher's "error hunt" (Rosen 139). The lived curriculum of a high school nightmare is juxtaposed with the "delivered curriculum" of "Writing for Writing Teachers," which includes our models of the writing process and Beth's present experience of drafting and revising a memoir. The dissonance is left for her to resolve in the "experienced curriculum," what she synthesizes as learning. Beth's framing of the story through several drafts distanced her from the lived experience, even exorcised the demons of "dm" and "agr" and "t." By the very nature of memoir, the writer must disengage from past experience and reorient toward the present.

The genre of memoir invites the writer to draw conclusions about her life, although unresolved tensions often give it vibrance. On the other hand, the reflective criteria call for thorough exploration of the question (Why was it agony or ecstasy?), so the writer is moved to explain the experience.

I learned that each individual who assesses your work will have a different opinion of it. Everyone has certain expectations that they will fall back on when judging your work. Some people will appreciate your voice and form, and others will criticize it. Some will focus on the technical details and others may place more emphasis on content. . . . Since then I have always tried to balance my criticism with that understanding in mind.

Beth's reflective thinking is transparent as she moves relentlessly toward a conclusion. She relates her literacy development to her own development as a teacher. The memoir succeeds as a reflective process even though it becomes didactic and disrupts the narrative. I affirmed Beth as a reflective writer, because that was the ultimate goal of the assignment. I am less concerned that she "told" her conclusion, instead of "showing" it, than I am that she gained reflective insight into her literacy growth and what constitutes good teaching.

It seems only fair to report that, despite never getting more than a "B" from her teacher, Beth received a 5 (the highest possible score) on her English Advanced Placement Exam. I can't help but smile at the triumph of persistence over the imperious red pen.

## **Dialectical Writing and the Road Not Taken**

Next I learn that reflection is recursive. Regardless of how many escapes the squirrel makes, Pippy returns for the next chase as if it were the first. Reflective writing should sustain the chase from one occasion to the next, not because reflection is incessant, but because it is intermittent.

Peter Elbow argues that most writing falls between the binary poles of rhetoric and dialectic. "Rhetoric. . . is language designed to have an effect on an audience. . ." whereas "dialectic is the use of language where the prime goal is to make meaning, rather than display a meaning toward an effect. . ." ("Everyone" 71). In some sense all writing is dialectical by this definition, because writing is typically used to explore meaning at some point in the writing process. However, the more writing aims at rhetorical goals, the less it pursues the dialectical ones. A primary example is the reflection in a teaching portfolio, which may be evaluated by the coherence it brings to the various artifacts in the portfolio. Dialectical writing, on the other hand, suspends closure and runs down the reflective "scent" to exhaustion. Reaching closure in dialectical writing is often a disappointment, because the goal never was to satisfy the audience. Like Pippy, we

follow the scent not to reach the squirrel, but to learn where the squirrel has been.

Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" portrays this kind of reflective thinking for me. The poem itself is a reflective excursion. What does the narrator mean by "That has made all the difference"? A positive difference or a negative one? What might be gained by the road "more travelled"? With this reflective stance, after we arrive at a conclusion we keep glancing back to see if we made the right decision. Journals, classroom and online discussion, and other exploratory genres support this "crossroads reflection," as I refer to it.

In contrast, portfolio reflection, whether by teachers or writers, has become a more decisive re-orientation toward the artifacts of teaching or writing. Portfolios are rhetorical forms which turn reflection to an external audience and require the consideration of long term social and moral consequences of problem-solving (Van Manen; Zeichner; Ladson-Billings). Such "critical reflection" places the affirming of beliefs above the doubting in the reflective hierarchy. Reflection becomes a value-laden process which exposes the cultural and moral dimensions of a problem and takes a more deliberate stance toward its resolution.

For the professional program at the University of Southern Maine, Nona Lyons describes the goals of reflection as 1) "bringing to the surface knowledge about teaching and learning" and 2) "knowing the self in relation to teaching: 'Coming to know who we are, our philosophy, our connection to the students'" (262). By its very nature, a portfolio requires a more unified and coherent presentation. It represents and affirms, rather than speculates and unravels. Lyons observes of her teacher internship portfolios, ". . .the processes of reflection that come about through public, collaborative inquiry paradoxically involve at the center learning about self, about the values one holds for teaching and learning" (261). I compare this kind of reflection to Moses viewing the Promised Land, because it is the possible classroom that comes into view more than the problematic one. Like Moses'



vantage point from Mt. Pisgah, it is also a panoramic view. The portfolio is the public presentation of a vision, a rhetorical construction of reflective thought. Yancey distinguishes it as "reflection-in-presentation" (72).

Elbow makes the same kind of distinction between "dialectical" and "rhetorical" writing in his discourse on "binary thinking." Critics of Elbow's work argue that his binary oppositions (like "rhetorical" and "dialectical" writing) are too simplistic and that points of view are multiple. Their position appears to support the goals of reflective thinking: uncertainty and multiple perspectives. Elbow argues that multiple interpretations are only useful for reflection as long as they sustain tension, yet they are often the precursors of convergent and conclusive thinking. "Seeing three or five sides is fine, but it is often just a way to talk about one of them as right and the others as wrong" ("Everyone" 50). Critical reflection, insofar as it gravitates toward a coherent view or belief structure, may take this course. Portfolio reflections that address a real audience (e.g. professors or school personnel) often return to a philosophical home to frame a coherent identity of the writer.

Elbow argues that binary thinking may be more generative than critical reflection, because it is more natural. "To perceive is to notice a category over against a difference, and the simplest path is in terms of simple opposition. The easiest way to classify information is to clump it into two piles" ("Everyone" 51). So binary thinking, like reflective writing, is a tool, not necessarily an exhaustive display of possibilities. It sustains reflection because it is based on polarities, rather than eventual conclusions. For this reason I subscribe to Elbow's view that binary thinking and dialectical writing are the primary engines of reflection.

At Eastern Michigan University, the teaching methods class (Engl 409) is well-situated for portfolios, because students are about to become student teachers. Most of them will be interviewed by principals or department heads for their teaching placements, and they will have to have their act together. The teaching portfolio, with their teaching philosophy and their unit

and lesson plans, is the one place they do have their act together at that point, and it continues to represent stability in the often chaotic semester of student teaching. The portfolio represents the rhetorical end of the writing continuum.

On the other hand, "Writing for Writing Teachers" (Engl 408) is usually the last writing course and the first curriculum and methods course in English education at Eastern Michigan University. It has been a crossroads where writer meets teacher, theory meets practice, and knowledge meets inquiry. Until recently the course was never precisely sequenced in our secondary education program, but the typical student was a newcomer to teacher education, with brief, if any, exposure to secondary classrooms. For one or two in each class, it has been a place to turn back from teaching. Some of my best students have made that choice with my blessing. Crossroads and dialectical thinking fit this place in the curriculum.

## **The Web Caucus and Reflective Styles**

Pippy defers to the sheepdog to model the constraints on reflective writing. Ann Berthoff acquainted us with this distant relative in describing the "dialectical method of composing."

Our method works like a Scottish sheep dog bringing in the sheep: she races back and forth, driving the flock in one direction signaled by the shepherd, but acting in response to the developing occasions, nudging here, circling there, rushing back to round up a stray, dashing ahead to cut off an advance in the wrong direction. When you compose, you are the shepherd and the sheep dog, and it's up to you to decide whether you want the sheep in fold, flank or field, and to know how to get them there (49).

Besides focusing on the intentions of the writer, the metaphor portrays the tension between divergence and convergence in dialectical composing. While the imagination must respond to the impulses of unruly sheep, it also drives them

toward some place. The sweep of thought must finally settle on a subject. Simply reviewing or recollecting texts or experiences will result only in a summary, but deliberating on one or a few of them brings the writer closer to true reflection. If there is a necessary constraint for reflective writing, it is the deliberate attention to some subject.

Some reflective writing formally announces its focus and the onset of deliberation, but more often in journals, learning logs, online caucuses, or listserv discussions, reflection happens spontaneously, because the writer herself is unaware that a reflective turn has been made. Thus there may be no transitions like "Upon reflection. . . ." And reflective writers respond to different goals: some to explore, even to create a dissonance of ideas, and some to resolve those dissonances and gain a foothold for action. The lack of rhetorical markers and announced goals makes the reading of reflective writing a pedagogical challenge.

Soon after the memoir has its cycle of drafts and revisions, I'm reading the web caucus responses, looking for the reflective turn. The caucus is a serial online discussion, which, in "Writing for Writing Teachers" (Engl 408), helps to capture what preservice teachers are noticing in the secondary classrooms they observe or to explore any topics generated by class discussion. Web caucus combines the leisure to consider what participants have said with the synergy of collaborative thinking. In these respects it avoids some of the social pressure of class discussion and the monologic thinking of the more perfunctory journals. Most important, it delivers what journals often lack: timely responses to writing from any of the participants in the caucus.

Early in the semester the preservice teachers have been asked to identify a secondary level student for a case study and to offer their initial reactions to the student's writing. With tongue in cheek I labelled the discussion item as "Shocking News About Secondary School Writing." In the prompt I asked, "What shocks you or most impresses you about their writing? You can write about grammar and syntax or broader issues like content and

organization. Try to give an example, so we know what you mean."

In spite of the time and response afforded by the web caucus, not everyone finds it congenial to reflection. Early reports of secondary classrooms by preservice teachers are often factual or reactive. They resort to safe statements and try to avoid speculation. They summarize, rather than deliberate. Julie writes:

I am currently working with my student on a memoir about her dance team's trip to Florida. What amazes me is the difference in writing levels throughout the whole class. The student I am working with is a great example of someone who could write forever on a given topic, but if it was up to her to create her own topic, she would be lost. I hope to have the opportunity to work with her. I am glad to see that some of their writing is done on the computer because some of their handwriting is very hard to read. I can see how a teacher could become a little frustrated when reading over 100 papers.

I hear Julie reeling off reactions without much reflection about why any of these things happen. She dodges the question about her individual student by referring to the writing of the whole class. She mentions handwriting and the trials of reading a set of a hundred papers. She does notice that her student writes better from an assigned topic, but she doesn't elaborate on that. I've observed that teachers who are unsure how to read student papers begin to generalize at once, instead of noticing features of individual writing samples. Still, reading reflective writing is tricky. Schön says reflection goes beyond what can be articulated at the moment (31).

Something was happening apart from the superficial observations, because Julie reflected in a paper later in the semester:

I find it hard to stay extremely focused on one specific topic or question to 'answer' because my mind jumps from one thought to a completely different thought when I am writing and I want to write everything I am thinking.

This reassures me that even those who struggle with reflection can gain a foothold, if they are only encouraged to keep at it. As a forum for public reflection, the web caucus had raised the bar a little high for Julie. Privately and independently she was able to articulate her problem with reflective writing, an astute reflection in itself.

Among those who find the web caucus congenial to reflection are writers who explore dissonances and writers who resolve dissonances in their thinking.

Kim was a born doubter. No one had to teach her dialectical thinking; she thrived on oppositions and incongruities. She read into the well-formed sentences of her student writer and questioned their substance.

My student is actually a very good writer. I was drawn to him because he is an athlete and was upset that he had so much homework all the time. . . you know that English papers come last! His writing is very fluid, and it is interesting to note that the brain or thought lapses are like big splotches on the paper, easy to find, and fun to work through . . . I have seen progress.

Kim's responses ramble like conversation, and her reflective turn is abrupt. ". . . it is interesting to note that the brain or thought lapses are like big splotches on the paper, easy to find, and fun to work through . . ." There's a lot to wonder about in this brief observation, but I think I understand that there are physical traces in the writing where Kim's writer has gotten blocked or distracted, and she uses them as entry points for discussion or revision. That's what I call close reading of the writer: a synthesis of the writer's motivation, the physical characteristics of his

writing, and the loss of continuity of thought. Kim's observations remind me of why writing teachers are often the foremost proponents of reflection. They have to scour the page for clues to expose the writer's intentions.

Kim also came at "peer editing" in our class with nearly hardened skepticism. In an exploratory essay later in the term she declared she had never received useful feedback from her peers, and our class was no different. She complained that her peer response group had deteriorated to "chatter," because a few were "unprepared." "If a single or couple of students were ready," she recalled in her essay, "they could easily be converted to unproductive behavior."

At this point in her essay, however, Kim came at the subject from other points of view. She recalled how past teachers (her lived curriculum) had carefully structured the peer response group with procedures and forms to fill out.

The problem from the teacher's perspective is figuring out what you want to see the students doing and what helps to structure the process. Putting my student cap back on: we would follow the system through one piece, but would get little accomplished once we were "calmly discussing." The only thing that ever saved me, as an editor, was a really well thought out critique sheet.

I appreciated how Kim donned the teacher and student "caps" successively just as experienced teachers do when they plan a new learning experience. So in her exploratory essay, she proposed that careful structuring of the peer response would resolve the superficiality of response groups.

But not so fast. Further down the page, Kim brought another perspective to peer editing. As a tutor in the P\_\_\_\_High School Writing Center, she had helped both the peer tutors and the clients of the Writing Center. The peer tutors were a select group of twelve juniors and seniors trained by English teachers for two weeks to provide appropriate feedback for writing and then

"checked and monitored by a rigorous process of paperwork. This is the ideal example of peer editing gone right." Yet when Kim read the duplicates of the response forms filled in by the tutors, she observed, "They are consistently too vague on comments, suggestions and summaries. Drawing on these observations and my experiences I am still questioning the benefit of [p]eer editing."

Although this is a modest three-page essay, it complicates peer response more than most pre-student teachers can imagine. Kim had found experienced teachers in her pre-practicum setting who believed in peer tutoring, yet who failed to convince her of its effectiveness under optimal conditions—in a writing center with trained peer tutors. So, with "dogged" persistence, she continued to ask the difficult questions about peer response to the end of the semester.

I'll return to Kim's development later, but she makes a good model of how preservice teachers use a dialectical stance to reflect and grow. It is not a cynical disposition, but a relentless one that follows the scent of a question tirelessly and sighs in disappointment when the chase ends.

Then there are those who reflect to resolve dissonance, rather than create it. These are the "believers," not for their credulity, but for their search for validation of pedagogical beliefs. Unlike the rest of the class, Shawn was already a student teacher, so she had seen a lot of writing already:

The students' first class paper was a personal narrative. Punctuation was a BIG problem. It is something we are working on.

I think the students' creativity surprised me the most. Many of their stories were emotionally moving. Overall, the content of the papers was phenomenal! I had to go back a second time to read for mechanical stuff, because on the first read, the mechanics did not enter my mind. I wanted to read the paper like they hoped I would first. What many

students poured out on the paper was not punctuation, or grammar, or anything but themselves.

Shawn performs the reflective turn with a noticeable transition. She exclaims, "Punctuation was a BIG problem," but checks herself with an eloquent afterthought: "I wanted to read the paper like they hoped I would first." This illustrates the empathy that writing teachers need. "What does a writer want from me?" Shawn reflects. Every writing teacher needs to identify with her students' struggle to write. As Elbow says:

Although we rightly value one kind of good teacher—the steel trap mind who keeps students on their toes by sniffing out their every mistake—we also value the opposite type: the teacher who can listen to a discussion or read a paper and sniff out every good idea that comes along, no matter how poorly understood or badly expressed it is. ("Embracing" 286).

Unlike Kim, Shawn reflected to affirm her writers. I wondered if it was because she was a student teacher, which placed her in closer proximity to them and charged her with solving problems rather than creating them. I will portray her reflective process using another writing assignment, the exploratory essay.

## **Exploration and Inquiry**

What genres other than memoir can incite reflection? Potentially any genre has reflective value, but the exploratory essay is designed as a methodological tool that sets the agenda for extended inquiry. Pippy would concur that any writing that sustains the scent of squirrel till the next chase must be reflective.

How often have I read research papers in high school and college composition courses and thought: Now this would a good place to begin inquiry! Too often it seemed all the notecards, paraphrases, and rough drafts had done no more than define what



the writer really wanted to know. What was proposed as an inquiry was performed as a linear journey through secondary resources toward an authentic question, but the semester was over and the question had only emerged in the final paragraph. My idea of the "exploratory essay" was intended to formulate a real question before the afterthoughts that emerge in the last paragraph of the semester. Bean refers to this as a "thesis-seeking" essay (92).

To consider the name for a moment. I know "exploratory essay" is redundant. An essay, by definition, is "exploratory" (an "attempt"), yet how many preservice teachers have received this notion from their lived curriculum? Very few, in my eight years of teaching this course. For most of them an "essay" is a formal explanation with a thesis and several well-defined supporting points, arriving at a foregone conclusion. I know some colleagues even advocate this plan, though not necessarily with five paragraphs. Therefore when I announce "exploratory essay," I consider it an oxymoron, not a redundancy. I accept the student assumption that essays must "prove" something and turn it around with "exploratory." Re-orientation to inquiry begins with disorientation from genre. Delivered and lived curricula clash in these two words: "exploratory" and "essay."

Elbow's "Doubting and Believing Games" are the spring that winds the exploratory essay. The essay's purpose is to initiate inquiry into a topic in the teaching of writing by articulating the nagging questions that emerge from the reading, the observation of classrooms, and the writer's previous experience in writing classes. It demands problems and complications. Uncontested conclusions are forbidden! It is the only required genre in the writing portfolio for this course, and it generates the greatest uncertainty, if the companion reflections I read are any indication. "This is just one of those papers that I just don't know if I understood the assignment," Shawn wrote. "Initially, my paper topic was about teaching grammar, but after the class peer editing session, I knew that I had written something other than what you asked for." Most of the class echoed these reflections about their

exploratory essays with varying levels of anxiety. Jackie's frustration was transparent:

The only thing I could do is go to class and hope others were having similar problems. In class, most people I talked to were as frustrated as I was. So we brainstormed together and I came home and wrote.

I hope this is what you needed. I'm still not sure what I have written here. It's all kind of cloudy. I think the assignment screwed me up. I think that as the assignment called for the exploration of a problem or question with no answer, I just kind of explored with writing, with no real structure. I don't know what do you think?

Normally when I read "I hope this is what you needed," I feel guilt about having usurped the writer's ownership, but Jackie's essay, and most of the others, were truly exploratory. I knew from reading their reflections that they couldn't have faked "exploratory" if they had tried, so I concluded they really had explored their question in whatever form it emerged. Although the strangeness of the assignment disoriented them, it inspired the reflective turn toward inquiry.

I am also reassured by the urgency I hear in the questions these essays address. Bret had to reflect on whether his high school teachers had neglected his sentence structure, when they only praised his voice and content.

I was proud of my paper and thought about how my high school teacher would have liked it. I got a 'D' on it. . . . I was very discouraged by the outcome of this paper. I felt like a failure and wondered if my high school teacher had just hung me out to dry; telling me I was a capable writer.

Shontee had to determine whether the African-American Vernacular was appropriate for her classroom:

Ebonics is a compound of two words: 'Ebony' which means 'Black' and 'phonics,' which means 'sounds.' Therefore Ebonics actually mean Black Sounds. After realizing the real meaning of Ebonics can someone really be for or against it? Ebonics is something that exists because this is the language that many blacks hear in the house. This is what we were [taught to say].

Amy wondered:

So then why do they read journals if punctuation doesn't count? My teachers would go through every entry and write little comments on the side. Perhaps they were studying my voice or perhaps it was to get to know me a little better. I wonder and I wonder what I will expect from my students. I want them to write, but I know many of them will feel like me and give the cliff note version of their lives for credit. It's almost sad to think of it that way—writing about your life for a few points.

Kristin wanted to consider how to deal with plagiarism, after she listened to teachers rant about it in her school site. Mike wanted to re-think the application of computers in the two-year college writing class, after a session with a writer who believed spell-check and grammar-check had done it all.

I quoted from Shawn's reflection (on her first draft) earlier to illustrate her initial confusion about the exploratory essay, but her reflective rebound from it is inspiring:

I wondered, no dredged my brain over finding a new paper topic. Because of the peer editing session that we accomplished in class, I was able to see that I had not fulfilled the assignment. Also, I had just completed a successful peer editing session in my English 9 class at S\_\_\_\_\_ High School. It was definitely a topic I thought I could write about.

What Shawn had learned from her misfired draft was that peer response groups were a good place to correct your course. In her next draft, she turned her attention to peer response groups and her conviction that they played a critical role in the writing process.

Shawn's co-operating teacher and other veteran English teachers had discouraged her about peer editing. She told Shawn: "It just does not work. These kids don't have the skills to edit each other's papers effectively. And, besides, it is almost impossible to keep these kids on task. They find everything to talk about except their papers. It usually ends up as a waste of class time." Voices from Constance Weaver's *Lessons to Share* seemed to contradict the popular wisdom at her school. Shawn wrestled with the contradictions between the lived and delivered curricula, faithful to her reflective goal: to resolve dissonance.

Although substantial research was not required for the exploratory essay, Shawn devoured the Weaver book and referred to other professional literature, such as Randy Bomer's *Time for Meaning*. Bomer offered modest claims for peer response. "It is crucial to have cheerleaders in this lonely business of writing. . . . Anytime a student has a peer read what he/she has written, his/her sense of audience is strengthened, regardless of whether the feedback is helpful. Sometimes a vote of confidence is all that's needed to keep a writer writing" (132). Like many nontraditional teaching practices, peer response has sometimes been oversold, giving teachers the wrong kind of expectations. Bomer's goals for peer response groups answered some misconceptions in a way that reassured Shawn that she wasn't just dismissing the voices of experience in her school.

I can hear the voice of her own experience later in Shawn's exploratory essay.

Many students abandon writing projects because they feel that their assignment is terrible, or they feel they are just poor writers. At least with peer editing students have an

idea of where the paper is strong or weak and can make the necessary corrections.

In these lines I can hear her reflecting on her experience of bringing her abortive first draft to her peer response group. The realization that she had misinterpreted the purpose of the exploratory essay resulted in this fine revision I was now reading. With the inclusion of her own experience with peer editing, Shawn had come full circle: from her own beliefs to the beliefs of experienced teachers, to the beliefs found in professional literature, back to herself. Her experience in our peer response groups had confirmed their value to her, even as Kim's experience had undermined their value. What mattered to me was that both Shawn and Kim had reflected about their experiences as students and applied them to what they knew of the secondary classroom.

Shawn's example of reflection drives toward resolution. Unlike my canine mentor, Shawn wants to capture the squirrel at the end of the trail. I don't consider her process of reflection truncated, however, like the disappointing research papers I have read. Her struggle with the lived and delivered curricula and her predicament as a student teacher in the company of experienced nay-sayers inexorably drove her to reflect.

## **Genre and Multiple Representation**

I think one of Pippy's best contributions to reflective thought is multiple representation. The squirrel has many manifestations in her experience, especially the auditory, the visual, and the olfactory ones. I am convinced it is the olfactory one that feeds her obsession, but it is clear she understands the squirrel from multi-modal perceptions.

Howard Gardner characterizes learning in these terms: "I argue that the best representations are multiple. And so our search should be for the family of representations that can convey the core ideas in a multiplicity of ways at once accurate and complementary" (202). In *Disciplines of Mind* Gardner illustrates these multiple representations in Charles Darwin's

process of inquiry. He refers to each representation of a concept as a "model language" (203). In Darwin's case there were pictorial representations of evolution, a "branching tree" depicted in his notebooks, but there were verbal descriptions to complement them. Contemporary readers have the advantage of studying evolution from film, video, and computer simulation, offering multiple representations of the same phenomenon.

"Different model languages will not capture identical aspects of the concept. Geometry will capture shape; film will capture motion; logic will isolate causative factors," observes Gardner. "Indeed each example of the model languages has its own genius; each is privileged for certain purposes, while less useful or relevant or exact for others. The individual who can appreciate these individuating features and piece them together ends up with the most versatile, flexible, and desirable understanding" (206). Pippy has a nose up on some human beings who comprehend the world only through a preferred mode of perception.

Gardner's notion of "understanding" comes close to what I consider the goal of reflective writing. It is multi-dimensional knowledge, sometimes fraught with contradiction, with competing representations of the same phenomenon. Kim and Shawn problematized the practice of "peer response" to writing. Whereas early in the semester "peer response" was identified by more than one teacher as the solution to the problems of teaching revision, Shawn and Kim challenged the practice in their own field experiences and arrived at opposing conclusions. Not contradictory, but "multi-dimensional" knowledge.

And opposing conclusions can even be incorporated into the work of one author, for example, the multi-genre research paper. As Romano describes it, "Each genre is a color slide, complete in itself, possessing its own satisfying composition, but also working in concert with the others to create a single literary experience" (4). Or it is like a collage of genres, explanatory or narrative or lyric, all connected by a reflective letter. It is an effective format for inquiry into education, where there are so many stakeholders and where shifting perspectives alter goals and values. I want to

briefly illustrate how Shawn and Kim represented their distinct perspectives within the teacher preparation program with characteristic genres and contrasting styles of reflection.

Shawn wrote a dream fantasy in which, as a first-year teacher, she had misgivings about what her older colleagues declared about peer response. In the dream sequence, she is visited by a retired teacher who offers evidence from professional literature that Shawn's faith in peer response is not misplaced. You can almost imagine the retired teacher leading her to the top of Mount Pisgah to view the Promised Land: her professional career. These genre and character choices so aptly fit the thoughts of a student teacher preparing for the job market that her conclusions to the inquiry seemed almost inconsequential. She had assumed authority for her own classroom and carried her inquiry far enough to know what she would do about peer response when she arrived there.

In contrast, Kim pursued "crossroads reflection." Her student teaching was still ahead of her. Her experience in the P\_\_\_\_\_ Writing Center led her to study journals next, so, for her research paper, she wrote a "journal on journals." An inveterate journal-keeper herself, her evaluation of the writing tutors' journals made her wonder why their responses were so superficial. Her research had led her to consider dialogue journals as a more motivational strategy for writing-to-learn. And typically Kim had chosen the "journal" as her primary genre for representing her research. She must have realized how perfectly the journal fit her dialectical style. Even her conclusion points to the next question, sustaining her inquiry for the next class.

My intention is to teach from the *Writer's Inc.* book, and to switch journals with the writing center students, asking for a reflection from them, and questions, comments. From these I would like to address their issues with mine, and possibly use this topic for a senior thesis.

When I find lingering questions at the end of inquiry like this, I rejoice, instead of thinking: Now here's where this project should have started! At every point where the chase might have ended, Kim made another reflective turn, doubting whenever the evidence contradicted what the textbooks said. I can't wait to see what turn she makes into student teaching.

Romano suggests that a limitless array of genres may represent inquiry. If we accept his and Gardner's characterization of understanding ("the best representations are multiple"), then genre and audience need not constrain reflective writing. The configuration and sequence of genres may still determine the kind of reflection—"crossroads" or "Promised Land," Kim's relentless dialectic or Shawn's quest for affirmation—but in both cases I know they have experienced the tension of reflection by the end of the semester.

Pippy, on the other hand, will never settle for mere affirmation of knowledge. Even in aged infirmity I expect her to relive the pursuit of squirrels, pricking up her ears and twitching her nose as the birdseed burglar climbs the feeder and thumping her finally frail legs in the throes of squirrel dreams. What drives her obsession I can only guess, but I know I want more of it for myself.

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