ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: DWELLING IN A PEDAGOGY OF IN-BETWEEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TEACHERS OF WRITING

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This phenomenological study explores "in-between" as a pedagogic site in the teaching of writing at two large public universities. The writings of Ted Aoki, Edward Casey, Elizabeth Ellsworth, Hans Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, and Max van Manen orient the study philosophically and methodologically. The notion of in-between is grounded in the author's life experiences, and is metaphorically suggested by her knowledge of scuba diving.

Six teachers of writing, who are also writers, are engaged in individual and group conversations to bring forward the lived dimensions of their pedagogy as teachers of writing. The rendering of audio taped conversations suggests themes of a paradoxical nature that might yield insights into the teaching of writing: knowing and not knowing whether one's teaching makes a difference for student writers; comfortable to be uncomfortable as it relates to the creation of a classroom atmosphere where writers are willing to take risks; as teachers, taking attendance and being in attendance of student rosters, both seen and unseen; process under pressure as a pedagogical dimension where writing detours and bewilderment coexist with personal and institutional resistance; the sustenance of response, including a revisioning of judgment and the virtue of failing together; successful risk and other

blessings for writing teachers who are at once avenging angels and sympathetic souls; and the pleasures of paradox: dwelling in the I-You relationship, nurturing the presence of absence, and loving one's work in all its imbalances.

Dwelling in the tensions suggested by these themes has the possibility of moving teachers of writing toward acceptance and exploration of their pedagogic identity. Furthermore, writing teachers who articulate and value the centering power of both/and are more attuned to coach students in becoming stronger, and more courageous, writers. A pedagogy of "equilibrium in motion" has the potential to re-vision teacher preparation—as well as curriculum in university writing classrooms.

DWELLING IN A PEDAGOGY OF IN-BETWEEN:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF TEACHERS OF WRITING

by

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DEDICATION

To my family and friends for keeping me afloat.

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CHAPTER ONE:

TURNING TO A PEDAGOGY OF THE IN-BETWEEN

For whatever we lose(like a you or a me)*
it's always ourselves we find in the sea
(Cummings, 1956, p. 682)

In-Between Knowing-That and Knowing-How: Diving In

It is the first day of the semester in my advanced writing course. As always, I study the faces of my undergraduate students. Some look interested, some wary, some fearful. They listen closely to me, watching my face and my ample hand gestures. The air in the room is tense with expectation. While I give them what I hope is a lively overview of the course, they flip through the pages of the syllabus—I know they are counting the number of required books, the length and number of essays, and whether a research paper is required. Although I rarely hear anyone groan out loud, I feel the weight of their silence as they skim through the lengthy syllabus.

Breath Holding

Writing is a burden for most of them. I know this to be true from previous semesters when I have asked them to respond to the question, "What was your best experience with writing?" and conversely, "What was your worst?" By the time they enter my class in their second or third year of college, they need a great deal of such reassurance. For besides their heavy backpacks and messenger bags, they are lugging around a ton of misconceptions about writing. Their spirits are weighed down from the belief that their writing must be perfect from the outset. For years, they have been

* Author's spacing

writing on disembodied topics that matter little to them. Not being allowed to write in the first person since high school, many of them are completely out of touch with their own voices. They lament over their lack of *inspiration.*

David Abram (1996) traces the etymology of "spirit," from which "inspiration" derives:

> "Spirit" itself, despite all of its incorporeal and non-sensuous connotations, is directly related to the very bodily term "respiration" through their common root in the Latin word *spiritus*, which signified both "breath" and "wind." (p. 238)

Thus, to *in-spire* is to take in the spirit, or breath. When relaxed, a person is prepared *to take in* what she needs to sustain her very life. For writers, might it be said that breathing easily allows them to be open to *in-spiration?* As a writer and a teacher of writing, I know that when one holds back from the blank page, one feels oneself to be greatly *un-inspired.* If inspiration is the filling up of the lungs, and a filling up of the spirit, it is only one part of the breathing equation. *Ex-halation* is the other part. Practitioners of the meditative and yogic arts speak of the importance of exhaling deeply to release toxins built up in one's heart and muscles—this deep "letting go" makes it possible for tight muscles to loosen, and with that loosening, for pain to disappear. If a writer's history is threaded through one's tense body, how might breath unlock painful memories that are suffocating for lack of oxygen? Being out of touch with one's own story translates into being out of touch with the person one is. What is required of teachers of writing who wish to clear the air for in-spiration and exhalation? In what ways might students be opened to long-neglected narrative power?

Aware that some students are holding their breath as they listen to my introductory remarks, I am called on to reassure them. I remind them of the origin of the word, "essay" which derives from the French verb, *essayer*, meaning "to try." I share with them my orientation and philosophy about writing, mentioning the importance of revision and response. Frequently, I compare writing to teaching and to life: we usually don't get them perfect the first time out, but through faith and practice, we usually improve. No one, including myself, writes perfectly or fluently. Instead, all writers—both experienced and novice—struggle. Strong writing is born of ample opportunity *over time* to write and revise, with thoughtful response from other writers, and most importantly, with the writer's own investment in the topic at hand. Although a messy business, writing is wonderfully malleable: rather like a lump of clay that the craftsperson shapes and smoothes until the form emerges. Form and meaning are latent, and will reveal themselves after much back and forth movement between writer and text. "Have faith," I tell them. "Your writing will improve," although at times progress may seem to be just beyond reach.

To allay my students' anxiety, I have them read a chapter called "Shitty First Drafts" from Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life.* Lamott writes: "For me and most of the other writers I know, writing is not rapturous. In fact, the only way I can get anything written at all is to write really, really shitty first drafts" (1994, p. 22). My students smile when they read the title of this chapter. In their logs, they comment: "I felt so relieved to learn that other writers struggle with first drafts the way I do!" The next time we meet, am I wrong, or does the air in

class feel lighter today? Are students breathing more easily? I like to think that once the toxins of fear are exhaled, space gets freed up for *in-spiration* to flow in.

Poor Visibility

Yet before writing students are able to breathe evenly, the teacher of writing must somehow encourage them to lower themselves into waters that may appear murky. As a scuba diver, I understand the anxiety that accompanies diving in unfamiliar waters where the visibility is poor. I recall one occasion when poor visibility underwater contributed to my panic. My partner and I were on a dive liveaboard boat in Micronesia, and I was the one woman in a group of six divers. As we prepared for our dive that morning, I felt nervous and unready: one ear was clogged up and I wasn't sure whether I would be able to equalize the pressure. In addition, my body was already tired from multiple days of diving. However, I ignored these clear signals from my body (a serious error in scuba diving), donned my gear, and—although the last diver off the boat—stepped off the platform into the drink. Hitting the water, I automatically adjusted my gear and exhaled in order to drop down below the surface. But because I was already tense, my contracted muscles made me more buoyant; this fact, together with my shallow breathing, prevented me from submerging. At last, by sweeping my arms and repeatedly exhaling, I was able to force myself down the first 10 feet. But now there was a problem: the water was sapphire opaque, so that I couldn't see more than five feet in any direction. Panic gripped me as I scanned the water in vain for the blue or yellow fins of my companions. A rapid calculation, fueled by my terror of being left behind, convinced me that the others had already arrived at the "wall" of the coral reef and were flying

along on the fast current where I could never catch up. As if this weren't enough, being enveloped in water through which I could not see was a new experience, and my imagination conjured up ravenous sharks, and worse. I remember thinking: "No way! I don't need this!" With no thought other than getting out of there, I shot back to the surface and inflated my buoyancy vest. Fortunately, the dive boat was only 20 yards away and quickly returned to pick me up. (As a postscript to this incident, and a lesson for those prone to panic, the other divers *were* waiting for me at the wall, and only after five minutes or more did they conclude that I had aborted the dive and proceeded without me.) Nevertheless, the memory of those murky waters still fills me with anxiety. Little wonder that novice writers want to "abort" (kill) the dive when the way through seems obscure.

Poet Ellen Bass (1985) captures this sense of wanting to know before its time:

To my students
for Susan Lysik

you are concerned. your writings
are not poems—there are no line breaks
sentences wind like coils of a pot
they are not stories—no beginning
middle end, characters [†]
are not developed
the action is a child
turning

in green chiffon

you apologize: I
    don't know what to call it
you want a name …
(no pagination)

[†] Author's spacing

As in the Ellen Bass poem quoted above, writing students want to "name" their writing even as they are going through it ("you apologize: I/don't know what to call it/you want a name"). They seek answers before their time, because a paucity of answers feels excruciatingly insecure. Is it by naming, even planning what is yet un-formed, that students expect to control the outcome?

Most novice writers also crave rules and rubrics to show them at the outset what is expected, just as teachers are enjoined to make expectations clear. Certainty, more than messy exploration, is a goal. How to go about "pinning it down" (just as a collector might skewer a particularly fine butterfly specimen) rather than "letting it go." And yet it is a far lovelier sight to witness the flight of thousands of Monarch butterflies among the eucalyptus groves of one California coastal town. Bass continues:

> then call it swimming. the water passes over you
> the smoothness
> the liquid
> the smoothness more enveloping than making love
> your arm, arching in the sun
> lit drops, crystals, falling
>
> or call it walking, the air
> cold in your nostrils
> the ground soft with rotting leaves
> the green is too bright
>
> some are mushrooms, some maize
> some take as long as persimmon to fruit
> some leave neatly
> they are the black pearl droppings of deer
> some are overgrown pups
> they hang on your tit, you cannot
> shake them off

If you must name what is not yet, Bass suggests that you give it body (texture, odor, temperature, sight, even decay)… or:

> call it
> coming home, returning
> by a different route

What is needed for students of writing to come home "by a different route?" Familiar paths may give an illusion of comfort, but after a while, a person grows immune to the sights and sounds along the way. New territory calls for heightened awareness.

> call it a sandwich in waxed paper
> we will give it to our children
>
> call it an antidote
> to what we have been taught
>
> call it rubble, what remains
> through pyres, altars, ovens, electricity
>
> call it what comes in place of sleep
> what we ask to know
>
> a tribute to redwood pods, they
> burst within fire, seeding
> young groves
> (Bass, 1985, no pagination)

Getting It Right

Undergraduate writing students want to know… *how*. "How" does Ms. De La Ysla organize the course? How many papers will we write and when are they due? How does "she" want the papers set up? The course syllabus is puzzling: Why aren't objectives listed? What does she mean by "valued ends?" Is that just a fancy name for the same thing? Where in these "how's" can redwood pods "burst within fire, seeding/young groves?"

"Professor De La Ysla, is *this* how you want it?" Kelly is a second year biology major, planning to enter the secondary education program. She gives me the draft of her family history "I-search" paper. Although writing in a narrative way is at once unfamiliar and thrilling to her, Kelly is a good student and wants to follow the rules. A few days later after reading Kelly's paper about her grandmother's childhood on a Harford County farm, I return the paper to her: "Yes, this is just fine," I say. "Keep writing."

Relief floods her face. "Good, because I didn't know if this is what you had in mind …" Her comment is familiar. I pause and respond, "Is it what *you* have in mind?" And as she launches into a detailed explanation of her grandmother's upbringing, I say: "That's great! Now write it down!"

Matt sits in the back row of the technology "smart" classroom that I have been assigned this semester. Ours is a 9 am class, so Matt almost always looks and sounds half-asleep. Frequently, he pulls his hood over his head and scrunches down, hoping to be passed by during discussion. Learning before 12 noon makes him suffer visibly. Because he was in my class in the fall, we know each other fairly well. Thus, I expect Matt's first response to a question to be "I don't know, Ms. D … um, I don't know," accompanied by a nervous laugh and perhaps a blush. He is averse to venturing his opinion, and when pressed to do so, straddles his chair sideways and looks at the wall, rather than at me. His mumbled words are occasionally interspersed with soft oaths directed at his friend Connor, who seems to be making wisecracks when Matt speaks. After a barely audible remark, Matt almost always asks, "Is that what you wanted?" or "I don't know what you want." Matt, for all his out-of-

classroom bravado with friends, is rarely able to speak out in anything other than a stumbling, half-apologetic manner. "I'll get back to you, Matt," I say, if it is hard for me to discern whether he is just opposed to speaking out, or unprepared. Meanwhile, I wonder about students like Matt who only want "a sure thing." They could not be further than writers such as Becky Thompson (1996) who turn away from certainty and celebrate what she calls the "borderland." She muses: "It (the borderland) is certainly a place that nurtures my creativity and imagination, since there are few rules and a lot of room for improvisation" (p. 105). Instead, Matt wants the rules of the game written on the wall.

A pedagogy of writing that supports the borderland eschews how. Such a pedagogical orientation pulls away from *technique* as strategy, while inclining towards a less well-remembered Greek conception of *technē* as a form of knowledge. Heidegger writes:

> *Technē*, as knowledge experienced in the Greek manner, is a bringing forth of beings in that it brings forth what is present … out of concealment and specifically into the unconcealment of its appearance; *technē* never signifies the action of making. (1993f, p. 184)

As a teacher, what a wonderful way to "be" with students, to "bring forth … out of concealment" the persons they are. Again, Heidegger writes:

> Teaching is a giving, an offering; but what is offered in teaching is not the learnable, for the student is merely instructed to take for himself what he already has … True learning occurs only where the taking of what one already has is a *self-giving* and is experienced as such. (1993g, p. 275)

I truly believe that students of writing possess the capacity for "self-giving." When given the time, space and opportunity, they can reclaim their voice as writers. Truth-full writing is a showing up on the page, the (self) giving of life to one's life

experiences. This is a process wherein the writer truly takes for himself "what he already has …" As a teacher of writing, is not one my charges to help my students navigate places where more questions than answers abound?

I am called by the question of **what is the lived experience of teachers of writing as they develop a pedagogy of "in-between?"** As a teacher of writing, I confront the challenge of responding honestly to students' writing while supporting them to "write to their best sentence or phrase," as one of my own writing teachers once described it. I puzzle over ways to give students the latitude to find and speak in their own voices *and* extend their writing beyond personal narrative. I question the questions I write in the margins of their papers, wondering whether I am imposing my own standards on their writing. I am called to attend to writing students who resist invitations to write openly of what matters to them; at what point do I give students the space to say "no"?

I wonder how to impress upon undergraduate students in less than fifteen weeks that writing is not to be dreaded, but to be embraced as an opportunity to live more alertly, more fully? In what ways might writing teachers help students loosen their hold on the "knowing-how's," and reach, instead, for the "knowing that's"—that writing might be a vehicle for navigating and orienting oneself in the world? What does this pedagogy of in-between allow? Does it nurture safe places for students' un-concealment to unfold? What is it to en-courage discouraged undergraduate students as they leap into the gap of not-knowing what comes next in their writing? How do we entice students to celebrate un-certainty, to welcome troubling questions? What will support them to "take in" *in-spiration*? Through sharing and conversation, how

do we help students discover community in the sense of *coming-together?* What is required of us as writing teachers to attend to our students' stories? At last, in what way might a teacher of writing invoke *technē* to bring forth what is already present so that a student is fully present on her own page?

If Only They Knew

As a writer and a teacher of writing, I have wrestled for years with a troubling sense of passing for someone I am not. These recurrent doubts about my identity have concealed an in-between place of anxiety. Some years ago, I coined a phrase for this mind-set: the Phake-Phraud-Foney Syndrome. It goes like this: if I were a "real writer," I would have been widely published by now. When my students ask me where I have published, I mention the literary magazines, *The Baltimore Sun,* and myriad newsletter articles. I wonder if two Masters theses count? If I were a "real" teacher, my students would unanimously love me. I stand in front of my class and tell them that I have been teaching since my late 20's. I hope that I sound convincing, because meanwhile in my head I am already discounting the half year as a third grade teacher, the seven years teaching nutrition in a public clinic, the substitute teaching, the three years of adjunct teaching at Beltway U, and the decade at Towson University as an adjunct professor. Surely, none of those really mean that I am a "real teacher." If … if … if. I harbor a deep sense of having fooled the world. *If only they really knew.*

In this exploration of the lived experience of writing teachers, I am drawn to the tension that self-doubt engenders. I wonder whether—and to what extent—my writing teacher colleagues have succumbed to the P.P.F. Syndrome. If they have

escaped it, and the tyranny of an amorphous "they" sitting in judgment, what process did they undergo? To what extent is it possible to reach a state of "mastery" in one's teaching, and yet immerse oneself in the "incompleteness" of lifework?

Is it possible to dwell in-between with one's students, giving them what they need to grow as writers and as persons? Might we—as teachers of writing—only pretend to be learners with them? When we model our writing process, are we self-consciously congratulating ourselves on practicing the pedagogically correct practice? Maxine Greene (in Ayers & Miller, 1998, p. 5) exhorts educators to "do philosophy;" what might "doing" a pedagogy of in-between look like for teachers of writing?

> In order to be able to ask, one must want to know, and that means knowing that one does not know. In the cosmic confusion between question and answer, knowledge and ignorance that Plato describes, there is a profound recognition of the *priority of the question* in all knowledge and discourse that really reveals something of the object. (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 363)

I fully acknowledge the "priority of the question," and will now tour the lived experience of my own in-betweens, for it has been my experience of living in-between that brings me to a pedagogy of in-between in the teaching of writing.

My In-Betweens: Sea Lion Girl—A Myth

> In a sunny land near the sea there grew a maiden half-human, half-sea lion. Her mother was human, her father sea lion. They called her Sea Lion Girl with hair the blue-black of a sea lion's flank as he dives through green breakers. Like him, Sea Lion Girl was all speed and curiosity and bravado. Still, she feared the Great White known to come up from the dark cold waters below. Despite her dread, Sea Lion Girl continued on her journey.
>
> From Alaska to Guatemala, up one side of the continent and down the other, Sea Lion Girl traveled for many years. She wandered with no aim but movement, out of the Great White's reach. All the while, she craved a safe niche where she might forever dwell. Straddling two species, she belonged to neither one. Sometimes, Sea Lion Girl felt lonely in her uniqueness. Then, she wished she could commune with someone older and wiser who might give her guidance. But who was there? Her father had disappeared into the waves

long before and her human mother, while loving, inhabited a place of work and worry. Sea Lion Girl often placed her small brown hand on her mother's furrowed brow—it had not been easy for her mother to raise a sea lion girl by herself—and tried to smooth away those wrinkles. Their spirits were much alike, Sea Lion Girl and mother. Traveling far and wide, Sea Lion Girl kept touch with her mother through an exchange of poems and letters. In that way, they created a world of anchored words. In the love between them were down wellings and currents that sometimes pulled them apart. Still, they returned time and again to written words. They found comfort in the safe places of words, like the floating kelp beds that nourish fish and crabs.

In all her travels, Sea Lion Girl searched for someone like the sea lion father. She vaguely recalled her father's salty, smooth pelt with its scent of seaweed. She had long heard stories about his bravery and charm, of his kingship among others of his kind. Yet all those memories dimmed with the years, and she craved for a closer connection. From time to time she thought she glimpsed her father in another, felt her father's embrace in the arms of someone else. Yet over and over that proved to be illusion, one unable to weather mighty storms. Because she always had to look out for herself, it was hard for Sea Lion Girl to rely on another, to trust another. Her creature shyness kept her at a distance from those who claimed to love her. Their claims exacted a price.

Finally, when she was no longer young, she claimed a human man as hers, and together they made family: a fair girl child, a dark man-child – like cream and cocoa, another merging. For a time there was bliss, but who would have known about the undertow in her human man's heart? When they parted, Sea Lion Girl felt she would drown. It was the children who kept her afloat and swimming, at first unsurely, but then with more confidence.

Years passed, the children grew, and still Sea Lion Girl searched. She kept writing, for writing brought her home: even if final answers remained out of reach, yet the writing journey itself brought healing and peace to her creature soul. At last, one day and living thousands of miles away, she wrote to her aged mother about writing as a working through of one's life. On a whim, Sea Lion Girl placed the letter in a bottle and set it adrift upon the sea. Alone on the beach, she watched the bottle disappear behind a wave. All at once, a sleek dark form—a sea lion king—leapt out of the water, seizing the bottle in its mouth. Sea Lion Girl's heart ached in its turning. The regal sea lion faced her, and nodded. Then, he dove back into the ocean, carrying her message to her mother on a faraway shore. (De La Ysla, 2002b)

In-between names a thread woven throughout my life ever since I was a child.

For much of this time I had not named those in-betweens, although I lived them daily.

In "Sea Lion Girl," I am a creature navigating two realms, sea and land. Sea Lion Girl, in-between two species, at last finds home by drawing strength from both father *and* mother. I am Filipina from my father, and Russian Jewish from my mother. I am Filipina *and* Jewish, not a hyphenated person. Like Sea Lion Girl, my own father (at first due to divorce, and then due to his death) was present to me as legend, an invisible supportive force. My mother was always there, but with a forehead furrowed with worry lines. The myth recalls my own wanderings over the years. Like the sea lion, I crave freedom and adventure. Yet—just as Sea Lion Girl keeps a look out for the Great White—I, too, am a wary creature, at once attracted—and alert—to the dangers of the open sea.

I live the in-between of biraciality. I live in the multiplicities of what "and" implies. Even as a child, I resisted attempts of others to define me as either/or. When around my father's friends, people said, "You look more Filipina than white." When around my mother's family and friends, "You look a lot like your mother!" Although I would smile, I was not pleased: apparently I gained approval by being the race of whomever I was around. Another bi-racial woman writes: "Who I'm with so often determines who others decide I am and sometimes I become that person" (Chang Hall, 1996, p. 246). Perhaps polite acquiescence to someone else's idea of who I was gave rise to the identities that I occasionally invented. Once as a freshman in college and attending a party given by people I didn't know, someone asked me: "Excuse me, but *what are you*?" While a hundred impolite responses ran through my head, the possibility of creating a new persona suddenly occurred to me: "My name is Mai Ming," I replied. And as if that weren't enough, should the interrogator ask

about my parents: "I'm an orphan." Strangely, I sometimes *felt* like an orphan who did not belong to my Caucasian mother and Caucasian stepfather with whom I lived. Many times when I went out in public places with them, strangers would stare at us. I imagined them wondering: "Where did they get that child?" During the summers when I stayed with my Filipino father, I was conscious of his complexion, several shades darker than my own skin. I concur with Chang Hall, who is half-Hawaiian and half Chinese, "I am a constant question" (Chang Hall, 1996, p. 243).

Over the years, it became apparent to me that I did not have to choose one identity over the other. I was clearly a person who straddled two cultures, taking my talents, values and genes from both my Asian father and my Russian Jewish mother. My parents' union had created two daughters who defied either/or, but were instead a dizzying multiplicity of what in-between allows, of what the conjunction "and" invites:

> AND is neither one thing or the other, it is always in-between, between two things; it's the borderline, there's always a border, a line of flight or flow, only we don't see it, because it (is) the least perceptible of all things … The strong people aren't the ones on one side or the other, power lies on the border. (Deleuze & Parnet, as cited in Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. 4)

My sister and I consider ourselves resilient people who have thrived from living in the tensions of in-between ("power lies on the border"). In-between is a fully present place where questions abound, where the power and possibility of becoming resist categorization ("there's always a … line of flight or flow, only we don't see it"). Poet A.A. Milne describes being in-between in another way:

> Halfway Down
>
> Halfway down the stairs
> Is a stair

Where I sit.

There isn't any
Other stair

Quite like
It.

I'm not at the bottom,
I'm not at the top;
So this is the stair
Where I always
Stop.

Halfway up the stairs
Isn't up,
And isn't down.
It isn't in the nursery,
It isn't in the town.
And all sorts of funny thoughts

Run round my head:
"It isn't really
Anywhere!
It's somewhere else
Instead!" (Milne, 1924/1988, p. 81)

As a child and later as a young woman, I experienced ambivalence about being biracial ("It isn't really/Anywhere!"). However, in adulthood, I perceive the advantages in what *not* fitting into a category (the *ands* of bi-raciality?) make possible: "It's somewhere else/Instead!" I embrace my enigmatic visage. It might be said that I perch on that neither-here-nor-there "halfway" stair. Still, such a vista is *fully* problematic, as Becky Thompson (1996) writes: "For me, this place of existence is tremendously exciting, invigorating, and life-affirming. It can also be complicated and lonely" (p. 105). Living in-between two cultures caused me to question the assumptions of both. Eventually with time, my face proved to be a passport to diverse persons and exotic places. Situated midway ("There isn't any/Other stair/Quite

like/It"), "All sorts of funny thoughts/Run round my head …" I enjoy the novelty of being one among the few Filipino Jewish persons in this country. As somebody I recently met remarked: "You are Flewish." Thus, I am able to add yet another possibility to my ethnic inventory.

Residing in the "Ands"

In-between places have less to do with "getting somewhere" and everything to do with being wherever one finds oneself. The lived experience of my own in-betweens challenges me to reside in the "ands" rather than in the dichotomous either/ ors. I am Filipina *and* Jewish. I am unmarried *and* the life partner to one man for over a decade. I am an adoptive *and* a non-custodial mother of two teenagers. I am a teacher of writing *and* a writer. I am middle-aged *and* a relatively new scuba diver. "Ands" open up "lines of flight" *and* at the same time elude sure answers. How much easier to know "how!" Please, someone … *show me how.*

Living in-between is an edgy place, where one is obliged to be both thin-skinned *and* tough. Skin, of whatever color, is less barrier than a way in—and out. What is it to live porously, *from the pores out,* meeting what is not yet with courage? If in-between perches perplex, yet might they not also open up possibility? Teacher scholar Maxine Greene "presents lived experience as the continual forming and re-forming 'of a primordial landscape in which we are present to ourselves'" (Jacobs, 1998, p. 182). Viewed this way, not-yet ("continual forming and re-forming") is at the essence of the lived experience of teachers of writers who embrace in-between as a pedagogy.

What are the pedagogical implications of *forever becoming* for teachers of writing? What might in-between bring forth in one's writing students? What is it like to live "a constant question?" In what ways does the question belong to the realm of a writing teacher's pedagogy? For teachers of writing, a student's multiple drafts are "not yet," but moving towards fuller expression. What is required of the writing teacher? Is she the one who articulates standards and un-loosens bindings to set students free to write? What pedagogy sustains students in expectancy? In-between is a fluid space, one that I named in new ways when I learned how to scuba dive several years ago. It was then that I began to understand the pedagogical implications of in-between for teachers of writing.

Buoyancy

I took up scuba diving in middle age. My sea lion heart must have remembered the joy of deep green waves into which I dove as a little girl growing up near the ocean. Still, it wasn't until my late 40's that I learned to dive. When I first began lessons, I felt at a disadvantage. My partner and I were a good 20 years older than the other students in the course. Not only that, but putting on my bathing suit in the locker room I was acutely aware of the contrast between my round, untoned body and that of the 22 year old women around me. In addition, part of the skills test was swimming the length of the pool seven times. No one else seemed to have as much trouble as I did.

In time, I had to learn how to assemble and operate complicated gears and gauges. I thought how much easier it would have been to let my partner Uri take over, but our instructors drummed into our heads the importance of knowing your own dive

gear. Finally, after several weeks of class and in-pool sessions we qualified for temporary certification cards. Now we were eligible to try five open-water dives that would prove our skills and permit us to carry a real “C card." We chose to complete our check out dives in Grand Cayman rather than in the freezing cold quarry in Pennsylvania where our classmates were going.

Because of the early and necessary emphasis on technique, together with the common sense knowledge that “practice makes perfect,” I was under the impression that hard work would result in my becoming a proficient diver. After all, in work and school areas of my life, pushing had led to certain successes. However, in Grand Cayman I discovered that diving was more complicated than mastering a series of skills. What proved elusive was my buoyancy. And it is by her “mastery” of buoyancy that a diver is judged by other divers. Neutral or perfect buoyancy is a physical state of “weightlessness” wherein the diver is able to maintain a nearly motionless place in the water column. She is literally hanging out in the in-between. Over the next several months on diving trips, I tried as hard as I could to improve my buoyancy. Yet the harder I tried, the more elusive it proved. What was I doing wrong? I ran through the checklist of skills: my buoyancy vest seemed to be properly deflated, the lead on my weight belt was about right for my body weight. “How” could I get it?

Eventually, a dive master on one of our trips demonstrated perfect buoyancy by hovering absolutely motionless in the water column, apparently without effort. I was astonished and yet frustrated at the same time. On the boat, he talked about relaxation and breathing which—he assured us—would come in time as we learned to

let our bodies do what came naturally. Buoyancy, then, was less a "how" than a state of being, one I could not "get" so much as "be." Lori, a scuba diver whom I met on one of our dive trips, gives voice to that realization:

> ... it definitely did take a while to get to the point where you're totally comfortable with your buoyancy ... it was probably closer to 50 dives ... I can remember thinking *Oh! This is what they're talking about!* This sense, this sensation is what they're talking about. (Lori, personal communication, 2001)

To arrive at the sensation to which Lori refers, one must be patient, trustful and *present*. Pushing is not the way. Even before "this is what they're talking about" occurs, a diver grapples with another apparent contradiction: to be able to hover weightlessly, she has to strap on enough lead weight to drop below the surface of the water, yet not *so* much weight that she sinks too rapidly. For perfect buoyancy to occur, the diver literally "hangs" in the water, her bodily perfectly balanced between sinking and staying afloat. Relaxation and breath help unlock the mystery of negotiating the tension between heaviness and buoyancy.

Being with students' raw, even tender, drafts means being with them as they churn through text, much as I used to churn with arms and legs through the water as a novice diver, learning how to "get to" that place of perfect buoyancy. If the work of writers is to go inward, as Progoff (1997) has suggested, is writing one's truth a journey home? Reconnected with home, might the writer rediscover emotional buoyancy? Perhaps he might also be afraid to go too deeply—who knows where the words might lead? As a teacher of writing, I am called to a pedagogy that prepares students for those unexpected *down wellings*, which for divers is a strong, vertical current that sucks the scuba diver down to dangerous depths. To extricate oneself from such an event, one must remember the diver's cardinal rule to avoid panic: Stop.

Breathe. Think. So rather than reacting blindly, the diver must stop whatever she is doing, continue to breathe, and then think about (assess) the situation. In this case, she would drop her weight belt, inflate her buoyancy vest, and kick at a right angle out of the current (and I would add, pray with all her might).

Caught in a down welling a diver could be on her own, separated from her diving buddy for any number of reasons. So in the end, she must be self-sufficient. Stop, breathe, think—this is a mantra that might save her life. Whether or not she remembers, whether or not the chant is threaded throughout her muscles depends on many things. Chief among them is her confidence from having mastered difficult situations in the past. She would then feel able to emerge from this one, as well. In a similar way, does not a caring teacher of writing bolster up the student's confidence, so that when the young writer is swimming at depth, he is "equipped" to deal with the situation? As a writer and a teacher of writing, I believe that the very act of writing is its own in-between, a way to navigate the cloudy waters of one's journey. But just as one would not strike out without her dive gear, so would it be risky to push a student of writing into waters over her head.

Hovering in Anxiety

In-between as a pedagogy for writing teachers encourages students to dwell in the anxiety of poor drafts. Van Manen writes:

> Sometimes the words just do not seem to come … Indeed, at times it feels as if one is writing in the dark ... Both (writer in the human sciences and literary author) know the terror of the blank page that refuses to be written; both experience the strange resistance of language; both feel at times that writing brings them to the edge of existence. (2002a, p. i)

It is one thing to tell writers to write their way through those terrifying blank pages, and another thing to provide them with the support they need to do so. As poet Denise Levertov (1982) suggests, encouraging the writer to catch her fleeting thoughts and allow them to sit awkwardly on the page might be the way to guide her through dark places:

> Writing in the Dark
>
> It's not difficult.
> Anyway, it's necessary.
>
> Wait till morning, and you'll forget.
> And who knows if morning will come.
>
> Fumble for the light, and you'll be
> stark awake, but the vision
> will be fading, slipping
> out of reach.
>
> You must have paper at hand,
> a felt-tip pen -- ballpoints don't always flow,
> pencil points tend to break. There's nothing
> shameful in that much prudence: those are your tools.
>
> Never mind about crossing your t's, dotting your i's --
> but take care not to cover
> one word with the next. Practice will reveal
> how one hand instinctively comes to the aid of the other
> to keep each line
> clear of the next.
>
> Keep writing in the dark:
> a record of the night, or
> words that pulled you from depths of unknowing,
> words that flew through your mind, strange birds
> crying their urgency with human voices,
>
> or opened
> as flowers of a tree that blooms
> only once in a lifetime:
> words that may have the power
> to make the sun rise again. (pp. 260-261)

Levertov trusts bodily wisdom ("how one hand comes to the aid of the other"). Her words remind me of the trust I would soon have as a diver in my own breath, to relax my tense muscles, thereby helping me become perfectly buoyant. Many times I despaired of ever floating without effort.

The bodily lesson learned in diving has resonated in many in-between areas of my life, and seems to name the anxieties that come of being a lifetime resident of the halfway. Heidegger asks, "Must we not hover in this anxiety constantly in order to be able to exist at all?" (1993c, p. 104). If so, what is a praxis that empowers and supports the traveler in suspension? What is required for a teacher of writing to encourage both her students (and herself) to at once *take hold* and *let go*? Might students be guided to view writing itself as a textual space that—even as it shapes and re-shapes itself on the page—also makes possible a means to be present in one's life? Might writers come to embrace in-between as opportunity? When scuba diving, I hover effortlessly—perfectly buoyant—in the water. I experience great centeredness, conscious only of in-and ex-halation. Body and spirit relax as even, deep breathing floods my muscles with oxygen. As teachers of writing, where might we create the openings to invite our students to hover in what writing as in-between makes possible?

Such a pedagogical orientation embraces both anxiety and possibility. I am mindful of how writing students are both fascinated and frightened by the tensions generated in that place. One of Maxine Greene's students writes about her: "Her questions kept me in a constant state of tension, and I now know that it is the tensions in my own classroom that propel me to question, change, and make learning better for

all my students" (Ernst, 1998, p. 36). As Gadamer (1960/2002) says: "The essence of the question is to open up possibilities and keep them open" (p. 299). When working with students, how might I support them to welcome and elongate tensions in their writing? What is it about the nature of the in-between that allows transformation to occur?

Diving Your Limits

A few months ago, my partner and I were discussing our relationship of 14 years—I wanted marriage, he was fine with a continuation of an open-ended partnership. Uri gave me a long look and said: "But you *like* security." I thought about this for a while and realized he was correct. Despite the fact that I have always regarded myself as an adventurous person, inside I am afraid that something will happen to strip me of everything, leaving me helpless and dependent. While our relationship can only be described as unconventional, I have long craved what I regard as the security of marriage. An excerpt from one of my journal entries describes the angst of my longstanding in-between relationship with my partner and an anticipated move to Florida:

> On this issue of … marriage, I am tortured. Why would we wait? Why is commitment so hard for him? I am leaving behind the familiar and comfortable niche here in Maryland; I would feel safer were we married, as if I could rely on his constancy more … surely, living together will not be easier, especially in a new place without the usual supports, yet part of me questions the wisdom of cutting ties unless we are first married … sure, I have my (many) doubts, yet I am willing to enter those waters sooner than him …My head swims … But this analysis is too level-headed. At the core is this sense of sadness, of little girl sadness that for some reason, I'm not good enough. (De La Ysla, 2004b)

The questions make my head swim, yet I am prepared to jump into the legal contract of marriage, and he is not. Two weeks later, I describe the lived experience of too many questions:

> Now I feel overweight, as if I am carrying too much lead (mental, emotional). I am plummeting to the depths, weighed down by doubts. These questions … are questions and doubts the same? Is wondering the same as doubting? No. The wondering is an *awe-filled* place, but the doubting feels *awe-full.* A big difference. What smooths that transition? Might time and breath be the way? Held breath causes a buoyancy impossible to suppress; it is the surface place of superficiality, of being unable to dive at all. If you cannot fully immerse, then you remain on the surface, bobbing like a cork. These reflections and metaphors inform my work, yet do they help my living? More questions! (De La Ysla, 2004b)

"Do they help my living?" Questions reflect the difficult process of becoming:

> I say the in-between is an opportunity, a space for creativity, but it can also be a painful space: a spasmed neck, a canker sore, a constant worry. Will I ever get used to it? What sustains the traveler? What supports the one who journeys through the dark, treacherous places? … That book, *Slowing Down to the Speed of Life* had some wise things to say about living behind and ahead. I know the Zen philosophers offer ways through. Yet less ways "through" as "dwelling in." That's what it is: a full being in the present. The "way." (De La Ysla, 2004a)

Unaddressed, questions accumulate as tensions in my body. My wish to know and control manifests itself by forming a tight knot in my neck. Over the past few years, I suffered from numbness in my right hand caused by muscle spasms in my neck. After several sessions of traditional massage, I consulted a bodywork therapist who specialized in a different technique. When I told her about the hours I'd been spending at the computer, trying hard to organize a certain section of my dissertation, she remarked: "Linda, you're pushing too hard. Try to ease up." And then she suggested: "Perhaps if you give yourself breaks and not focus so much on the

outcome, your writing will flow more easily." Indeed, just as my writing had stopped flowing, so the oxygen had stopped flowing to my spasmed muscles. Giving oneself breaks means taking good care of one's body and ultimately, one's soul:

> Storing
>
> My mother asks me, what are you storing
> in your shoulders, in your neck?
> What am I storing?
> All my strength is in my shoulders.
> I do not trust my feet …
>
> A neck could be supple as a
> Slender fish, as the arms of Hawaiian dancers.
> I could speak with it.
> A neck could offer no resistance …
>
> Shoulders could spread smoothly across.
> My arms could hang from them like
> buckets from a yoke, muscles fanning out
> like palm leaves, opening like moon flowers.
> There could be space, empty space.
> My parts don't need to huddle together.
> We are not newborn ducks. There could be
> open windows, open walls, like
> houses in Haiti. There are no doors.
> There are roofed walks. In large houses
> you cannot tell when you are in
> or out. I want my body that way.
> I want to be unsure.
> I want to admit I
> do not know …
> (Bass, 1977, pp. 96-98)

Like Bass, "I want to be unsure./I want to admit I/do not know." And yet to give up the illusion of knowing what lies ahead is terrifying, akin to the terror that student writers may experience when confronted with the blank page. What enters in when illusions of control evaporate? While I am at once a strong, self-sufficient woman, I am also vulnerable as a newborn duck, seeking the comfort of my partner's

downy chest. Is it possible to have a neck "supple as a/Slender fish," and "muscles fanning out/like palm leaves, opening like moon flowers?" This business of living in the *and*s is complicated. In the Western world, we believe we can control our environment by manipulating persons and things to "do" what we want them to do. We assume that we can "secure" an answer to every question, *if only we try hard enough.* Yet my lived experience of pushing toward a goal rather than living in-between has led me straight to the table of the massage therapist. Pushing on the in-between is a *doing rather than a being*. It disrespects the wisdom of our body when it says: enough is enough.

In scuba diving, we are counseled over and over to "dive our limits." This means that we need to be mindful of our physical and emotional limitations, and avoid scenarios that might endanger our lives. Knowing when to stop, knowing when to back off when our bodies tell us they're tired or cold, is important. Not only comfort is at stake, but sometimes, life itself. In recognition of this fact, one of the highest compliments divers pay one another is to remark that someone is "a safe diver;" this comment underlines the relationship between safety and awareness of personal limits.

However, putting into practice what I know to be true in scuba diving (and which I am somehow able as a diver to accept) has often eluded me in other life spheres. When I reflect on "limitation" in reference to myself, I immediately think about "shortcoming or defect," the word's third dictionary definition (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 1016). Friends and family know me as taking on far more than I can handle, whether that be at a restaurant when I order too large of a

hamburger, or in the multifaceted spheres of work, school, or family. While I pride myself on finishing what I set out to do, I have too often neglected the real limits of energy and time. My disregard of my limitations has cost me a great deal in terms of peace of mind.

Now, as I reconsider "limit" and "limitation," I turn to an etymological tracing. "Limit" derives from the Latin, *limes* (border), and *limen,* meaning threshold. "Limit" is defined as "one of the fixed points between which the possible or permitted … of anything is confined" (OED online). I find this definition to be provocative, in its *between which-ness.* For another related word, "limbo," opens up possibility. "Limbo" is defined as "an intermediate place or state" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 1015). Perhaps in this *between* place, in limbo, a person might virtually stand on the threshold of greater understanding. Might not dwelling awhile in one's limits expand one's frontiers?

> But we also have the opportunity to remember that schools are liminal places. You know that the limen is the top beam of a doorway, a passage that designates movement between one space and another. So the limen, or liminal, experience is experience in the middle, experience that is situated somewhere special, where it can be felt and thought about and played with. (Grumet, 1998, p. 144)

Madeleine Grumet (1998) views between-ness as an open—even fluid—space, one inviting passage through. She celebrates the liminal place as "somewhere special." Schools are liminally situated, places where students and teachers might be together in play. What is the nature of experience in the middle that makes it not only "somewhere special," but perhaps even, *sub-lime?* As teachers of writing, what is needed to transform our limits into sites where sublime-ness might unfold?

Does not acceptance of students' weaknesses—of their limits—call for what van Manen (1991) refers to as pedagogical tact? Is our charge as teachers of writing to emphasize that the "purpose" in our course rests in the often-indefinable process of writing rather than in the "hows" of writing? When the writing proves elusive, student writers may feel the need to push and push on the text. Yet at times it is better to advise the writer to back off and give the draft some time to breathe, to recognize the *limits* of one's heart and mind. And eventually—just as the silence of the underwater world is the medium for discovery—might not the silence of the blank page give buoyancy to student voice?

Diving on the Edge—Marginal Places

"Dig deeper," I write in the margins of my students' papers. "Please show me more …" My responses to their early drafts may feel relentless. They look at the margins of their papers filled with my questions and comments. When we conference, they admit: "When I saw all of your questions, my heart sank. I thought I was a pretty good writer." Their comment worries me. At heart, I always hope to lead students to explore questions; still, I question my practice of writing on their pages. In the past, to avoid altering their text, I tried to make my remarks on post-its, or type up a single page of comments at the end of the paper. Neither of those methods "worked": the post-its fell off the paper even as I returned it to the student; the single page of comments ended up being general in nature. Writing in the margins, writing *in-between* their own lines, gives me a chance to "be" in the text with them, at once enjoying the ride and feeling the bumps. "You have awakened my interest. Please tell me more." In a sense, I am also able to read *between the lines* at

what yet calls to be written. When, as a writing teacher, I cover a page with comments, it means that I am engaged, not disengaged. But do they view my marginal comments as such? While I do my best to help my students understand the pedagogy underlying my practice, the ongoing process of reassuring beginning writers is a work of patience, humor, and care.

In *Stirring the Mud: On Swamps, Bogs, and Human Imagination,* Barbara Hurd (2003) writes about the possibilities inherent in margins and edges:

> Whether bog or swamp, all wetlands have edges, rich strips where two hands clasp. On the edge, vegetation is always more varied, a mix of mature trees and grassland, or bog mat and shrubs, water lilies and spruce saplings … They are visited not only by creatures who normally inhabit one community or the other and occasionally cross over, but also by creatures known as "edge species," who have specifically adapted to spending their lives in this strip between two communities, which winds, wrinkled and bunched, like the imperfect and wavy seam at the waist of a full-skirted dress …Humans don't seem to be this kind of edge species, and mostly we're not comfortable here. This margin is, after all, not the continental margin as we know it on summer beaches …Here there is only a constant and languid saturation. (pp. 4-5)

Admittedly, it is difficult to help one's students embrace a space of not knowing: "Humans don't seem to be this kind of edge species, and mostly we're not comfortable here." Edges feel insecure, tentative, like the soggy earth after a spring rain. Will this terrain support you, or will your shoes sink into the mud? One tentative step after another, you inch along. The going is slow, but deliberate and done in a heightened state of awareness. Might it be that just as students venture into text, they also experience sharpened instinct? In my journal, I explore a heightened bodily awareness that comes from staying present in edge-like places:

> In-between. The other day as I took Gadsby for his morning walk, I felt it. My coping … is to stay focused on the present. It seems that present-ness requires slowing down (just as one moves through muddy ground!). I notice more: the matte sheen of the purple green leaves on the flowering plum, the

> smell of toast on the evening air, the steam bath blanket that envelops me when I step outside on a summer day … This present focus is a coping, yet a shelter, a shelter from over obsession with the future … a way of being in the world. In the present, I am opened to the possibilities … Senses heighten when one stays present. As one of the high school girls in the Student Writers' Workshop said, "My job as a writer is to pay attention." (De La Ysla, 2005b)

Hurd (2003) issues a challenge to teachers and students who hesitate on the edge:

> How much longer until we grant ourselves carte blanche to move beyond the neatly printed page into the margins strewn with skunk cabbage, the twilight world of dozing she-bears, to drift in the liminal space between what is and what could be? (p. 14)

How enticing (yet threatening) might be a "between what is and what could be." For just as "the margins strewn with skunk cabbage" give off a strong, unpleasant odor, so might a novice writer say, "This piece stinks!" Writing in marginal territory evokes subliminal worries born of the fear that one's work is inferior. Teachers of writing need to support students confronting the vulnerable underbelly that truthful writing evokes.

Hurd draws a connection between marginal places and the uncertainty of her students:

> Ecologically rich and diverse, that overlap of bog and forest habitats did not appeal to visitors, who found them "unreadable," having no focus and little coherence. This uneasiness is partly about lack of definition. It reminds me of creative writing students whose first drafts of poems are scribbled messes. "I don't know where this is going; nothing hangs together," they wail, and I urge them to slow down and stay where they're uncomfortable. I tell them "being on edge" is where good writing, especially poetry, is all about and I hope they never get used to it. I want them to move out of the places where they feel safe and secure … I want them to creep to the edge, nervous and uneasy, to sit as long as they can in that margin-between the known and the unknown. (2003, pp. 5-6)

I understand the reluctance to "creep to the edge." Perhaps the following excerpt from a recurrent dream suggests my own lifelong situatedness in-between. This

dream first started coming to me in my early 30's at a time when I was confronted with early decisions about marriage, career, and children. In my dream, I am alone in the hallway of a large, strange house. Before me is a series of doors. Somewhere nearby a clock is ticking loudly. Something tells me that I "must" choose one of the doors. Because there are so many, I do not know what to do. It *feels wrong* to choose when so many possibilities lie before me. I hesitate endlessly, invigorated and full of anxiety. Here is where the dream ends. Never, in all the years that this dream recurred, do I choose one door over the other. I remain "in that margin between the known and the unknown."

There is another dimension to margins and edges. In scuba diving, taking unnecessary risks is called diving on the edge. For example, divers gage the length of their dive by the rate of their consumption, or the amount of air left in their tank. The rule of thumb on air is by thirds: use one third of your air to get to where you're going, one third to return, and get back on board with the remaining third, or at least no less than 500 psi (pounds per square inch) of air in your tank. Diving on the edge would mean allowing your gage to enter the red zone (virtually "empty") while you're still far from the boat. Or, in another scenario, some divers like to take chances and dive deep. In Cozumel, diveboat owners are frequently approached by Western divers who want to dive below the recreational limit of 135 feet. This is a dangerous undertaking, because special mixtures of air are required, and the toxic effects of deep diving can lead to injury or death. Still, year after year, divers who want to experience the thrill of deep diving will pay a boat captain enough money to engage in this risky activity, and year after year, a diver will be lost at sea. Here is an

edge into which prudent divers do not venture. One might say of risk-taking divers that they violate the rules of safety.

In the teaching of writing, is it possible to take students too far? Writing is revelatory. Are there places where we ought not to go with our students? The lived experience of in-between as a pedagogy in the teaching of writing may lead us to question not only the "ecologically rich" imaginative terrain, but also the places where students might get swept away.

Gaping Possibilities in the Deep Blue

Heidegger writes of the "strife," or "rift" between earth and world. The German word for "rift" is *reissen*, which means a gap. *Reissen* also means "writing" (1993f, p. 188). Is not the blank page such a "gap" place—a gaping possibility—a place to spend time, albeit in anxiety (angst), above the abyss? Might taking one's time to write, and re-write, come to be experienced as joy? Gadamer (1960/2002) writes: "In fact the important thing is to recognize temporal distance as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding. It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition" (p. 297). The distance of which Gadamer speaks might also be distance away from, and reflection on, one's early drafts.

On a dive trip near Baja, California, our dive group found itself at Roca Partida, a stark island of lava rock in that group of islands known as the Revillagegido Archipelago. We had come to dive with the hammerhead sharks and majestic manta rays, whose wings can span 20-25 feet. At 75 feet of depth, we hovered off the dark black wall of Roca Partida. Above us, the surf churned violently against the rock, forcing us to stay at a good distance away from the wall, or else risk getting slammed

against the rock. We moved as a group out into that realm of open sea where one is surrounded on all sides by blue, what divers call the Deep Blue. At all times we kept the lava wall in view, because when a diver is hovering out in the Blue, she can easily lose her point of reference. The realization that one is suspended above a seemingly bottomless ocean trench does little to reassure nervous divers. Dive masters suggest that divers be wary of the Deep Blue, because disorientation can quickly descend. In fact, if a vertical current crosses your path, you might be unable to tell whether you are going up or down, unless you watch the direction of your bubbles. Divers can be sucked down into the abyss without even knowing it. Similarly, writing students who do not know which direction to take may wonder if the void will claim them. What might teachers of writing do to help students stay oriented? What reference points give comfort to those hanging out in hesitation in the Deep Blue?

My undergraduate writing students are frequently anxious over the writing of their first papers. Lack of certainty about the quality of their writing, together with worry over my expectations, creates tension. It is common to hear them say, "I'm stressing out over this essay!" In their journals, they describe previous writing classes where their best was never good enough. What guarantees do they have that this teacher of writing will be different? However, with a few weeks, students begin to trust that they are not going to fall into a bottomless hole. Eventually, they grow willing to inch their way out into the Blue to hang out in that (temporarily) in-between place where meaning unfolds. While stress-full, in-between is where the teacher, too, is present just as the dive master remains with his divers in order to guide and reassure them. Both writing teacher and dive master coach their students

through situations where silence, in one, and paralysis in the other, might occur. Heidegger describes the person's response to the unknown: "We 'hover' in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole … Anxiety robs us of speech" (1993c, p. 101). It is easy to imagine students "slipping away" without the care and attention of good teachers.

Drifting Off

When I invite writing students to "wander" in their early drafts, I am asking them to attend—not only to what is on the page—but to what is yet to reveal itself. For many of them, wandering on the page is an unfamiliar, and anxiety-provoking, experience. "See where this goes," I suggest. "Try to write your way through." When we ask students to write their way through, we are asking them to put their thoughts together, building on what they already have. Interestingly, the word, "build," can be traced to the Germanic for "dwell" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 2033). Thus, when students build on, they might be said to *dwell* on and in the writing process. Casey (1993) offers up this extended etymology of "dwell:"

> The Old Norse *dvelja* means linger, delay, tarry, and the Old English *dwalde,* go astray, err, wander . . . One may *dwalde* in that kind of world, drift with it, follow its lead (and not just one's own lead, as occurs in the concerted activity of the study). Dwelling is accomplished not by residing but by wandering. (1993, p. 114)

As the etymological tracings suggest, *dwalde* means that one would stray, one would "drift with it." However, drifting is antithetical to my students' experience of school. Instead, they are expected to set goals, take the required courses, and graduate as soon as possible so that they might enter the work force—in short, they must follow the curriculum. Writing is yet another task (to be gotten through), and the final product is

the coherent and grammatically correct paper. Much as factory workers produce machine parts, students "do" papers that they hope will earn them an A. There is scant room for error (let alone drifting) in such a composition. The piece of writing *produced* may result in genuine satisfaction, as much for the fact that the assignment is *done* as for what the student has learned in the process. For although the writer has indeed "reached" a destination, it is frequently a destination not of her own choosing, but that of the instructor. Such papers turned in on deadline may already be "dead," robbed of the writer's voice. Pinar (1976) offers up a vastly different notion of curriculum:

> So curriculum reconceptualized is *currere*; it is not the course to be run, or the artifacts employed in the running of the course; it is the running of the course. The course most broadly is our lives, in schools and out, and the running, is our experience of our lives. (p. 18)

The sad reality is that writers miss the many enticing swim-throughs that beckon to the wandering pen. I am reminded of one of my favorite activities in scuba diving, swimming through those tunnel-like openings in the coral, called swim-throughs. Swim-throughs can be narrow or wide, pitch black or shot full of light from openings at the top. What swim-throughs hold in common is the element of surprise. Swimming through this enclosed space, divers never know what they will encounter: a glittering wall of tiny silver fish, a piece of coral shaped like a crucifix, a shy mammoth grouper lurking under a ledge. But to enjoy these sights, one must be willing to plunge ahead through openings that may at first appear to be dark.

When I ask students to list their writing strengths and weaknesses, many of them mention "I sometimes get off track," or "I have a tendency to ramble." My guess is that a previous writing instructor discouraged them from exploring

imaginative openings, preferring instead tightly organized prose, perhaps even a five-paragraph theme. By contrast, I accept early drafts that wander around on the page. Such rambling signifies meaning in the making. Swim-throughs—as circuitous or shadowed as they may first appear—delight the writer with vistas he otherwise might never have had had he stuck to the mainstream. Opportunities for discovery proliferate in pass-through places. As a writer and a teacher of writing, I believe that when students are allowed to get off the track, they eventually get closer to saying what matters to them. They *come home* to their own truth. Writer Georgia Heard (1995) has a wonderful way of putting this:

> In Spanish, *querencia* describes a place where one feels safe, a place where one feels at home. It comes from the verb *querer*, which means to desire, to want … Recently, I was talking to my friend Don, telling him about *querencia*. He said, "Yes, *querer* … it means the wanting place." He helped me realize that for writers, that burning urge to write is our *querencia*. In order to feel at home we have to be writing … (p. 5)

"A wanting place" implies movement, yearning—to dwell in a place is to wander through it, being in that place as a dynamic, breathing organism. When students embrace the meanderings of thinking on the page, *they breathe life* into their own texts. Of course, wandering takes time, time which they say they have none of. However, the many revisions they must write makes them slow down and linger on the page. The pedagogical orientation that teachers of writing might support is one that Casey calls wandering "off the street …" (1993, p. 114). Off the street, or through swim-throughs, is where the unexpected happens. "I didn't know I could write this well," they say. What does it mean to be at-home in one's wandering? Casey writes:

> Between the extremes of exploration and inhabitation lies an entire middle realm, for the most part neglected in previous investigations of built place, that calls for our concerted attention … We wander, but we wander in the vicinity of built places we know or are coming to know. Not discovery but better acquaintance is our aim. (p. 121)

Might not teachers of writing celebrate that dynamic middle realm, that in-between, for what it offers? Guiding students along the swim-throughs, writing teachers enable the "exploration and inhabitation" of lived experience. And from time to time, the silver of truth shimmers before students as they pass through the pages of their lives.

Etymology reveals the nature of what it is "to be." The intransitive form of "be" means "to exist in actuality; have life or reality" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 155). "Be" can be traced to its Old English root, *bheu,* "to be, exist, or grow." *Bheu* derives from *byldan,* "to build," which in turn comes from the Germanic, *buthla-*, meaning "dwelling" (American Heritage Dictionary, p. 2033). Gadamer (1960/2002,) also refers to *Bildung* (the *concept of self-formation, education, or cultivation*) as a vitally important concept in eighteenth century humanism (p. 9). He writes, "The result of Bildung is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of an inner process of formation and cultivation, and therefore constantly remains in a state of continual Bildung" (p. 11). To "be" is to dwell "in a state of continual Bildung," and to wander in Casey's "middle realm." The *be* of in-*be*-tween offers a site for *be*-coming.

When I ask students to write their "true stories," they feel awkward about the intimacy of such an assignment. Un-used to the shape and sound of their own voices on the page, students have forgotten many details. I gently press them, assuring them that writing and re-writing calls forth the past. Casey (1993) discusses the

embodiment of memory. "If the lived body is (in Bergson's phrase) a 'place of passage,' then it is itself a creature of the between …" (p. 128). Indeed, writing freely causes neurons to spark in the right hemisphere of the brain; in fact, "the right brain plays a critical role in the initial stages of doing anything not already clearly laid out" (Rico, 1983, p. 72). Between brain and hand there is a passage where words take shape. Often, student writers, motivated by a topic of their own choosing, may remark: "It was easy; it just flowed!" What pedagogy makes possible such flowing-ness? Might writing teachers help students become *composed?*

> Part of becoming intimately acquainted with a particular place is sensing it as with me at all times, not only physically in the manner of something present-at-hand or instrumentally like a ready-to-hand entity but as something I remember stays with me over time and in different places. In memory as in architecture, the things I am with help to constitute an ongoing "aura," an enveloping atmosphere, which surrounds me. The things of memory remain with me, within me. (Casey, 1993, p. 129)

As a writer and a teacher of writing, I am a traveler of the between whose embodied memory may unfold on the page and in the classroom as text. And to the extent that I wander there in those middle realms, I rediscover home and those places, as Heard (1995, p. 10) says, where writing hides.

When students ask me "how" I generate early drafts, I speak to the process: "I write my way through; I write into the darkness." Van Manen (2002a) describes a similar experience: "Sometimes the words just do not seem to come … Sometimes the writer simply does not know where to turn, what to do next. Indeed, at times it feels as if one is writing in the dark" (p. i). As a writer, I drop into the page with mixed feelings of excitement and apprehension, akin to my sensations when diving at night. In both situations, I am uncertain about what will come next. Although I have

had a lot of practice both writing and diving, doubts lurk in the back of my mind. Night dives are fraught with the unexpected. What if the water is unexpectedly cold? What if there are strong currents? What if I my flashlight fails and I get separated from the group? What if a shark ignores the statistics about the unlikelihood of attacks on divers, and decides to bite off my leg? Disorientation is more common when diving at night. Describing the writing experiences of participants in an phenomenological inquiry group, van Manen (2002b) says: "The writing remains painful, difficult, disorienting … the words just would not come; it was like trying to find their way through darkness; a strange solitary experience, like writing in the dark" (p. 2). As teachers of writing, what do we need to do to make our students' writing experiences feel less lonely? How might we shore up the courage of those who fear dark places?

At the same moment that apprehension seizes me, I am drawn to the blank page with its potential for meaning, and to the classroom in all its complexity. Describing Heidegger's thinking in "The Origin of the Work of Art," Krell (1993) writes:

> In a sense all artwork and all thinking are for him participations in the creative strife of world and earth: they reveal beings and let them come to radiant appearance, but only by cultivating and safeguarding their provenance, allowing all things the darkness they require and their proper growing time. (p. 142)

Within the confines of 75 minutes twice a week over a span of 15 weeks, it is often difficult for the teacher of writing to create conditions where fledgling drafts receive "the darkness they require and their proper growing time." Ironically, from the beginning of the semester, I am asking my students to embrace a contradiction:

spend time on essays through multiple revisions, but turn those same essays in by a specified date. Still, I encourage my students to dwell in the uncertainty of early drafts. With revision and care, "it" will emerge, I tell them. And what is the "it" of which I speak? Certainly meaning, meaning that springs from truth-telling. One of the books my students read and study is *True Stories: Guides for Writing from Your Life*, by Rebecca Rule and Susan Wheeler (2000). These authors say:

> When you write about your life and the lives around you … you will discover insights. As these insights accumulate, you may change your opinions, ideas, and attitudes. Writing is a lens for seeing yourself and the world, a vehicle for re-seeing and reevaluating. It can change your life. It can become a way of life…. (p. 8)

And in a later section entitled "Finding the Courage to Tell the Truth," they counsel:

> When you write about a subject that's close to your heart, when you reveal secrets, your readers will not think, "What a mean-spirited, stupid, cowardly person." Instead, they will recognize themselves, their emotions, temptations, unwise acts. They will be grateful for your honesty and impressed by your courage. By writing the truth, you will have shed light on their lives, expanded their understanding of the human condition. (p. 217)

Truth-telling illuminates the darkness; it builds community among a group of writers. "Truth means the essence of the true. We think of this essence in recollecting the Greek word *aletheia*, the unconcealment of beings …" (Heidegger, 1993f, p. 176).

When students share their "true story" essays with one another, they confess a fear of exposure. To share one's truth might make one vulnerable to another person. Only in an atmosphere of trust and care is it possible to lift the veil on the person one is, and is becoming. In my classroom, I strive to create a safe atmosphere where the writing student is en-couraged to be truthfully present. When our writing *unconceals* the persons we are, a feeling of reverence pervades the group—silence draws us

closer one to the other. As Rule and Wheeler say, (students) "recognize themselves …" I would add that students recognize themselves in each other.

What is the lived experience of teachers of writing as they develop the pedagogy of "in-between?" In peeling back the layers of my search, I lean on phenomenological research methodology in order to arrive at a deeper core of understanding, as I pursue my research question: **What is the lived experience of teachers of writing as they develop a pedagogy of "in-between?"**

Gearing Up: Human Science Methodology

We stand in the world in a pedagogic way. (van Manen, 2003, p. 1)

Van Manen (2003) writes: "Human science … studies 'persons,' or beings that have 'consciousness'and that 'act purposefully' in and on the world by creating objects of 'meaning' that are 'expressions' of how human beings exist in the world" (2003, pp. 3-4). As a methodological approach, human science has as its valued end the deeper understanding of the meaning of lived experience (phenomena) for the persons involved. In contrast to natural scientific researchers who concern themselves with detached observation, experimentation, and quantitative analysis, human science researchers pursue a methodology that "involves description, interpretation, and self-reflective or critical analysis" (van Manen, 2003, p. 4). What "drives" human science research inquiry is pedagogical concern for students, and a desire to "increase our thoughtfulness and practical resourcefulness or tact" (van Manen, 2003, p. 4).

Phenomenology seeks to understand the way in which persons orient to their life worlds. Whereas scientific inquiry has focused on categorizing and explaining

phenomena and behavior, phenomenological inquiry turns to the understanding of the lifeworld. Writing and interpretive reflection (hermeneutics) lie at the heart of a phenomenological research methodology; in fact, van Manen (2003) views research and writing to be "practically inseparable pedagogical activities" (p. 4). Since our interest lies in lived experience, our phenomenological reflection is always *retrospective* in nature, not *introspective* (van Manen, 2003, p. 10).

To do research as a phenomenologist is to question our experience in the world, to "become more fully part of it, or better, to *become* the world" (van Manen, 2003, p. 5). We engage in the act of research by posing questions that spring from our wish to understand the essence of that to which we turn. Our wish to understand is not, as Gadamer (1960/2002) reminds us, "just one of the various possible behaviors" in which we engage as human beings, but is our *way of being* in the world *as* human beings (p. xxx). Our research lays open questions that will contribute to the well-being of persons, in and under, our care. Arminino and Hultgren (2002) emphasize: "What we know about the goodness of research does not come from an authoritative objective truth waiting to be discovered, but rather from an understanding we gain when engaging in our work"(p. 447). In our research, we must also set aside our pre-understandings and prejudices about the phenomenon. We come to the work with unique landscapes as persons and researchers; in order to apprehend the essence of the phenomenon under investigation, we suspend, or "bracket," our beliefs.

In my pursuit of the lived experience of teachers of writing who develop a pedagogy of in-between, I am guided by van Manen's (2003, pp. 30-31) hermeneutic phenomenological research activities:

1) Turning to the phenomenon. In this chapter, I have described the way in which in-betweens have permeated my life, and the tensions and possibilities attendant to that life experience. Furthermore, I have spoken about being both a teacher and a teacher of writing. My scuba diving experience of being perfectly buoyant underwater expands my pedagogic awareness of what in-between might allow for teachers of writing.

2) Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it. In Chapter Two, I open up the phenomenon of in-between in the teaching of writing through a number of sources: scuba diving, myth, poetry, personal journals, as well as research literature on the teaching of writing. I also rely on informal conversations with other writer-teachers.

3) Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon. To engage in thematic reflection and grasp the significance of the phenomenon, I have to set aside my common sense understandings of the teaching of writing. I begin to do that in Chapter Two as I begin to uncover themes that open up my phenomenon. In Chapter Four, my conversants will offer the text for themes that thread throughout their life worlds. Those themes will bring to my awareness the nature and the pedagogic implications of their lived experience as teachers of writing.

4) Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. Since, in phenomenological research, the act of writing and research go hand in hand, I will

engage in textual reflection throughout this study as I have begun in these initial chapters. My experiences as a writer and a teacher of writing locate me in the in-between that is meaning in the making.

5) Maintaining a strong and oriented relation. In Chapter Three, I examine my methodology and the phenomenological underpinnings of my study. As a researcher in the human sciences who cares deeply about the teaching of writing, I will continue to ask hard questions, unwilling to "settle for superficialities and falsities" (van Manen, 2003, p. 33). Being strongly oriented to my phenomenon, I must remain mindful of my *conversants'* experience at all times.

6) Balancing the research context by considering parts and wholes. My final chapters will address what I have learned through the study, as well as the pedagogic implications for the teaching of writing. I hope to achieve insight in the sense that (Gadamer, 1960/2002) describes it:

> Insight is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive. Thus insight always involves an element of self-knowledge and constitutes a necessary side of what we called experience in the proper sense. Insight is something we come to. (p. 356)

CHAPTER TWO:

MAKING THE IN-BETWEEN VISIBLE AS A PEDAGOGY IN THE TEACHING OF WRITING

Getting Buoyant

When I first plunged into phenomenology to unravel the lived experience of writing teachers who embrace a pedagogy of in-between, I connected with the metaphor of perfect buoyancy, the state that scuba divers are in when they hang suspended in the water column, seemingly without effort. My writing of a phenomenological study of scuba diving supported an intuitive feeling that—in diving as in writing and as in the teaching of writing— a number of resonant themes emerge. For example, as a scuba diving phenomenologist, I marveled at the way in which "getting perfectly buoyant" imparted to me a profound sense of peace coupled with excitement: peace for the seamlessness of blending with the ocean surge, and excitement for the startling insight that this unique (and previously coveted) feeling of flight had "just happened," apparently independent of my past strivings to get there. I trusted my perception that a natural affinity exists between the *in-between* that is perfect buoyancy, the *in-between* that writing itself allows, and the pedagogical *in-between* that teachers of writing who are also writers encourage in their classrooms.

Navigation

> nav.i.gate (nav i-gat) v.-*tr*. 1. To plan, record, and control the course and position of (a ship or aircraft). 2. To follow a planned course of action on, across, or through: *to navigate a stream*. –*intr*. 3a. To make one's way… (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 1173)

The word "navigate" can be traced to the Latin, *nav,* or *navis,* meaning "ship," and the Latin *agere*, signifying "to do, act, drive, or conduct." It might be said that

the writing instructor is the *navigator,* the person who steers the ship that is the writing classroom, and the students are the *crew* signed on for 15 weeks. As the person at the helm, the writing instructor literally "charts the course" for students by providing them with a syllabus that outlines in detail the sequence of reading and writing assignments. This document is one to which the instructor has given considerable thought; it explicitly lays out a course rationale and overview, expectations, due dates, and criteria for grading. In the best Tylerian tradition, some instructors even include learning outcomes that they expect each student to reach. Other instructors speak of valued ends. However, for a teacher of writing who embraces in-between as a pedagogy, the syllabus is a map from which one might deviate, not a tablet etched in stone.

When students receive the course syllabus on the first day of class, they understand that it is their responsibility to "follow … on, across, or through" this "map" until the end of the term. At the same time, writing teachers who are willing to engage in conversation with students about their movement over the landscape of the syllabus recognize the uniqueness of each student. Conversely, if students perceive that their instructor discourages conversation when they have questions or concerns, then they may veer so *off course* that they *fail* the course. That is why a syllabus, like any "tool," is only that: something that we take in hand to help us along the way. In and of itself, without the hands-on guidance of the teacher, it is only an outline. Drawing on my experience as a diver, I recall an incident that taught me about the limitations of tools.

Years ago, my partner and I were taking a navigation course in a deep quarry. We had one compass between us, and dive coordinates that would take us into the middle of the quarry to an automobile sunk at a depth of 30 feet, then over to an underwater platform, and then back to the dock. We lowered ourselves into the murky yellow water, with me holding the compass at arm's length while Uri swam alongside to "steer." We found the rusted automobile and headed optimistically to the dive platform which—given the poor visibility of 3-4 feet—was nowhere to be seen. Fifteen minutes later, totally lost, we surfaced to find ourselves on the opposite side of the quarry, one half mile away from the dock where we saw our instructor searching the water for his errant students.

We were astonished at how difficult this "simple" navigation lesson had been, and how thoroughly we had become disoriented swimming with nothing but the compass as our guide. We couldn't figure out what we had done wrong. The dive instructor had forewarned us: "When the visibility is poor, trust your equipment, not your body." But it wasn't until we returned to the dock, that he explained: the trick is to hold the compass steady with the needle pointing in the cardinal direction, at the same time adjusting the body *behind* the compass. I got confused because as I had passed through a current, I had drifted off-course and then compensated by shifting the position of the compass to *follow* the body. For it was our *bodies*, not our instrument, that drifted off course. It seemed that successful navigation meant mindfulness of the dialogue between compass and body.

While this experience made me leery of underwater navigation using a compass, I have never doubted the importance of knowing where you are. However,

in time I discovered that different factors determine the importance of relying on one's compass alone. For example, when diving in a small group with dive masters as guides, we relied on *them* to take us on the underwater tour. In addition, our diving almost always took place in waters with excellent visibility (unlike the murky quarry), visibility that made it possible to orient ourselves by noting the underwater topography: the shape of large coral heads, the slope of the sandy bottom, the location of a swim-through, which is a tunnel through coral. Eventually, I found that it was possible to orient myself by paying close attention to the sensual world: to the dive master, to distinctive underwater terrain, and to the number of my fin kicks between two geographic markers. An underwater journey meant being located in relationship to lived dimensions. Casey (1993) writes:

> In the actual practice of navigation, space cannot be held apart from time. Despite the initial impression that one is simply moving over a spatial expanse at sea, time must be continually invoked. In the case of longitude, space is *equivalent* to time. (p. 4)

In the end, I put trust in the proximity of the dive master, in the look of the terrain, and in my own corporeality. Those dimensions would outweigh my skill in using a compass.

What are the pedagogical implications for teachers of writing who chart the course? A pedagogy of teaching writing as in-between may allow for *temporal* exploration in safety. When I work with writing students on a particular draft, I ask: "Where *are* you?" This question goes to the amount and quality of time they have spent on the draft, an indication of the extent to which they have invested themselves in the writing. As Casey suggests, time and location are synonymous: "The winning

logic was this: when lost in space, turn to time. In other words, *where* one was became equivalent to *when* one was" (1993, p. 6).

Navigators at sea choose *how* they will steer their craft, and what route they will follow. They decide which course to take depending on the prevailing weather conditions, currents, and capability of their ship. Orienting themselves by the wind, water, sun and stars as well as by a compass, writing teachers who embrace in-between as a pedagogy are akin to those Pacific Islander navigators whom Casey (1993) describes:

> From the sea, they observe ocean currents and flotsam and above all the exact size and character of ocean swells, including the jet spray as waves strike the hull of their canoes. They also pay close attention to signs of underwater reefs … From the sky, navigators pick out a certain star seen as standing over a "reference island," itself located beyond the horizon. (p. 27)

In addition to their respect for the "currents and flotsam," teachers of writing who embrace a pedagogy of in-between encourage students to trust their limbs as they kick through darkened tunnels in the text. "Let words be born from you/wet and kicking. Let them cry,/ but you, keep quiet and moving" (Piercy, 1992, pp. 104-106). Teachers of writing attend the birth of their students' words.

At the same time, writing teacher navigators are aware of hazards at depth: when students brush against jagged sections in their writing, they involuntarily pull back, just as divers shrink from coral imbedded with stinging microbes. At those moments, the writing teacher may come forward with encouraging words that heal the tender place.

A pedagogy of in-between in the teaching of writing is about teacher-navigators as leaders who *make their way* across the course in the company of their

students. Writing teachers tell their students what they *might* discover at a particular location, at the same time as they advise them to expect the unexpected. As a diver, what a thrill to suddenly emerge from a black tunnel at 135 feet into hundreds of bubble columns laced with silver fish. As a teacher of writing, what a thrill to *guide* students through a claustrophobic place in their writing and see them reach an unanticipated perspective. Caring educators are in touch with the wisdom resident in the landscape of their classrooms. Indeed, it might be said that students *are* the landscape. In *Landscapes of Learning*, Maxine Greene (1978) views personal transformation as occurring within the distinct "landscape" of an individual's lived world; each person's landscape is unique since his perceptions grow out of a particular autobiographical experience. She also believes that feelings of powerlessness can be overcome "through conscious endeavor on the part of individuals to keep themselves awake, to think about their condition in the world, to inquire into the forces that appear to dominate them, to interpret the experiences they are having day by day" (p. 43).

Perhaps it is the unique power, the *potent-iality* of the writing classroom, to evoke life experience that makes our teaching of writing a natural site for transformation. Where else are we so well situated to encourage our students' narratives? As Casey says, "The power of place such as a mere room possesses determines not only *where* I am in the limited sense of cartographic location but *how* I am together with others (i.e., how I commingle and communicate with them) and even *who* we shall become together" (1993, p. 23). Together as learners with our students, who knows what persons we are becoming?

Weight-ing

Divers who find the perfect buoyancy of in-between are liberated from a preoccupation with striving. In that place, they feel excitement at the vistas they can now survey. What do writing teachers who engage in a pedagogy of in-between need in order to create a similar opening for student writers? "Being" in the in-between means *finding one's equilibrium*, not so much resolving as *dwelling in the tension of what that space allows:*

> Afraid of losing it, you want it lost. It weighs a ton, [sic] it weighs nothing at all. What is it? Give up? If only you could! Give up, and the answer appears. Give up, and you are released …Struggle, and clarity of mind disperses. Surrender, and somehow it is yours. (Friedman, 1993, p. 16)

Giving up that which "weighs a ton" can be a liberating experience. It involves a letting go of the emotional and spiritual burdens that come from trying to keep everything together. Struggling under leaden expectations leads to stress.

At times, stress has reached dangerous proportions in my own life. In the following excerpt from a paper that I wrote a few years ago, I sketch the lived experience of doing too much:

> For the past two to three months I'd become aware of the most obvious symptom: a racing, palpitating heart. Whether at work, home or at night as I lay in bed, I felt my heart thud inside my chest, great dolloping thuds. The sensation climbed up to my throat as well. Alarmed, I would freeze and "listen" for a few moments until the episode passed. This racing occurred with a force at once mighty and fragile…
>
> I must listen to my heart's message: slow down. Yet all around me, everything swirls, changing with dizzying speed. My life feels pressure from all directions. For the past three and a half years—and most acutely – within the past six months, my teenage daughter has struggled with severe depression and an eating disorder that resulted in two hospitalizations and one four-month stint at a treatment center out of state. From her return late this

> summer through mid-October, she was out of regular school while her dad and I struggled to complete Baltimore County's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process for her admission to a therapeutic day school… This, coupled with my own teaching at Towson, stretched me thin. In addition, a late bloomer, I was taking my fourth course in the doctoral program at UMCP. The Monday evening course met once a week for three hours, plus I had an additional hour's drive each way; of course there was considerable reading and writing to do, as well! … Then, some time in early September, another "runner" friend … suggested we volunteer to be T.U. co-captains for the Susan Komen Race for the Cure in early October, a project to which I agreed in a moment of temporary insanity. In addition to these responsibilities, I was planning a long … weekend in DisneyWorld for my son's Bar Mitzvah present, and a post-Bar Mitzvah party for 20 family and friends, all drawing on dwindling financial resources … These circumstances were exacerbated by menopausal symptoms, including forgetfulness, sleeplessness, hot flashes, and flagging energy. (De La Ysla, 2002a)

Reviewing this excerpt, I am alarmed at what it felt like to be unable to "catch my breath," when my heart worked overtime. I was beyond stressed. An etymological tracing of "stress" reveals that it derives from the Middle English *Destresse* and *stresse,* words that were pre-dated by the O.F. *estrece*, meaning "narrowness, straitness, oppression" (OED online). An earlier definition of the word "strait" yields: "Tightness; insufficiency or scantiness of breadth, area, or spatial extent, narrowness …" A now obsolete definition is "Tightness of the chest; difficulty or 'shortness' (of breathing)" (OED online). This latter definition fascinated me, since a literal and figurative inability to catch one's breath is a common symptom of stress. In addition, vascular constriction ("narrowness") can lead to chest pain. When people say they are "under pressure" are they not describing a closing in, a sense that everything is bearing down on them?

For writers, and for teachers of writing, what helps to lift the burden of impossible expectations? In diving, if the diver gets low on air, he must *stop, breathe, and think*. Only then can he recall the rules for an emergency ascent. The

first action is to "drop your weights" (the lead weights worn on a belt, or inserted into a specially designed buoyancy vest). Dropping weights immediately increases buoyancy, so that the diver can then kick up towards the surface. He does not hold his breath, though. He must continue to exhale through his regulator. Similarly, Friedman (1993), quoted earlier, counsels struggling writers to "give up, and the answer appears … you are released" (p. 16). Although weighty thoughts may keep the writer at depth, there may be times when she runs low on air, or inspiration. Then it is best if she drops her weights, exhales, and heads for the surface. Sometimes, "taking a breather" will propel the writer to a new place.

The same might be said for those of us who teach writing. Yet, what is involved here? What is it that we cast off? And if something is lost, what is gained? What might it feel like to stop being the heavy? What are the implications for the way we respond to our students' papers? Fletcher says: "Young writers are deeply vulnerable to teachers' appraisals of their stories, poems, or essays. We must speak to our students with an honesty tempered by compassion: Our words will literally define the ways they perceive themselves as writers" (1993, p. 19).

Do teachers of writing truly greet the student's voice, or is there an unarticulated expectation that the student will come to accept what the writing teacher considers to be "good" writing, despite the teacher's disclaimers to the contrary? Is it possible for teachers of writing to dwell in the in-between of what they consider good writing and of what students have in fact crafted? What is needed for teachers of writing to keep a light touch when it comes to students' papers, yet hold on to weighty expectations at the same time? King (2000) advises:

> You can approach the act of writing with nervousness, excitement, hopefulness, or even despair—the sense that you can never completely put on the page what's in your mind and heart. You can come to the act with your fists clenched and your eyes narrowed, ready to kick ass and take down names …Come to it any way but lightly. Let me say it again: *you must not come lightly to the blank page.* (p. 99)

Here, King is speaking to writers; yet, if we substitute the word "teaching" for "writing," the passage still holds true. Some teachers of writing may also "come to the act" with "clenched fists" and "eyes narrowed;" at least they do not "come lightly to the blank page." It might be said that King cautions against floating on the surface of the text. He sees merit in bringing *everyone* to the table, even those who come in tension. He calls for passion when confronting the blank page. Passion gives birth to seriousness of purpose, for writers and for those who teach them. There is, of course, a balance—an in-between—*between* serious determination and play when it comes to writing, and in the teaching of writing. At times, a lighter touch is called for, depending on the individual student's sensitivity and level of anxiety. Humor eases fear, as Anne Lamott (1994) so well shows:

> Writing can be a pretty desperate endeavor, because it is about some of our deepest needs: our need to be visible, to be heard, our need to make sense of our lives, to wake up and grow and belong. It is no wonder if we sometimes tend to take ourselves perhaps a bit too seriously … In the Bill Murray movie *Stripes*, in which he joins the army, there is a scene that takes place the first night of boot camp … Each man takes a few moments to say a few things about who he is and where he is from. Finally, it is the turn of this incredibly tense, angry guy named Francis. "My name is Francis," he says. "No one calls me Francis—anyone here calls me Francis and I'll kill them. And another thing. I don't like to be touched. Anyone here ever tries to touch me, I'll kill them," at which point (the sergeant) jumps in and says, "Hey—lighten up, Francis." (pp. 19-20)

<u>Messing Up</u>

> For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.
> (Eliot, in Intrator & Scribner, 1940/2003, p. 161)

Encouraging the tough guys "to lighten up" is less a one-liner and more of a pedagogic orientation that names the difficulties students encounter in writing. When students are anxious, I laughingly reveal my own imperfections as a writer. I show them my own messy drafts, confessing to the need of most writers (no matter how experienced) to produce what Lamott (1994) calls a "shitty first draft" (p. 21). The admission that I, too, make a mess of things helps set the tone in the classroom. Student writers often mistakenly believe that their instructors and other published writers have a special gift as contrasted with their own raw and clumsy "skills." Harsh criticism from past teachers or other ungentle readers has fueled students' self-consciousness about what they write. What I attempt to share with my students is that *all* writers struggle with meaning making. Even T.S. Eliot comes to the blank page as a novice: "So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—/Twenty years largely wasted …Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt /Is a wholly new start…" (in Intrator & Scribner, 1940/2003, p. 161). If T.S. Eliot is still "trying to learn to use words," might not beginning writers feel less nervous about their fledging attempts?

Student writers often worry about sharing their work with both instructor and peers. They fret over boring their readers. As a teacher of undergraduate writers, Don says: "They don't think they bring anything …" Students also fear having their (inferior) writing exposed. However, given the opportunity to hear what their classmates, instructor, and even widely published writers go through in the process of composing, they may be more reassured. They may accept the messy imprecision of composition. Lamott invites writers:

> So go ahead and make big scrawls and mistakes. Use up lots of paper … What people somehow … forgot to mention when we were children was that we need to make messes in order to find out who we are and why we are here—and, by extension, what we're supposed to be writing. (1994, p. 32)

By the time students reach college, they have become expert at meeting the expectations of teachers in order to earn a high grade. They quickly figure out what the instructor wants in terms of paper length, format, and content; in class discussion, they perceive what kind of questions are welcomed and what kind are not. In short, students learn to read their instructor. However, in so doing, they often neglect their own inner process in understanding what has been presented. It is no wonder, then, that students might need encouragement to make mud pies on the page; it is no wonder that they hesitate to reveal that what they *don't* know will always exceed what they *do* know. Nevertheless, over the course of the semester, it is possible for students to begin to view the putting together of their papers as an opportunity to "make messes" in order to figure out what they're "supposed to be writing." In the end, as T.S. Eliot says, "Each venture/Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate…" Writers and teachers of writing would do well to heed: "For us, there is only the trying" (in Intrator & Scribner, 1940/2003, p. 161).

Both Craft and Art

> A craft is a process of shaping material toward an end. There is a long, painstaking, patient process demanded to learn how to shape material to a level where it is satisfying to the person doing the crafting. Both craft processes, writing and teaching, demand constant revision, constant reseeding of what is being revealed by the information at hand; in one instance the subject of the writing, in another the person learning to write. The craftsperson is a master follower, observer, listener, waiting to catch the shape of the information. (Graves, 1983, p. 6)

Graves views both writers and teachers as persons attuned to their worlds, "waiting to catch the shape of the information." It takes great patience to wait for understanding to take shape. As Lindemann (2001) reminds us, "The teaching of writing involves both discipline and imagination" (p. 28). The same might be said for writing, for writers engage in a creative process that includes both reasoning and invention; creativity happens at the intersection of what some psychologists call "a tension or moment … between two or more opposing variables" (Lindemann, 2001, p. 87). At any rate, cognition (knowing) has to do with both the logical and the feeling modes of thinking; it is not an either/or proposition. Lindemann (2001) points out the implications for writers: "Writers must respect both the affective and cognitive dimensions of thought, developing a feeling for and an intuition about their work as well as a sense of its logic" (p. 87). Thus, writers are squarely situated in the in-between, where feeling and reason vie for attention in their writing. As teachers of writing, we need to know something about the student's cognitive processes of perception and cognition in order to shape our writing course to the best advantage. These two processes "must work together," regardless of the mode of discourse in which our students engage (Lindemann, 2001, p. 87).

What we see in the world, and how we think about it, is shaped by the way in which we organize stimuli (perception). No two people will recall the same event in exactly the same way due to the fact that each person is a distinct individual with a distinct cultural context and life experience (Lindemann, 2001). Furthermore, language differences can also influence the way in which we perceive, as when a particular culture has multiple names for various color shades, while a different

culture does not make such fine distinctions. As Lindemann (2001) says, "Sometimes we control language, and at other times it controls us" (p. 93). Because of cultural and linguistic differences and "perceptual stereotypes," Lindemann advocates the use of prewriting to help students "probe a subject matter thoroughly and systematically," so that they might "begin to see it differently" (2001, p. 93). Prewriting will also enable students to draw connections between observations, interpret and discern patterns; this cognitive process is called conception (Lindemann, 2001, p. 93). Thus, the use of prewriting in writing instruction, as well as offering other ways to help students unpack their thinking around a topic (such as heuristics, outlining after the fact, or graphic organizers), are based on the way in which writers construct meaning.

Although as teachers of writing, we speak of writing and discovery in the same breath, it is interesting to note that a cognitively-based understanding of learning as discovery is less than fifty years old. This field of study was greatly influenced by the research of Jerome Bruner in the 1960's (Berlin, 1990). Bruner's work as a cognitive psychologist supported an educational program in which "students should use an inductive approach in order to discover on their own the structure of the discipline under consideration" (Berlin, 1990, p. 208). In other words, students ought to practice the traditions of a discipline rather than just be told about them. Cognitive science would have important implications for the teaching of writing; as Berlin (1990) points out, research now indicated that

> Students should engage in the process of composing, not in the study of someone else's process of composing. Teachers may supply information about writing or direct students in its structural stages, but their main job is to create an environment in which students can learn for themselves the behavior appropriate to successful writing. (p. 208)

Thus, while our teaching vocabulary emphasizes writing as discovery, it was not too long ago that imitation and translation of the ancients was believed to be the way to teach students how to write (Murphy, 1990).

Now we can turn to other dimensions of the writing process, such as the quality of waiting, waiting that is more *lived time* than clock time—until discovery discloses itself. What is needed here is the writer's *presence* to what is at hand; it is dwelling in a place that is cyclical in nature (revision, "re-seeing"—then more revision). Perhaps the crafts of teaching and of writing unfold in a time and space dimension similar to that of the indigenous, oral cultures that Abram (1996) describes. In those cultures, space and time are indistinct:

> Unlike linear time, time conceived as cyclical cannot be readily abstracted from the spatial phenomena that exemplify it—from, for instance, the circular trajectories of the sun, the moon, and the stars … Thus cyclical time, the experiential time of an oral culture, has the same shape as perceivable space. (p. 189)

The lived experience of writing and the lived experience of teaching writing are recursive phenomena where time and space coalesce in discovery.

"Craft" is defined as "an occupation or trade requiring manual dexterity or skilled artistry" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 424). Often, when working with students, I encourage them to "get down and dirty" in the messiness of drafts. In a similar way, artisans emerge from their workshops at the end of the day all covered with wood chips. Many veteran writers seek out "workshops" where they can hone their craft and get feedback from others. Writing teachers also frequently employ the "writer's workshop" approach. In this model, students are given time, ownership, and

response; they learn how to ask for specific help on a draft, and how to respond to the work of other writers.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, *writing well* is considered to be a *craft*: "the artful construction of a text or discourse" (2000, p. 424). Van Manen (2003), too, describes the work of phenomenological research as "the crafting of text" (p. 78). As a writer and a teacher of writing, I have long considered writing to be a craft rather than an art. Yet, perhaps, as Lucy Calkins (1994) suggests, the *teaching* of writing is truly an art:

> If we want our teaching to be an art, we must draw from all we know, feel, and believe in order to create something beautiful … Artists know this. Artistry does not come from the *quantity* of red and yellow paint or from the *amount* of clay or marble but from the organizing *vision* that shapes the use of these materials. (p. 3)

Calkins looks to the teacher's "organizing vision." Others share her philosophy. For example, Maxine Greene emphasizes the importance of educators being self-reflective and wide-awake practitioners:

> I believe it is important for teachers, no matter what their specialty, to be clear about how they ground their own values, their own conceptions of the good and of the possible … Teachers need to be aware of how they personally confront the unnerving questions present in the lives of every teacher, every parent: What shall we teach them? How can we guide them? What can we offer them? How can we tell them what to do? (1978, p. 47)

The teacher of writing who has a clear understanding "of the good and of the possible," along with courage to confront "the unnerving questions," is on her way to create something precious and rare with her students. Is this not art?

Nevertheless, writing—and the teaching of it—take a great deal of hard work. The two endeavors are disclosed step by slow step. Writer Stephen King, who has over 50 bestsellers to his credit, admits: "The work is accomplished one word at a

time" (2000, p. 151). Rather than discourage beginning writers, King's metaphor would appear to encourage them. The notion of writing as building text demystifies a process that many students find intimidating. It makes writing more accessible, reinforcing an understanding that it is not so much genius as constancy and craftsmanship that will improve their writing. For teachers of writing, too, *text-uring* the classroom is a process of coming to know each student's face, each student's voice. Calkins (1991) says, "One of the challenges we as writing teachers face is that we must begin teaching writing before we've grown to love each child … Our first objective, then, is to fall in love with our children, and to do so quickly" (p. 11). One way to demonstrate our care and concern for students is to create a classroom space where they are empowered to write something about which *they* care.

Fire Breath

Fletcher (1993) is one of many educators who believes that teachers of writing need to be passionate mentors: "Passion," he writes, "remains the most important quality the mentor has to offer. When we think back on those teachers we looked up to, we don't always remember exactly what they taught. Above everything, we remember passion. Fire" (p. 17).

Teachers of writing who dwell passionately with students in the classroom invoke a pedagogy that creates a *warm classroom atmosphere*. An etymology of the word, "atmosphere," yields the Greek *atmos* (vapor) + *sphaira* (sphere), the air that surrounds. Casey (1993) also refers to the "enveloping-pervading atmosphere" of certain regions that we identify by the quality of their 'air …' As inherent presence, atmosphere is invigorating and has as its most palpable expression the actual 'breath'

of a living creature" (p. 220). As we recall the classroom atmosphere of favorite teachers, we might well say it was *the very breath of that teacher* that invigorated us. Perhaps when we speak of someone's *passion* we are naming the warmth of that person's spirit, exhaled as breath. Indeed, Sharon (pseudonym) is such a person. Standing beside her, I literally feel the energetic warmth emanating from her body. At our joint presentation for a group of classroom teachers, I observe the way in which Sharon's spirit infuses students with positive energy. My other writing friend, Gus (pseudonym), is also known for his passionate teaching. As he moves around the room, Gus rivets the attention of his audience. His voice and body occupy space in such a way that students are drawn in, and enveloped in his message of possibility and hope. Both Sharon and Gus epitomize passion in a dual sense: personal energy *and* passion for *what* they teach, writing:

> I now listen anew to students' stories about their great teachers in which "a passion for the subject" is a trait so often named (a passion that need not be noisy but can be quietly intense). I always thought that passion made a teacher great because it brought contagious energy into the classroom, but now I realize its deeper function. Passion for the subject propels that subject, not the teacher, into the center of the learning circle—and when a great thing is in their midst, students have direct access to the energy of learning and of life. (Palmer, 1998, p. 120)

The teacher's love for her subject makes it come alive for students. This is why it is so important for teachers of writing to be practitioners of writing, too.

Stephen King (2000), while addressing himself to writers, might well be speaking to those of us who teach writing, too. He says: "Words create sentences; sentences create paragraphs; sometimes paragraphs quicken and begin to breathe" (p. 130). It is at this point when the writing comes alive, when one might say that *in-spiration* takes place, and the writer *takes in the very spirit* that resides in the

surrounding air. As thoughts begin to tumble on to the page, the sight and sound of the words shape the writer's next thoughts. Many writers have long noted this back and forth nature of writing. King, master of the horror genre, regards the quickening text to what Frankenstein's creator must have felt: "*Oh my God, it's breathing*, you realize. *Maybe it's even thinking. What in hell's name do I do next?"* (2000, p. 130).

Most teachers of writing have experienced moments when classroom discussion took on a life of its own, when a lesson was transformed by the students, themselves. Open and alert to those opportunities, we experience the dialogic nature of teaching. Yet, at the same moment, we might think: "What in hell's name do I do next?" Then—as undergraduate writing teacher Katie describes—we teach "by the seat of our pants" (personal communication, July 7, 2005).

Spacing the Logs

"What makes a fire burn/is space between the logs,/a breathing space," writes Judy Brown. She continues:

> We only need to lay a log
> lightly from time to time.
> A fire
> grows
> simply because the space is there,
> with openings
> in which the flame
> that knows just how it wants to burn
> can find its way.
> (in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 89)

Give the logs plenty of space to smolder. Smolder describes the way that thoughts gather energy. Space, air, and careful tending precede the roaring fire. Brown reminds both teacher and student alike: "So building fires/requires attention/to the spaces in between,/as much as to the wood." What does this mean? While the logs

must be stacked in a careful way so as to allow for "the spaces in between," when do we know as teachers of writing when we have over-structured, paying more attention to our schedule than to our students, themselves?

As I re-read some of the written evaluations from a writing course I taught one semester in the college of education, I encounter some comments that make me wince. Students complained that I gave too many assignments with overlapping deadlines. Admittedly, my students' criticism is valid. Over the years, aware of my wish to "do it all," I have had to cut down on the number and variety of papers. Since I expect students to revise each essay at least two—if not three or more—times, I may have given them a mixed message: do all these essays and turn them in on time, but be sure you've revised each one with care. My ambitious expectations may have made problematic the very process that I advocated: thoughtful revision, full of care. Indeed, the tension between covering the material and uncovering it poses a challenge to all teachers, and perhaps, to teachers of writing even more. If we promote reflection as a valued end, where do we leave space for that to occur? Within the constraints of a fifteen-week semester, we are confronted with the need to balance. As writers, we know that good writing—like good coffee—needs time to brew.

As I turn back to reflect on the semester in question, though, I recognize that I had over-structured the course and under-listened to my writers. Without meaning to, had I extinguished the very fire I was hoping to fan? "Too much of a good thing,/too many logs/packed in too tight/can douse the flames/almost as surely/as a pail of water would" (Brown, in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 89). Next time I lay the logs, will I remember Brown's counsel? I contemplate the pedagogical puzzle of a classroom

where there are plenty of logs, yet plenty of space between. What is required for teachers of writing to create a site where being and doing are in equilibrium?

Irrelevancy or Lifework?

In her poem, "Imperfection," Elizabeth Carlson puts it this way: "I am falling in love/with my imperfections … I am learning to love/the small bumps on my face/the big bump of my nose/…Learning to love/the open-ended mystery/of not knowing why" (in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 95). This poem echoes throughout my being. Perfection and its twin, productivity, have pursued—and eluded—me as long as I can remember. On many occasions, these two demons have depleted me of energy that might instead have been directed to other pursuits: daydreaming, perhaps—to "being" less than "doing." Lists of to-dos—while helpful in remembering various chores—may become ends in themselves, making us forgetful of the present in all its possibility. What, for example, might we "be" if we *let* ourselves be?

What would happen if we put aside our lists and ventured out into the messiness of the page, into the messiness of trying out a new way of being with our students? What would happen if we forgot to hang up our clothes, if we lost ourselves in what Carlson calls "the parking lots of possibility?" (in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 95). What does a practice that Carlson names as "inconsistency, irrationality, forgetfulness" (p. 95) sometimes allow? These are realms of the in-between. Risky places. As a teacher of writing, I want to entice my students to *feel at home in wandering*. I would like to feel at home in that same place with them. It might seem as if being at home in wandering is an oxymoron; yet is it not in the

wandering—as writers and as teachers of writers—that we find ourselves? And, in finding ourselves, do we not come home?

Still, the invitation to take a chance on the page is one that some—but certainly not *all*—students appreciate. To those students, "Learning to love/the open-ended mystery/of not knowing why" feels too alien. They crave prescriptions and outlines and a step-by-step rationale for how something can be "used." When one student in my undergraduate writing course for pre-service teachers filled out her mid-term evaluation, she said, "All this writing is irrelevant … how will it teach me how to be a teacher?" Her comment saddened me, but it was not the first of its kind. I understood that her dissatisfaction emanated from years of schooling that made skill acquisition the preferred outcome. As a future classroom teacher, Jess feared losing control, of appearing unprepared in front of her students. To avoid public humiliation, she wanted foolproof strategies, which my course, with its emphasis on process and reflection, did not give her.

Clearly, she had not connected with my frequent comments about the need for reflective practice, and the ways in which writing helps persons understand themselves and what they may not yet know. She had disliked the excerpt from *The Courage to Teach*, finding Parker Palmer's philosophy too difficult to understand:

> After three decades of trying to learn my craft, every class comes down to this: my students and I, face to face, engaged in an ancient and exacting exchange called education. The techniques I have mastered do not disappear, nor do they suffice. Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this "I" who teaches—without which I have no sense of the "Thou" who learns. (1998, p. 10)

Other teachers and scholars of education have encountered similar resistance from their practical-minded students. One graduate writing teacher shares the spoken and the unspoken concerns of his students:

> Words spoken with
> voices, polite and earnest:
>
> "Excuse me, but how much will the final assignment be
> worth??"
> and …
> "How many words should that include??"
> and …
> "Should that be single or double-spaced??"
> and …
> "Can you tell us how it will be graded??"
> and …
> "Does punctuation count??"
>
> Words unspoken with
> voices, angry and confused and earnest:
>
> "I've been burned too many times in other courses to trust this
> one nutty professor."
> and …
> "This creative stuff sounds good but I've got my grade point
> average to consider."
> ("Yeah, and what about jobs next year.")
> and …
> "Hey, I'm actually being asked to write what I really want to
> write."
> and …
> "This stuff is not going to go over too well in the school where
> I'm practice teaching."
> and …
> "Just give me the usual assignment please, tell me what to do,
> spell it out, I don't have time."
> (Rasberry, 1994/2001, pp. 159-164)

Students often resist that which cannot be boxed up and labeled. "Tell me what to do,/spell it out, I don't have time" they object. And writing certainly *does* take time—slow, patient time, just as coming to understand oneself is the work of a

lifetime. The writing classroom can become a place where students slow down to contemplate what they value and envision. If the students also plan to be teachers, the search for self-knowledge assumes a moral dimension. As Palmer (1998) says:

> Knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life—and when I cannot see them clearly, I cannot teach them well. (p. 2)

Lacking inner vision, such a teacher labors in the dark, unable to share a vision with her students.

Notwithstanding the fact that respected scholars and teachers share my philosophy about the vital need for reflection, I still felt as if *I* had failed to convince Jess of Palmer's wisdom that "We teach who we are" (1998, p. 2). Her criticism calls me to look at the way in which my practice as a teacher of writing confronts the reality of my undergraduate students' expectations. The slipperiness of becoming through writing, together with clumsy starts and stops along the way, might well seem "irrelevant" to students. The goal, they believe, is to learn how to manage well and control behavior. Poet Carlson teases us with another possibility:

> But I'd rather waste time
> listening to the rain,
> or lying underneath my cat
> learning to purr.
> (in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. 95)

The poet's phrase, "waste time" is tongue-in-cheek, for she offers enticing images. Perhaps what is needed as an antidote to methods courses for pre-service teachers is "Listening to Rain, 101?" or "Advanced Purring?" Such courses embody what Abram (1996) notes: "Language as a bodily phenomenon accrues to all expressive

bodies, not just to the human …Each thing, each phenomenon, has the power to reach us and to influence us" (pp. 80-81).

We can, however, only be reached if we make ourselves available to what life offers. As Greene says, "Curriculum, to me, ought to be a means of providing opportunities for the seizing of a range of meanings by persons open to the world, especially today" (1978, p. 169). Providing opportunities for what she calls wide-awakeness has, for Greene, a distinctly moral dimension: "The opposite of morality, it has often been said, is indifference—a lack of care, an absence of concern. Lacking self-awareness … individuals are likely to drift, to act on impulses of expediency" (1978, p. 43). As teachers of writing, might we not lead our students to self-awareness through personal reflection on the page? Calkins (1994) believes we can: "Authorship does not begin in the struggle to put something into print; rather, it begins in living with a sense of awareness … Writing does not begin with deskwork but with lifework" (p. 3).

However, students may resist listening, may resist lifework. They seek refuge in the safety of answers as opposed to the threat of open-ended questions, questions that disturb what is taken-for-granted. These wary persons require the gentlest *tact*, a quality of being that van Manen calls "a critical pedagogic competence" (2003, p. 8). The *tact-ful* practitioner is someone who extends herself to others, and who—in touching the hearts of her students—opens herself to being touched by them as well. As van Manen says, the educator's pedagogic competency encompasses qualities that transcend technical skills. Calkins agrees: "To teach well, we do not need more techniques and strategies as much as we need a vision of what is essential" (1994, p.

3). For Calkins, writing teachers need to keep their vision unobstructed: what matters are the students' lives. She continues: "As human beings we have a deep need to represent our experience. By articulating our experience, we reclaim it for ourselves. We need to make our truths beautiful" (1994, p. 8). What is needed in a writing classroom to enable students to "reclaim" experience, to "make … truths beautiful?" As teachers of writing, might it not be essential to help students discover their "landscapes?" Maxine Greene argues that it is:

> Persons are more likely to ask their own questions and seek their own transcendence when they feel themselves to be grounded in their personal histories, their lived lives. That is what I mean by "landscapes …" To be in touch with our landscapes is to be conscious of our evolving experiences, to be aware of the ways in which we encounter the world. (1978, p. 2)

Writing is a means to encounter the world in all its fullness.

"Tenderness … More Than Technique"

> I learned an important idea about teaching writing while preparing for the birth of my son. In our childbirth class, our teacher had this suggestion for husbands (and writing teachers) who are nervous about doing and saying the right thing at the critical moment. Relax, she told us. Try to remember that *tenderness is more important than technique*. (Fletcher, 1993, p. 18)

Guiding the Dive …

I find that most writing students embark on assignments with seriousness of purpose and a desire to do well. I also find that most of them are apprehensive about the quality of their writing. Their guardedness calls for the "tenderness" that Fletcher describes above. It is this tenderness that will soften students to the possibility of opening up on the page.

As teachers of writing, we face a conundrum: we seek a student's best writing, yet we do not wish to impose an expectation that the only acceptable writing

is "my way or the highway." We have standards based on our values and beliefs about what constitutes good writing. Fletcher (1993) remarks on this challenge:

> A writing teacher will challenge students to attain a species of excellence according to particular beliefs about writing. This cannot be otherwise; it's hard to teach what you don't believe. The teacher, however, may encounter a student whose writing differs dramatically from the teacher's idea of excellent writing. A true mentor will not try to penalize a student or clone a duplicate of himself. Rather, the mentor is forever alive to the possibility of something new and distinctly original. (p. 16)

The writing teacher as mentor who "is forever alive to the possibility of something new and distinctly original" is a relatively recent notion in the field of composition studies. Within the past thirty years, teacher scholars such as Donald Graves, Janet Emig, Nancie Atwell, and Lucy Calkins, together with the National Writing Project, have been at the forefront as advocates of a pedagogy that describes effective writing classrooms where both process and product are addressed, both form and content (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2003, p. 2). According to the authors of *Because Writing Matters*, there is an impressive body of research "that is changing how writing is taught in many classrooms and our understanding of how it can affect learning" (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2003, p. 4). One of the results of composition research is that it "has brought the practice of writers in the real world into the classroom" (2003, p. 4). This wisdom about how real writers work has supported my pedagogy as a teacher of writing. It has shaped my understanding of the way that students "find" topics (or rather, the way that topics find them), write early drafts, and respond to my critique of their writing. As a writer and a teacher of writing, I have discovered that gentle, yet firm response yields the best result. I was recently reminded of what happens when the student's process is dis-respected.

It had been years since I had been forced to squeeze myself into the writing template of an instructor. Certainly, in the course of my graduate work, I had been obliged to write research papers that might not have been of my own choosing. Still, my professors allowed us to find our own way. But as I described in a harried email to my friend, the instructor in question was trying to "control my writing voice." My friend responded: "Many students in college writing classes are probably used to having the teacher direct their voices … Brenda (pseudonym) seems to see her writing coach job as being the technical director who makes sure everyone has all the gizmos functioning properly" (L. Massey, personal communication, November 6, 2004). Fletcher would view Brenda's practice as very non-mentor like, for she penalized students whose writing deviated from her preferred form. Our "punishment" was the requirement to submit one revision after the other until, in essence, we had become Brenda's "clones." As a student in her class, I suffered through the semester angry at having my voice—myself—obliterated. For the first time in years, I sat as if frozen in front of my computer screen. I belabored a single paragraph for hours at a time, second-guessing every phrase: *Is this how she wants it*? In effect, it was Brenda's voice, not my own, that resounded in my head. That voice silenced me.

In marked contrast, Fletcher (1993) lauds a teacher colleague who encourages a young writer's process: "This teacher places a higher value on Ron's habits of thought, his willingness to apply his knowledge to brand new information, than she does on his getting the correct answer … Risk allows children to outgrow themselves" (p. 17). From the experience recounted above, I am reminded of how it

feels to heed the dictates of a teacher, at the expense of my own integrity as a learner. I was filled with powerlessness and sadness. And if I—as a mature graduate student at the end of her doctoral studies—can experience such despair, imagine how students with less life experience might react? Helping students get the correct answer has its place, but—as writing teachers—do we not need, above all, a more far-reaching vision? As Fletcher says, come to value "habits of thought … willingness to apply … knowledge?" For what is better work than helping writing students take risks that allow them "to outgrow themselves?" Perhaps as teachers of writing, then, the in-between is the place where we alter garments, rather than force students into wearing what no longer fits.

… Into the AND

> It is not a question of analyzing the universal and eternal; in curriculum studies, we believe, it is a question of discovering the conditions under which something new might be produced … This discovery of or working toward the new is at the heart of multiplicities and lines of flight. (Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. 2)

Authors Reynolds and Webber eschew the dualism of *either/or* while celebrating the conjunction AND, or *both/and.* While they are writing about post-modern research in curriculum studies, many of their comments pertain to the praxis of writing teachers. For example, "working toward the new," aptly describes teachers of writing who respect the in-between as a pedagogical site. It is there, in the in-between, that pristine multiplicity might be explored. Reynolds and Webber explain:

> It is not the elements or the sets which define multiplicity. What defines it is the AND, as something which has its place between the elements or between the sets. AND, AND, AND—stammering. And even if there are only two terms, there is an AND between the two, which is neither the one nor the other, nor the one which becomes the other, but which constitutes the multiplicity. (2004, p. 34)

As our students craft text, we hope that they, too, will enter a state of equilibrium, inhabiting an in-between realm. Perhaps that will be the realm of confident authorship, authorship that explores the richness of new territory. In diving, we seek underwater sites that have been infrequently visited, for it is there that the coral is most brilliant, the marine life most prolific and diverse. We seek those places that rarely have been explored, for it is in virgin territory where the surprises most often hide. The AND holds a similar promise for writers, and for teachers of writing.

"We always have to develop new lines of flight—lines of flight, (becomings) that allow, however, contingently, briefly, or momentarily for us to soar vertically like a bird" (Reynolds & Webber, 2004, p. 31). Might a pedagogy of in-between be home to lines of flight? Reynolds and Webber lean here on the work of Gilles Deleuze (1977/1986). Deleuze launches the notion of "lines of flight" and "AND-stammering"—in the latter, stammering is viewed as "conversation," or *encounter with*: "To encounter is to find, to capture, to steal, but there is no method for finding other than a long preparation" (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/1986, p. 7). "A long preparation" aptly describes the writing process as students inhabit early drafts. It might be said that students engage in conversation with a text that may initially intimidate them; they may stammer for a word or phrase, just as a teenaged boy does when he encounters a beautiful girl. With time and encouragement, he may reclaim his voice, but only if his beloved is gentle and kind. Similarly, teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between embrace their students' faltering drafts, in the understanding that the writing will "come together" *only after* a long period of

mis-steps. Indeed, for Deleuze the in-between of AND-stammering is richly productive as the source of multiplicity and creativity: "… neither a union, nor a juxtaposition, but the birth of a stammering, the outline of a broken line which always sets off at right angles, a sort of active and creative line of flight …" (1977/1986, pp. 9-10).

When students are given permission to muddle through, they will certainly question, and stumble over their own words, but—as Deleuze suggests—it is such AND-stammering that gives birth to a creative line of flight. Questions proliferate in the AND. Mary Oliver asks, "Is the soul solid, like iron?/Or is it tender and breakable, like/the wings of a moth in the beak of an owl?/ …Why should I have it, and not the anteater/who loves her children" (1992b, p. 65)? Perhaps Deleuze would respond that the "answer" resides not in the either/or, but in the *both/and* of anteater *and* human, in the soul as solid *and* tender. In what ways do teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between create opportunities for stumbling, stammering, and questioning? What is a way of being with students that respects awkwardness? How do we help writers make their writing soar, applauding them with these words: "You really took off, there!" Deleuze reflects on the trajectory of writing itself:

> It is possible that writing has an intrinsic relationship with lines of flight. To write is to trace lines of flight which are not imaginary, and which is indeed forced to follow, because in reality writing involves us there, draws us in there. To write is to become, but has nothing to do with becoming a writer. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977/1986, p. 43)

As teachers of writing, we are present to students as they come to the page where they be-come.

"Like flying"

> When you're underwater, despite all the gear and paraphernalia, you're more or less weightless—gravity's gone—it's three dimensions, like flying! (Lori, personal communication, 2001)

Lori is one scuba diver among many who draws parallels between underwater exploration and flying. The feeling of flight comes to divers when they are properly weighted and sufficiently relaxed. The *perfection* of "perfect" buoyancy emanates from one's corporeal equilibrium in the liquid medium of water. I have also frequently wondered if the sensation of diving is akin to what astronauts experience, floating in space. Between being airborne and diving there are many similarities: in both realms the body experiences the effects of increased atmospheric pressure, specifically in the ability to breathe and in the constriction of body cavities such as ears and sinuses. People have to equalize the pressure in their ears by holding their noses and exhaling forcefully. But there is another resonance between the two states. I include an excerpt from a journal written on a flight to a Caribbean dive destination:

> Acre after acre (of fog) stretches below me … the topography of clouds. I feel lifted up into the atmosphere, buoyant as I do when diving …Here, as in scuba, there seem to be no limits to space, to possibility. Can altitude have depth? Can depth have height? One continuum, our space on this planet. (De La Ysla, 2001)

There is, indeed, no need to dwell in polarities, to choose altitude over depth. For in writing this entry, I am struck by the merging of the two realms, by the possibilities inherent in *both/and*. As guides, we have a pedagogic responsibility to prepare our students for flight. We show them how to revise. We encourage them to seek out each other for friendly response. All the while, we know they could dive solo should they venture away from the group. Is this not a pedagogy that leads our students

toward what Reynolds and Webber (2004) call "discovering the conditions under which something new might be produced" (p. 2)?

Self-Containment

Before taking divers underwater, dive masters always give a detailed pre-dive briefing on board the boat. They orient divers with a hand drawn map that describes distinguishing features of the underwater terrain; they discuss prevailing currents and the presence of thermoclines (abrupt changes in water temperature). They give the overall dive plan, including the maximum depth and time allowed. At the same time, they urge divers to be self-sufficient, mindful of their own air consumption as well as physical and mental fitness for the dive.

In scuba diving, the "S.C.U.B.A." stands for "Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus." Perhaps, in a similar sense, teachers of writing seek to guide students to a state of self-containment where—just as divers can navigate independently—writers are able to rely on their knowledge of the writing process. As guides, writing teachers do a great deal to prepare novice writers. They validate topics about which students care. They model how to approach revision and work towards clarity. They give students time and opportunity to generate multiple drafts. They set up writing support groups and individual conferences. They also provide students with resources that explain language usage and conventions. They do all this to empower writing students to pass through the byways of writing, in a real sense giving writers an overview of the sites (and sights) to be seen. They also welcome questions from anyone confused along the way, just as dive masters are always

present to divers underwater, checking on their comfort and air consumption throughout the dive.

As teachers of writing, we seek to make our students confident and self-contained. Ultimately, we understand that they have to "flesh out" their writing by working the text. More than once, I have reminded undergraduate writers: "*You* are the author who 'knows' what this needs better than anyone else. Just keep at it, and the meaning will emerge." King (2000) articulates a philosophy of writing that resonates with my own: "I want you to understand that my basic belief about the making of stories is that they pretty much make themselves. The job of the writer is to give them a place to grow (and to transcribe them, of course)" (p. 159).

Between the Lines

> Writing is action in the sense of a corporeal practice. The writer practises his or her body in order to make, to "author" something. In one sense, the text is the product of the writer's practical action. But writing exercises more than our mere redactive skills. Writing exercises and makes empirically demonstrable our ability to "see" … Writing, true writing, is authoring, the exercise of authority. (van Manen, 2003, p. 130)

Here, van Manen emphasizes the corporeal nature of writing. For him, the writer "practises his or her body in order … to 'author' something." At the same moment, the writer seems "to be seeking a certain space. A 'writerly' space" (van Manen, 2002b, p. 1). While van Manen acknowledges that what writers seek out is an internal space, he says that "Phenomenologically it is probably just as plausible to say that the writer dwells in the space that the words open up" (2002b, p. 2). The nature of this space "does not just refer to physical extension and perspective. Space possesses the meaning of lapse or duration in time as well as distance; it carries the meaning of temporal and physical expanse as well as the time spent in an experience"

(van Manen, 2002b, p. 3). In what ways might the teacher of writing help students deal with the vicissitudes of writing, with what van Manen (2002b) describes as the strangeness of the textual space? "Language," he writes, "seems to vacillate between transparency and impenetrability" (p. 3).

In van Manen's (2002b) sense, then, meaning may indeed reside "between the lines." What appears on the student's paper are words, sentences, paragraphs, white space, indentations and line breaks. Yet what makes itself known is the student herself. Residing between the lines, she is at once text and *more than* the text. I am reminded of Heidegger's discussion of an appearing that makes itself known by *not showing itself*: "Appearance, as the appearance 'of something,' thus precisely does *not* mean that something shows itself; rather, it means that something makes itself known which does not show itself … Appearing is a *not showing itself*" (1993a, p. 74). Heidegger continues: "Appearance is tantamount to a bringing to the fore" (1993a, p. 75). Indeed, the student's true self, her essence, might be said to make its appearance on the page. In another essay, Heidegger (1971) draws the connection between appearance, truth, and beauty. He writes:

> Truth is the unconcealedness of that which is as something is. Truth is the truth of Beauty. Beauty does not occur alongside and apart from this truth. When truth sets itself into the work, it appears. Appearance—as this being of truth in the work and as work—is beauty. Thus the beautiful belongs to the advent of truth, truth's taking of its place. (p. 81)

Sometimes, as teachers of writing, we need to remind student writers to get out of the way of "truth's taking its place." We counsel students to allow their writing to say what it wants to say, and—in so doing—nurture appearance in the sense that Heidegger describes above. Allowing the writing to gather energy, students

may be able to create something beautiful on the page: the truth of their lives. The writer writes *and* the writing writes the writer. Truth and beauty emerge from the in-between, the AND of this dialogic exchange. What is required of teachers of writing whose pedagogy nurtures the AND?

Talking About

> Communication requires more than the successful performances of speech-acts; it requires, among other things, the capacity to be touched and moved by what one sees, and the capacity to listen carefully and with an open mind. (Levin, 1989, p. 102)

Still, the venture into the uncharted fills persons with anxiety: "Students want to see where they're going," comments Katie, a writing instructor at a major public university. To guide them through the murk, Katie conferences with her writing students: "Sometimes they're *really* lost!" she says gently (personal communication, July 7, 2005). "Talking about" their work helps. Another writer has explored what true conversation is in the educational setting:

> The term, "conversation," …can be etymologically traced back to the Latin "conversari" meaning "to associate with," and "to turn around, abide, remain, live …" A good conversation differs from discussion in that conversation creates a sense or "sphere" of living together in a shared world. (Li, in van Manen, 2002, p. 88)

The "talking about" to which Katie refers above is truly *conversation* because, *as a writer*, Katie does live in the same sphere, struggling with writing just as her own students do. Donald Graves (1983) speaks to the importance of writing teachers who are "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. (pp. 5-6)

When asked if she ever shares her own writing with students, Katie hesitates: "I did, once, but I did not tell them it was mine until afterwards." Her reasoning was that she wanted her students to critique her essay as just another example of the genre. We talk about modeling the writing process. I sometimes put my rough draft on an overhead, and reading it aloud, voice comments and mark up the page as I go along. Students observe my revision process with great interest. Perhaps they get an inkling of how I, too, wrestle with text.

"Showing what they mean," as Graves mentions above, is standard practice for National Writing Project Teacher-Consultants. Since 1994, as a Teacher-Consultant and a director of the Maryland Writing Project, I have learned a great deal from other teachers of writing who make transparent for their students their own composition and revision processes. For example, Barbara, a Teacher-Consultant and a professor of undergraduate writers, exemplifies the Writing Project teacher in action. She models the composition process by writing the very essay she has assigned to her students. When it comes time to share essays in writing support groups, she allows her own early draft to be subjected to student critique (Barbara, personal communication, August 25, 2005). This practice conveys to her students that Barbara is also a writer willing to offer up her work in progress. Her composition class reflects what Elbow (1973) calls the "teacherless writing class:"

> But what about the teacherless writing class itself? Can it have a teacher? Yes and no. I find I can set up a teacherless writing class in my own class *as long as I follow all the same procedures as everyone else:* I too must put in my piece of writing each week; I too must get everyone's responses and reactions to it; I too must give my own reactions to other pieces of writing … In short, I can only set up something like the teacherless class in my own class if I adopt more the role of a learner and less the role of a teacher. (p. ix)

Most assuredly, in opening up her writing—and herself—to the scrutiny of her students, Barbara sends a deeply important message: she learns along with "everyone else."

Risk Teaching

Revealing my written flaws to students did not come easily to me as a writing teacher. When I first began sharing my writing with students about 10 years ago, I was tentative and edgy. However, after spending five weeks in the Maryland Writing Project's Summer Teacher Institute, I gained courage. There, I heard the testimony of other teacher-writers who put themselves on the line. Indeed, one of the core premises of the National Writing Project is "Teachers of writing must also write." One writer-teacher who has exerted great influence on composition pedagogy over the past thirty years is Donald Graves. He maintains:

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

For Graves, then, the teaching of writing takes place in the AND—at the in-between of teaching *and* writing, at the place where *knowing of* and *knowing how* merge: teacher *and* writer.

In the years that followed my experience in the Summer Teacher Institute, I discovered that students welcomed hearing about my own process as a writer. They respected my early drafts and gave me helpful response. They laughed along with me at places in the essay where I used the wrong word. They witnessed my struggle to make writerly sense out of a particularly difficult passage. Some of them wrote in

their learning logs that it was the first time in their school careers that a teacher had ever shared her writing with them. Nevertheless, just before I read my essay to my student listeners, my heart invariably beat faster. I told my students what was happening to me on the physiological level. "Even after all the times that I've shared my writing with others, it's still not easy," I admitted. "I still feel exposed."

Bloom (1991), a writing teacher for thirty years, describes what it felt like the first time that she shared her personal writing with her graduate writing students: "In the two days between class sessions … I began to walk the tightrope that stretched from experience to innocence … So I moved headlong toward the innocent, the unknown end. In risk taking I would do risk teaching" (p. 57). The notion of "risk teaching" is rich in possibility for the teacher of writing. Only through troubling our comfort level from time to time will we stretch and grow. Yet venturing out from behind the "safety" of the podium and into the circle with one's students is fraught with risk. How will they react? Will they dislike your writing, or be intimidated by it and possibly silenced? If they know about you as a person, will they respect you less as their instructor? *What will they say?*

Being Necessary

In *Writing Without Teachers*, Elbow (1973) addresses a special note to teachers of writing: the purpose of his book is to "help students not enrolled in a writing class and people out of school altogether" (p. viii). Then, he offers up a notion that challenges the taken-for-granted relationship between teacher and student. He writes:

> In proposing the teacherless writing class I am trying to deny something—something that is often assumed: *the necessary connection between learning*

> *and teaching*. The teacherless writing class is a place where there is learning but no teaching. It is possible to learn something and not be taught. It is possible to be a student and not have a teacher. If the student's function is to learn and the teacher's is to teach, then the student can function without a teacher, but the teacher cannot function without a student … I think teachers learn to be more useful when it is clearer that they are not *necessary*. (pp. ix-x)

Elbow points up a dilemma that has often confronted me as a writing teacher. Is it possible, even, to "teach" writing? If, as Elbow suggests, students can learn *without* me, how necessary *am* I? Early in the semester, I tell my students that I view my role as their writing coach, or guide. As a writer who can share her writing process, I promise to support them in their own. I tell them how and when writing claimed me. Before I could scarcely reach the keys of my mother's manual Underwood typewriter, I was churning out story after story. With the publication of my first story in *The Sacramento Bee*, I was hooked, at age seven. My students and I write about our experiences as writers, to find a common ground. However, many of their stories about early writing experiences are filled with pain and the harsh criticism of ungentle persons. It is important for all of us to be familiar with the writing landscapes we bring to the course.

Heard (1995) articulates what she views as her simultaneous responsibilities as a teacher of writing, both to herself and to her students:

> As their writing teacher, my job is to try to help them speak again. To help them trust their own voices again. As a writer, my job is to keep walking out of the fire of silence myself, to keep telling the story of falling in and of climbing out again, to let my voice sing. (p. 3)

Heard emphasizes the continual challenge of encouraging her students' writing *and* giving voice to her own. At times it is difficult for the writing teacher to make time and space for her own work. Reading and responding to student writing is intensive

and time-consuming. There is always a risk of neglecting one's own writing. Yet, not writing runs counter to what recent composition research tells us about the importance of literally *keeping oneself on the page.* Teachers of writing are not *either* teachers *or* writers, but both, dwelling in the AND of teacher *and* writer. Another famous teacher of writing offers a slightly different perspective on teachers' writing. Lucy Calkins (1994) writes:

> It is not necessary to expect that all of us, as teachers, will regularly draft, revise, and publish our own essays and poems. What *is* necessary, however, is that we have memories of a time when we loved writing and that we draw on those memories when we teach writing. (p. 13)

Perhaps, our stories "of a time when we loved writing" (whether that be when we were seven, or last week, or last year) will temporarily suffice. Those narratives, recounted with zest, may be enough to fuel our students' desire to write. But as teachers of writing, we cannot long be absent from the page. We must "keep walking out of the fire of silence."

Tuned to Their Truths

Nelson (2000) writes eloquently about the importance of listening to persons' stories:

> Why personal story? Because without that nothing else matters. Without that, the violence will not stop. Given story, allowed story, all else becomes meaningful. Because the story and the story writer become meaningful. Because the story writer begins to find voice and identity. (p. 43)

There will be times when the power of a student's writing leaves us at a loss for words. Perhaps we may feel inadequate to respond to the intense current that pulls us to unexpected places in the text. But as teachers of writing, we are called to lend an

ear to the emerging voice on the page. "Our stories must be told. Attention must be paid" (Nelson, 2000, p. 43).

Don, (pseudonym), a poet and a writing professor, encourages students to give vent to all their feelings. "If (their writing) is too nice," he says, "it's not true." For example, he wants his writing students to get comfortable with anger. He believes that powerful writing resides at the site where anger pours on to the page. In writing conferences, Don confronts his students if he suspects a lack of authenticity: "You're lying," he tells them in an affectionate, teasing tone of voice. "How did you know?" they respond (personal communication, August 25, 2005).

I have also found students to be reticent about writing their first "true story" essays; "true" is risky, since it implies revelation of emotions both positive and negative. Accustomed to academic writing from a third person perspective, student writers are un-used to speaking in their own voices. In fact, their voices have grown hoarse from being silenced so long. Students need a great deal of encouragement to go out on a limb. They need to know that, if they fall, someone will be there to catch them.

What my colleague Don creates in his classroom is a safe place where students are encouraged to let their shadow selves be seen. As Calkins (1991) says:

> Our students need what readers and writers the world over need. They need places to go and things to do … They need supplies … They need lots and lots of time to write and doodle and dream and play. They need ways to get advice, to gain distance, to settle down and write, to take a break. But more than all this, they need to feel at home. They need to feel safe and respected and free to be themselves. (p. 27)

"More than all this, they need to feel at home," writes Calkins. Might a pedagogical orientation of in-between bring about *home* where teachers and students dwell

together in a place where all "feel safe and respected and free to be themselves?" Is this not the essence of home? Home is the place where we can drop artifice and show ourselves as we are. Home is supposed to be a retreat, a place where our family accepts us when the outside world will not. The implication for the teacher of writing is to make his classroom a comfortable place where students might show themselves in full imperfection. For *not* listening causes harm. Metzger (1992) points out: "When we are told that something is not to be spoken about, we understand this to mean that this something should not exist … we understand this to mean that we should not exist" (p. 32).

Encouragement

Barbara speaks about the reluctance of her incoming undergraduates to reveal themselves: "The freshmen are so … so 'fresh'! I ask them, 'Why are you *here*?'" At the first meeting of the semester, she directs them to write down the answer to that very question. The responses suggest that many of her charges have given superficial thought to what they may think is a superficial question: they are going to college because their parents want them to, or they think that a college degree will help them find better jobs. Underlying Barbara's question is a challenge: *give voice* to what and who you are. Question pat assumptions. But, sighing, Barbara says: "They don't like to question" (personal communication, August 25, 2005).

As we talk about his students, Don wonders out loud: "What about a pedagogy of not-knowing? What about teaching them to *not* know?" (personal communication, August 25, 2005). Many teacher-scholars advocate a pedagogy that keeps the questions churning. Ayers (1998) describes the "pedagogy of possibility"

practiced by teacher-philosopher Maxine Greene: "Maxine Greene's challenge (is) to break through the frozen, the routine, the unexamined" (p. ix). Greene asks: "What might it mean to pose distinctive kinds of questions with respect to our own practice and our own lived situations …" (in Ayers & Miller, 1998, p. 4)? Greene invites educators to join her in the critical questioning that is "doing philosophy" (in Ayers & Miller, 1998, p. 5).

The reflective practitioner who teaches writing "does" philosophy by encouraging students to ask questions and take risks. At the same moment, he, too, must keep himself open to possibilities, just as writing teacher Jonathan Baumbach does:

> The only constant in my method as a teacher is to keep changing what I do, a way of keeping myself from getting stale. It pleases me to think that I teach the way I write, making things up as I go along, but who knows? … I like to engender a condition of risk and trust to instinct, or hope for revelation, to get me through. (1983, p. 11)

Here is one teacher of writing attuned to what comes his way. He ascribes to no particular methodology, instead trusting to his instincts as a teacher and a writer to get him through. Thus, like a good diver, this writing teacher is always learning, receptive to the unexpected. In "Landscape," Mary Oliver evokes the need for our readiness:

> Every morning, I walk like this around
> the pond, thinking: if the doors of my heart
> ever close, I am as good as dead.
>
> Every morning, so far, I am alive. And now
> the crows break off from the rest of the darkness
> and burst up into the sky—as though
>
> all night they had thought of what they would like
> their lives to be, and imagined

> their strong, thick wings.
> (1992a, p. 129)

What is the lived experience of teachers of writing who—together with their students—have imagined "what they would like/their lives to be?" A pedagogical orientation that welcomes the in-between of uncertainty *and* possibility fosters "lines of flight." What might writing teachers do to send their students soaring on "strong, thick wings?" In the next chapter, I turn to phenomenology to ground my study of the lived experience of teachers of writing who develop a pedagogy of in-between.

CHAPTER THREE:

DIVING INTO PHENOMENOLOGY: A METHODOLOGICAL PLUNGE

The Encounter

> Why then should one adopt one research approach over another? The choice should reflect more than mere whim, preference, taste, or fashion. Rather, the method one chooses ought to maintain a certain harmony with the deep interest that makes one an educator (a parent or teacher) in the first place. (van Manen, 2003, p. 2)

The Why of Diving

One of the thrills of scuba diving is the possibility of coming upon something completely unexpected. Encounters with marine creatures and with the shifting medium of water are at once exciting and anxiety-provoking experiences. In this sense, diving encounters are embedded with the dual meaning of the word, "encounter." Defined as "a meeting, especially one that is unplanned, unexpected, or brief," an encounter has a second definition, "a hostile or adversarial confrontation" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 589). As a diver, I have encountered, and been encountered, in a number of ways resonant with the word's meaning. Suddenly—out of nowhere—a gigantic silver tarpon looms in the opening of an underwater passageway. Without warning, a strong vertical current pushes me down 30 feet below my preferred depth. A green eel with a head as large as a basketball shrinks into a rocky crevice at my approach. Drifting past a carpet of bright vegetation, I glimpse a quarter-inch spotted nudibranch with scarlet antennae. These encounters present themselves to me, startling me into greater awareness. In fact, encounter is the why of diving. Divers seek out encounter; they sharpen their eyes for the astonishment, the awe-inspiring. Ironically, divers may hunt for a creature for

days, yet never be rewarded with a glimpse. It seems as if my most memorable underwater encounters took place when I least expected them.

The lived experience of teachers of writing also involves multiple and simultaneous encounters: encounters with students, with text, with oneself as writer and as teacher. I am drawn to the question of what it is to create space for encounter in the writing classroom, and on the page. What is the shape and shift of that space? What do teachers of writing need to be fully aware of their surroundings?

It is to hermeneutic phenomenology that I turn in this study to bring into awareness the lived experience of teachers of writing who develop a pedagogy of in-between. I remain alert to encounters, posing questions. "Phenomenology is not finding the answer, but opening it up in many ways" (F. Hultgren, personal communication, October 9, 2003).

Encountering the Word

Two women—one an assistant professor, and the other my co-worker—stand together in the conference room at the college of education where I used to work. Coming in to collect some papers left on the table, I catch a snippet of their conversation. "Well, it's called phe-nom-e-NOL-ogy," Dr. Edwards (pseudonym) is saying. She pronounces the word slowly, emphasizing the fourth syllable. My co-worker looks puzzled. "'Phenomenology?' I've never heard of it …"

I turn toward her, grinning: "Maybe it has something to do with extrasensory perception."

There is a moment of silence. My face flushes, as I realize that I have intruded on a private conversation.

Dr. Edwards clears her throat. "Actually, it is a research orientation *and* a philosophy." Her tone is polite, but corrective. At the same time, my co-worker gives me a strange look.

"Oh." My voice is barely audible. Hot-faced, I hurry out of the room. As I leave, it occurs to me that I *still* don't know what Dr. Edwards is talking about. But anything with the word "phenomenon" in it *must* be something mysterious.

Encountering the Teacher

My next encounter with matters phenomenological occurs a few years later. My friend Barbara is taking doctoral courses in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland. From time to time, Barbara tells me about a specific book she is reading or a lively discussion in one of her classes. Even more often, she mentions her delight in having an adviser like Professor Hultgren—or rather, "Francine." This level of comfort strikes me as unusual, for what little I've heard about the relationship between doctoral students and their advisers suggests that some advisers excel at making their advisees' lives miserable. "I take every course she teaches," Barbara laughs. I sit in class and just smile away, I'm so happy!" Even now as she speaks, her eyes sparkle with pleasure.

I am intrigued. Who *is* this person, Francine, who excites such loyalty and enthusiasm in her students? Barbara, herself, is an experienced writing teacher at the university where I work and teach; she is known for her warmth and empathy. In view of that fact, the unsolicited endorsement of her doctoral adviser carries extra credibility. It is no small thing to be in the presence of an exceptional teacher. Palmer (1998) describes teaching as a *vocation*, or calling, and helps us remember that the

essence of teaching lies in the teacher's identity: "We teach who we are" (p. 2). Other educators and curriculum scholars echo Palmer. Aoki (2005c) writes:

> What *is* teaching?, emphasizing "is" … The question understood in this way urges me to be attuned to a teacher's presence with children. This presence, if authentic, is being … teaching so understood is attuned to the place where care dwells, a place of ingathering and belonging, where the indwelling of teachers and students is made possible by the presence of care that each has for the other. (p. 191)

Barbara describes her lived experience as Francine's student and advisee as being "good" because Francine demonstrates care for her students. As van Manen (2003) explains, phenomenology asks the retrospective question, "What is this or that kind of experience like?" (p. 9). In Barbara's experience, her teacher and adviser Francine remains present to students at all times, whether that is in the reading of their dissertations, in her responses to them in class, and in meeting them for conferences when her first question is, "How *are* you?" She engages in the simple, yet profoundly thoughtful, gesture of remembering her advisees' birthdays with cards. In addition to Francine's other qualities as a scholar and a valued colleague, she is an educator who shows "pedagogic thoughtfulness and tact" (van Manen, 1991, p. 1).

Just as phenomenological researchers inquire into the meaning of a lived experience for the persons involved, I have come to understand the meaning of the multi syllabic word about which—in its unfamiliarity to me—I once joked. Phenomenology represents, not a word in need of definition, so much as a philosophical way of being in the world with others. Francine's being has helped make the pedagogic implications transparent to me. For it is not "what" phenomenology is so much as *that* it is. It is not *what* Francine is so much as the

person she is; in essence, she *is* the texture of her pedagogic cloth. As Aoki writes: "Good teachers are … the teaching" (2005c, p. 196).

Attending to the World Through a Phenomenological Lens

What is it that a hermeneutical phenomenological research methodology makes possible to me as I strike out into the lived experience of teachers of writing who dwell in the in-between as a pedagogy of writing? As van Manen (2003) emphasizes, "A research method is only a way of investigating certain kinds of questions. The questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting point, not the method as such" (p. 1). My abiding interest as a researcher is to come to an under-standing, to *stand-under and amidst* the questions that emerge. Van Manen tells us that phenomenology, as a human science research approach, has as its "fundamental orientation" a pedagogic stance: "When we raise questions, gather data, describe a phenomenon, and construct textual interpretations, we do so as researchers who stand in the world in a pedagogic way" (2003, p. 1). Indeed, my quest in the present study was to explore the lived experience of the teaching of writing, to bring forward the possibilities and the challenges inherent in residing in-between with one's students.

Warming Up to the Question

As teachers of writing, what pedagogic wisdom might emerge as we dwell in the in-between with our undergraduate students? What does an in-between space allow that nurtures writing that both satisfies and reveals? How does a phenomenological methodology deepen understanding of the lived experience of teaching writing as a pedagogy of in-between? What does a pedagogy of in-between

bring forth? Might in-between invite us as writers and as writing teachers to inhabit—along with our students—the tensionality of anxiety and possibility? Van Manen (2003) speaks of the harmonious chords that ought to resound between method and researcher. In what way, then, does a phenomenological mode of inquiry buoy up my own "deep interest:" the teaching of writing?

Inner and Outer Explorations

I am now—and always have been—an explorer, both above (and below) the water. As a writer and a teacher of writing, I find myself constantly reflecting on persons, events, and situations. I am someone who watches and listens carefully to what goes on around me. Such attentiveness to the world probably began when I was eight years old and began keeping journals. My journaling gave me a place to pose questions and puzzle out why things happened the way they did. Perhaps in those days, I was already a phenomenologist in the making, aided by the complementary practices of paying attention and writing my world. Indeed, van Manen (2003) writes that human science researchers want to know the world they live in. "And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching—questioning—is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world … to become the world" (p. 5).

Unlike my older sister, I was a child inward by nature. I had many secrets and always craved privacy. Van Manen (1996), writing about physical hiding places, captures well the way I felt about my journal as a private place: "While the primary function of a secret hiding place is to conceal someone's presence, it also provides a space of shelter and safety where one can withdraw from the outside world" (p. 23).

The outside world of my growing up, while not a dangerous one, was noisy with disappointment and high expectations. Never having enough money, my mother single-handedly supported our family. My stepfather—although well meaning—never held down a job for very long. Because my stepfather's weakness as a provider embarrassed her, my mother turned to my sister and me as the source of her greatest joy. Yet, whereas my mother burst with pride over her precocious daughters, my own self-consciousness simmered because I was a bi-racial child who looked nothing like her parents. At home it was all right, but when we went out into public places, I invariably felt awkward. Perhaps the circumstance of being different encouraged me to seek the "shelter and safety" of the blank page. There, I could block out the imagined judgment of others and hear my own voice. Again, van Manen: "The (secret) place is a place that permits the simple experience of solitude. Here one can be by oneself in order to come to oneself" (1996, p. 24). In some ways, might it seem contradictory that one "retreats" to the written page in order to "come to oneself" as a social being? And yet, such retreat into writing has always been a "treat" for me, emotionally and spiritually.

In describing the "preferred method" of phenomenological research, van Manen (2003) says: "The fundamental model of this approach is textual reflection on the lived experiences and practical actions of everyday life" (p. 4). It seems natural that a writer such as myself—one who also teaches writing—would be drawn to a research methodology whose interest "begins in the lifeworld." For the job of writers *and* of educators is to slow down and pay attention to the world around them, to mine everyday experiences. When grounded in reflection on the meaning of the lived

dimensions of time, space, relationality, and embodiment, both writing and teaching gain power. Just as heightened awareness of other people yields rich data (*data* in the original sense of "that which is given") to the writer, so a phenomenological methodology delves into the pedagogical implications of lived experience for the persons involved. Writers are wordsmiths, and phenomenologists also craft language, not to "grasp" the essence of lived experience, but to "bring the mystery more fully into our presence" (van Manen, 2003, p. 50). Essential experience is elusive, and van Manen's interest is in finding "What kind of speaking would satisfy understanding?" (2003, p. 49). He reaches for metaphor as one pathway through pedagogic text:

> By way of metaphor, language can take us beyond the content of the metaphor toward the original region where language speaks through silence. This path of the metaphor is the speaking of thinking, of poeticizing. (p. 49)

Thus, as I metaphorically position myself in the in-between, I seek to reside more fully in the mystery of a certain teaching pedagogy. The following excerpt celebrates the connection between pedagogy and metaphoric poetry:

> Poetry and Pedagogy:
> *Always and already a deep, ambiguous kinship at work*
> where language takes us deep deeper to that place, strange and familiar,
> Home. There is nothing to be solved. Only the
> turning over, where dark means rich.
> Opening ourselves to ourselves: High on a cliff …
> (Rasberry & Leggo, 1994)

Fundamental to the phenomenological methodology is the creation of text that describes and interprets. "Hermeneutic phenomenological research is fundamentally a writing activity. Research and writing are aspects of one process" (van Manen, 2003, p. 7). Writing is—and always has been—the way that I make sense of the world. As a teacher of writing, I am attuned to what others' writing brings forward in them.

Having said this, I am naturally drawn to a research methodology that plumbs the depths of written text. No wonder that phenomenology as a way of doing philosophy—together with hermeneutical rendering of text—feels like a second skin. The phenomenological approach outfits me to explore the lived experience of the teaching of writing, just as my diving "skin" provides warmth for the underwater exploration of new sites.

Watching Out

> All correct interpretation must be on guard against arbitrary fancies and the limitations imposed by imperceptible habits of thought, and it must direct its gaze "on the things themselves." (Gadamer, 1960/2002, pp. 266-267)

> Authentic teaching is watchfulness, a mindful watching overflowing from the good in the situation that the good teacher sees. In this sense, good teachers are more than what they do; they are the teaching. (Aoki, 2005c, p. 195)

Gadamer emphasizes the importance for the researcher in the human sciences to be cognizant of the inevitable pre-understandings (assumptions and prejudices) she brings to the interpretive task. As I embarked on the present study, I kept before me my own pre-understandings. For me, writing and teaching have always been artful crafts fraught with complexity and possibility. The doubts that have assailed me as a writer and as a teacher of writing are shaped by a vague sense of inadequacy. Perhaps I am not the authority others think I am. Perhaps I have been fooling the world all along. Yet despite those doubts, I continue to write and continue to teach, intuiting that "the only way out is through." The practice of "acting as if" has come to my rescue more than once. As Gadamer points out, persons are unable to avoid their pre-understandings: "History does not belong to us; we belong to it … That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the

historical reality of his being" (Gadamer, 1960/2002, pp. 276-277). Clearly, my personal history pre-disposed me to second-guessing myself.

Nothing in my life, writing, or teaching ever seems to be resolved; instead, I feel perpetually suspended between knowing and not knowing. Writing is the place where I am able to work through the tensions of being. Writing, then, has always been *my* refuge from the deluge of conflicting pulls; as a teacher of writing, I wish to invite student writers into that shelter, as well. At the same time, I am uncertain whether writing can ever truly be taught. I believe that the sharing of my own process as a writer, together with the acknowledgement that students are at different places in their own development as writers—may enable me to be helpful to them. I view my role to be their coach, guide, and fellow writer willing to share whatever wisdom she has acquired through life experience. I am always unsure of what students are actually learning in my classroom, and what they take away. Are they only trying on an attitude of discovery? Are they producing drafts—not because they perceive the value in making their meaning known—but because Professor De La Ysla requires multiple drafts? Do they ever—once the course has ended—enlist the assistance of "gentle readers" to give them honest response? Do they come away with a sense of the power inherent in self-reflection? Are they genuinely aware of their own process of becoming? I hope they are, but I do not know if they are.

Gadamer (1960/2002) also addresses how the authority of others shapes our "attitudes and behavior" (p. 280). We defer to those who seem wiser than we. Surely they are more knowledgeable. However, when "that which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom" (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 280) takes pre-eminence over the

things themselves, then our interpretive vision as researchers may be clouded. I notice that when it comes to teaching, I am alert to what other teachers of writing have to share. I respect their accumulated knowledge, and am usually willing to try out techniques that seem to work for them. I harbor a sense that what they have to offer is of more value than what I may bring to the table. There are times when I doubt the originality of anything I do in the classroom. When I went through the Maryland Writing Project Summer Teacher Institute in 1994, there was a teacher whom we affectionately dubbed "White-out Wayne" for his candid admission of liberally adapting (with acknowledgement, of course) the ideas of others. Am I not "White-out Linda," too, someone who rarely has an entirely original thought? Perhaps my insecurity as a teacher of writing will affect the way in which I shape questions and respond to my conversants. Perhaps my interest in the in-between as a pedagogical site stems from the way in which I hover uncertainly in so many realms.

Because of my pre-understandings, I approach my study with mindfulness. As Gadamer points out: "It is necessary to keep one's gaze fixed on the thing throughout all the constant distractions that originate in the interpreter himself … He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text" (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 267). While I cannot expect to go facelessly into the interpretive endeavor, I have to remain "sensitive to the text's alterity" (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 267). As I study the text of my conversations with other teachers of writing, I attempted to set aside my biases and open myself "so that the text can present itself in all its otherness" (Gadamer, p. 267). This is the nature of the hermeneutic circle: a way of questioning that doubles back on itself, recursively and

dialectically (Moran, 2000). Aoki says: "Every questioning is a seeking. Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought. Questioning is a knowing search for beings in their thatness and whatness" (1993a, p. 45).

Aoki (2005c) writes about pedagogical watchfulness, "a … watchfulness filled with a teacher's hope that wherever his students may be, wherever they wander on this earth away from his presence, they are well and no harm will visit them" (p. 195). Similarly, researchers in the human sciences keep watch over their interpretive practices. We remain "filled with hope" that what we write will reveal, and not distort, "the things themselves."

Working the text of their lives, writers reside within the transient, evolving nature of their own history. Working the landscape of the classroom, teachers of writing hearken to their prior experiences as educators. Both van Manen (2003) and Gadamer (1960/2002) speak to the elusiveness of history: "All recollections of experiences … are already <u>transformations</u> of those experiences …" (van Manen, 2003, p. 54), and "If we are trying to understand a historical phenomenon from the historical distance that is characteristic of our hermeneutical situation, we are always already affected by history" (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 300). One's sense of what "really happened" changes even as it is written, for people do not remain static. With each retelling, the story is embroidered with the (new) person one has become since the writing of the original text. To be "always already affected" also addresses the inherently subjective perspective that phenomenologists bring to their study of phenomena: "One's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 17). Nor should it be, he contends. Instead, in the thick of research,

researchers ought to be fully attentive to their prejudices and biases. Then, they can "disclose to … readers where self and subject become joined. They can at best be enabled to write unshackled from orientations that they did not realize were intervening in their research process" (Peshkin, p. 17).

Rather than impeding the research process, an awareness of that which is taken-for-granted, (or mindful "bracketing") will help us as researchers to come closer to the essence of the phenomenon studied. "By a free act of will, we can refuse to be drawn in the direction of the positing, and instead focus on the structure of the act and its intentional correlate" (Moran, 2000, p. 149). It is the structure of the act wherein the difficulties in hermeneutical interpretation lie (Gadamer (1960/2002). He reminds researchers to yield to the experience of "being pulled up short by the text" (p. 268). As phenomenological researchers engaging in hermeneutic interpretation, we need to focus on what lies before us.

Minding Space

In what way are writers and teachers of writing called on to understand from within an inner space? Journaling is one way in which I remain watchful of, and fully inhabit, my life. One resource for unraveling my life experience came in the 1970's when I discovered the Intensive Journal. The Intensive Journal is a highly structured journal created by Ira Progoff, a depth psychologist who once studied under Carl Jung. Although Progoff (1975) sometimes calls the Intensive Journal a "method," or an "instrument" for understanding, it is far more than that:

> (The Intensive Journal) … has been spoken of as a method that is beyond psychology because it takes a transpsychological approach to what had been thought of as psychological problems. Here the word transpsychological means that it brings about therapeutic effects not by striving toward therapy

> but by providing active techniques that enable an individual to draw upon his inherent resources for becoming a whole person…It establishes a person's sense of his own being by enriching his inner life with new experiences of a creative and spiritual quality. (p. 10)

Similarly, phenomenology is concerned with the pedagogical good, and the ways that teachers might help the "individual to draw upon his inherent resources for becoming a whole person."

The way in which the Intensive Journal is structured helps to open up persons' lives by giving them evocative access to new understandings. For example, the journal is divided into several sections that invite the writer to explore life along several dialogic dimensions: Dialogues with the Body, with Persons, with Events, Situations, and Circumstances, and Dialogue with Inner Wisdom; additionally, there are several log sections: Daily, Dream, Life History, and Period Log; a section called Steppingstones, and one called Intersections, or an exploration of "the roads not taken." Dwelling in these dialogic sections both during intensive weekend workshop sessions, and over time at home, opens up a person's sense of one's life that has been given. The dwelling that takes place here is the wandering of *dwalde,* Old English for "go astray, err …" (Casey, 1993, p. 114). For such journaling implies movement not only across the page, but across and into the possibilities of being. Progoff (1975) explains the philosophical orientation behind his psychology:

> The seed of the inner person is the essence of a human being. It carries the potentiality of life, and it is unique in each individual. The urge to live is an affirmation of this seed, but its growth especially in the early stages, is soft and delicate. Like the young shoot of a plant, its life is precarious. It is especially vulnerable to the pressures and whims of the social environment. If it is to survive, it must build its own inner strength. It must be able to affirm the private person within itself. (p. 48)

Similarly, van Manen (2003) writes: "Phenomenology is, in a broad sense, a philosophy or theory of the unique" (p. 7). In phenomenology, the focus is on *cultivation*, on tilling lived experience, digging into and behind. What other research methodology makes better sense for a writer and a teacher of writing whose "deep interest" lies in meaning-making on the page? What is better work than questioning ways to *implant* within one's students of writing a willingness to "go astray" in the in-between vulnerability of the page?

Making Space

The blank page intimidates, as van Manen (2002a) points out:

> No doubt, the writer in the human sciences shares experiences of difficulty with the literary author. Both know the terror of the blank page that refuses to be written; both experience the strange resistance of language; both may feel at times that writing brings them to the edge of existence: to the uncanny experience of the un-really real. (p. i)

The not-yet, in-between-ness of text in process, rises up to challenge van Manen:

> In the experience of writing (or trying to write) something happens to me. I seem to be seeking a certain space … A "writerly" space. In this space I am no longer quite myself … It is like falling into a twilight zone, where things are no longer recognizably the same, where words are displaced, where I can lose my orientation, where anything can happen. (2002b, pp. 1-2)

If a renowned phenomenological writer and researcher describes himself as falling into "a twilight zone," how might unsure undergraduate student writers feel? Is there a teaching pedagogy that both anchors writers to the page and sets them free? And if so, are there coordinates teachers of writing might provide to young writers who are uncertain how to navigate in poor visibility?

At the same moment, the dimly lit "writerly space" connotes possibility. Our colloquialisms hint at those possibilities. When deeply engaged in the writing

process, we often say that we are "spaced out;" interestingly, this expression need not have a pejorative meaning. For when we space out our thoughts, are we not giving them room to roam? Is not *spacing out* a place for reflection? Space appears again in the idea of "white space," the intentional absence of text on a page. The poet revels in white space for its power to extend meaning. Even the use of white space in longer documents is said to facilitate the reading process. White space gives pause, gives the reader breathing room. It may be in the *not-writing* of white space, in its spatial silence, "where language speaks." How might teachers of writing help students dwell in the possibilities of neglected spaces?

"Space," writes van Manen, "possesses the meaning of lapse or duration in time as well as distance; it carries the meaning of temporal and physical expanse as well as the time spent in an experience" (2002b, p. 3). Dwelling in-between as a writer and a teacher of writing offers the possibility of rich wanderings across life's text. My praxis as a teacher of writing is to support students in this in-between place as they engage in dialogue, as they reflect and revise. Van Manen (2002b) views it this way:

> The writer dwells in an inner space, inside the self. Indeed, this is a popular way of spatially envisioning the self: an inner self and an outer self. But phenomenologically it is probably just as plausible to say that the writer dwells in the space that the words open up. (p. 2)

Embodied Time

> Sitting quietly is not knowing. But first you have to recognize the tremendous desire to know. This is how we're built, how we've evolved. It's wonderful to see this powerful urge to know, to question it, and to realize that maybe I don't have to know everything. Not knowing, the body is at ease. Not knowing doesn't mean not hearing the words. The words arise but the brain isn't concerned. (Packer, in Friedman & Moon, 1997, p. 182)

Lived experience occurs along bodily, temporal, relational, and spatial dimensions. Many teachers of writing are philosophically drawn to the writing workshop approach that honors the lived dimensions. Pedagogically, teachers name *time*, *ownership*, and *response* as essential to the support of writers. Students need clock time and lived time to develop their writing. The clock measures the passage of hours, yet the *lived time* to which we want students to aspire is a dwelling in the text through revision. Heidegger writes, "We come to terms with the question of existence always only through existence itself" (1993a, p. 54). Writing about one's experience, then, is a way of manifesting one's being on the page; another way of putting this is to say that the writing process begs for familiarity with the text of one's making. Only through deep investment (lived time) will the writer's being move into the foreground. As teachers of writing, what pedagogy enlivens a student's desire to reveal herself, over and in time?

Gadamer asks us to befriend the historicity of our understanding. He writes:

> Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged because it separates; it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted. Hence, temporal distance is not something that must be overcome … The important thing is to recognize temporal distance as a positive and productive condition enabling understanding. It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition. (1960/2002, p. 297)

As teachers of writing who wish to enable the understanding of our students, what pedagogy lends courage to students who are reluctant to cross the bridge of time? How do we reassure them that writing about their history will support them as they go forward?

Merleau-Ponty (1964) posits the corporeality of human existence and its relationship to perception and time. He writes: "The perceiving mind is an incarnated

mind" (p. 3). Because perceptions arise from our corporeality, "it is perceptual experience which gives us the passage from one moment to the next and thus realizes the unity of time" (1964, p. 13). Thus, as writers and teachers of writers, we dwell in textual space that is at once temporal in nature. Matter, itself, "is pregnant with its form," and as corporeal beings, ours is not to order matter according to "an ideal law," but to "experience a perception and its horizon … by 'posing' them or explicitly 'knowing' them" (1964, p. 12). As I unravel Merleau-Ponty, I am struck by the innately paradoxical nature of being in the world: on one hand, the world has reality outside our being; at the same moment, our perception of that reality is bounded by our embodiment. Thus, there seems to exist an innate tension in our ability to understand the world. Might the paradox of our embodiment be articulated in an in-between of knowing? In what ways do teachers of writing develop a pedagogy that creates classrooms where students' lives are unified through their writing?

For Heidegger, the meaning of Being *is* temporality. Heidegger understood *Da-sein* ("that kind of existence that is always involved in an understanding of its Being") as *being* presence (1993a, p. 48). Consequently,

> Remembering this connection, we must show that *time* is that from which Dasein tacitly understands and interprets something like Being at all. Time must be brought to light and genuinely grasped as the horizon of every understanding and interpretation of Being. For this to become clear we need an *original explication of time as the horizon of the understanding of Being, in terms of temporality as the Being of Dasein which understands Being.* (1993a, p. 60)

My reading of Heidegger is this: if the essence of being human is this presence in and through time, then we are ontologically situated to reveal our truths. And this Being

unfolds within time. Time is the horizon of possibility. I am reminded of taking walks on a crisp fall day. As I walk along gazing on the brilliant russet and yellow foliage, I move toward the horizon. Each step brings me closer to a new vista that can never entirely be reached, for always there is another vista ahead of me. The horizon unfolds only as I advance in time. Time shapes my perspective and my perspective shapes my awareness of what has transpired in time. I experience a sense of wonderment at the ever-retreating horizon. Abram (1996) writes:

> Just as the power of time seems to ensure that the perceivable present is always open, always already unfolding beyond itself, so the distant horizon seems to hold open the perceivable landscape, binding it always to that which lies beyond it … And so let us ask: is it possible that the realms we are looking for, the place of *the past* and that of *the future*, are precisely beyond the horizon? (pp. 209-210)

Is it time, then, that gives us as writers and as teachers of writing horizons toward which we strive?

Heidegger: Considerations In and Over Time

> The very fact that honest consciousness and good-will were our initial guides is bound to deepen our later disillusionment and disappointment in ourselves. It leads us to question even our best faith; for we are responsible for our delusions—for every delusion to which we succumb. (Jaspers, 1947/2000, p. 60)

> Human science research begins in questioning. (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 267)

In the image sketched in the preceding section, I travel a path that reaches into the horizon. Each step occurs in time, moving me both closer to—and forever out of reach of—the distant horizon. A walker might be said to be situated temporally within a horizon of becoming, an in-between place. This becoming place toward an ultimately unreachable vista is—it appears to me—a natural site for self-reflection: contemplation of the distance behind, simultaneous with contemplation of the

distance one has yet to travel, may keep one attuned to the journey. Perhaps there is a horizontal subtext to this venture which the self-reflective walker heeds. And yet, it is also possible for the walker to proceed *without* tuning in, deaf to the murmurs that announce his existential position. It is thus that I turn to Martin Heidegger, whose philosophical work informs aspects of this study. I grow quiet and reflect on Heidegger, who—during his rectorship at the University of Freiburg from 1933-1934—was a member of the Nazi Party. As I read more about Heidegger, I am left with the impression of his deafening silence, together with questions about the philosopher's adherence to his own writings on truth and authenticity. If it is time that uncovers *Dasein* (*"Time as the horizon of the understanding of Being")*, then from a vantage point some seventy-five years later, I once more open up the questions surrounding the professor's collaboration with the Nazis. I do so, not to excuse or explain away Heidegger's troubling involvement, but out of fidelity to phenomenological methodology which bids the researcher to stay attuned to the lived dimensions of a person's life. For to refuse to consider the embodied nature of a person's actions, even when those actions are (like Heidegger's) morally reprehensible, is to close off inquiry once and for all. And such a stance would be contrary to a philosophy and methodology that seek to wrestle with the many difficult and paradoxical aspects of what it is to be human in the world.

On the question of whether Heidegger violated his own beliefs on authenticity, Safranski (1999) points out that Heidegger's philosophy did not explicitly favor the choice of good over evil; rather, authenticity for Heidegger emphasized *Dasein's* freedom to choose, despite what others might say (p. 166).

Certainly, many of his contemporaries (e.g., Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt) and those of us seven decades later, are compelled to raise *our* voices against Heidegger's choices. His alliance with the National Socialists lays him open to hard questioning. As a phenomenological researcher of Jewish heritage, I am called to explore the tensions. For Heidegger surely descended into what I consider to have been a downward (and apparently unreflective) path into the darkness of Nazism. Even in the years that followed his membership in the Nazi Party, he appeared to be a man seized by delusions. Remaining attuned to the embodied context of those times, we turn for a moment to consider the circumstances surrounding Heidegger's collaboration.

As Bambach (2003) writes, Heidegger's work was "deeply embedded in the historical context of German right-wing/National Socialist thinking in the post-war generation" (p. xviii). Specifically, Heidegger engaged in a "philosophical attempt at geo-politics, a grand metaphysical vision of German destiny based on the notion of a singularly German form of autochthony or rootedness in the earth" (Bambach, 2003, p. xix). It is interesting, yet not entirely surprising for a delusional person, that in the post-war years when he was confronted by an anti-nazification committee, Heidegger performed a philosophical turn-around by describing his writings as "(taking) place outside the sphere of politics" (Bambach, 2003, p. 15). In short, Heidegger sought to avoid confrontation with what Jaspers (1947/2000), in his deeply insightful book on German guilt, describes as the moral guilt of many German intellectuals of that era.

I am drawn to consider the tensions generated by drawing from the philosophical understandings of a man who—although not alone as a radically

conservative German intellectual who collaborated with the Nazis (Bambach, 2003)—engaged in discriminatory behavior toward his Jewish associates. Despite the fact that, on a few rare occasions, Heidegger tried to keep a Jewish scientist on the university payroll (if that person's work might prove helpful to the Reich), and despite the fact that Heidegger attempted to distance himself from the racist anti-Semitism of the National Socialists, he nonetheless made it his policy to refuse to help Jewish faculty dismissed from their posts, and to withdraw advising support from his Jewish doctoral students (Safranski, 1998, pp. 254-255). "Certainly, his kind of anti-Semitism had not been a reason for him to join the Nazi movement. Nor, on the other hand, did the (soon to be revealed) brutality of the Nazi anti-Semitism deter him from the movement" (Safranski, 1998, p. 256).

In a certain sense, what drove his actions and ambitions was the belief that the university would be "in the vanguard of revolutionary change" (Bambach, 2003, p. 78). Heidegger was typical of German intellectuals who "hoped to lead the German *Volk* into a new epoch of national unity where, through determined struggle, a new community would emerge to transform the history of the West" (Bambach, 2003, p. 78). As Bambach sees it, Heidegger hearkened back to the Greeks and believed that Jewish people threatened the unification of the German nation because of "their rootless wandering, their urban identity, (and) their lack of authentic attachment to the landscape" (2003, p. 53). (Ironically, until his decades-long estrangement from them took place, Heidegger had two close Jewish associates: his mistress, Hannah Arendt, as well as fellow philosopher, Karl Jaspers.)

It was within a year of serving as rector at the university that Heidegger would fall out of favor with the National Socialists, and by 1934, resign from his post (Safranski, 1998, p. xiii). In later writings, he would criticize the strong arm tactics of the Gestapo. Eventually, he left the Nazi Party and retreated to the mountains to write and philosophize from afar.

Where, one might ask, does this brief historical excursus on Heidegger leave us? There is no question that he was a member of the Nazi Party. Contextual awareness of his actions does not mean that we can excuse him for his immoral choices. As Jaspers (1947/2000) writes, all Germans—by virtue of being German—shared some form of guilt for the Nazi era. Intellectuals such as Heidegger would be saddled with a deep moral guilt, for having been seduced by their delusions. Jaspers certainly had Heidegger in mind when he wrote:

> Many intellectuals went along in 1933, sought leading positions and publicly upheld the ideology of the new power, only to become resentful later when they personally were shunted aside … (Now) They regard themselves as anti-Nazis. In all these years, according to their self-proclaimed ideology, these intellectual Nazis were frankly speaking truth in spiritual matters, guarding the tradition of the German spirit, preventing destructions, doing good in individual cases. (1947/2000, p. 61)

These individuals, according to Jaspers, are morally guilty. For them, "Awakening and self-analysis of this delusion are indispensable" (1947/2000, p. 60).

Did Professor Heidegger face up to his own delusions? Did he atone for behavior driven by self-deception? In what ways did he account for his collaboration with the Nazis? These are questions that remain open, only because—when confronted with the myriad paradoxes of human existence—when do we truly have access to the inner workings of another person's heart? Nevertheless, it appears that if

Heidegger ever repented in private, he certainly never publicly admitted his moral guilt. Such a public admission might have vindicated him to some degree in the eyes of history. For not doing so, we take him to task. We know that following his resignation from the rectorship, he sought to put literal and historical distance between himself and his past actions.

Perhaps introspection was beyond Heidegger. Perhaps he was unable to look upon his own weaknesses, to confront his dark side. While we may have good reason to doubt that he ever put his moral house in order, we cannot know entirely. In all realms, not knowing is a difficult place. Just as the horizon seems to come closer, at the same time slipping away out of our reach, so does a final answer to the question of the philosopher's atonement. I surmise that Heidegger may have lacked the courage for self-reflection; immersed in his own delusions and attracted to the role of academic *fuehrer*, his insights as a philosopher appeared, for a time, to have stopped at his own threshold. Gazing inward, most persons perceive—and hopefully, reconcile—the co-existence of both good and evil within themselves. Was Heidegger such a person? We suspect not. The "indispensable" self-analysis to which Jaspers alluded was missing. Instead, we see a man who lost his way toward the horizon—someone stuck at the crossroads of human failing—his own. "Could it be that awareness of binds is a call to remind us that we, as humans, live in a divided way, in a realm of both this and that?" (Aoki, 2005d, p. 292).

I turn for a moment to a pedagogy of in-between in the teaching of writing, in order to consider the way in which I have woven Heidegger's philosophy throughout this study. In the full light of the darkness brought forward here, I would say that

Heidegger still offers us important insights that broaden phenomenological understanding of teaching, authenticity, truth, beauty, time and the nature of being. As one who studies and appropriates his teachings into my work, I do so in a wide awake state about Heidegger's failings as a person. Accordingly, I am bidden to keep in mind two conflicting, yet not mutually exclusive, realities about Heidegger. This is my responsibility as a phenomenological researcher who considers the thorny nature of being which, when we turn toward it, may not be what we might have expected, or wanted.

A Blinking Strobe

During night dives, divers descend into the black opaqueness of the ocean. They carry only a small flashlight that illuminates an area of several feet. As they venture farther and farther from the boat, they risk being disoriented, or even lost. But then the captain lowers a blinking strobe into the waters. Immersed in the liquid embrace of dark water, unable to see beyond the circle of my own small beam, I recall the relief that floods through my body as I spy the flashing light. In a similar way, when our writing students swim through uncharted text, what strobes might teachers of writing provide to reassure writers that they are not alone?

Growing up—and even now—I feel most "at home" when writing. "Home" is a place to lounge around in the oldest clothes, without make-up or adornment, away from the public sphere. Home means being inhabited with the memories that place invites: in a house, one's books, paintings, plants, people, animals, and music embody recollection. On the page, words *flesh out* meaning. Casey (1993) has described the "intimate cultivation" of the places we call home: "The most interior cultivation—in

both senses of interior—is found in the home. Without such intimate cultivation, a house or apartment or hut remains a bare habitation, a built place in which inhabitation has not yet occurred and home has not arisen" (p. 175). Just as home is where one might dwell without artifice, it is in the sheltering page-that-is-home where a life might safely unfold.

In his reading of Heidegger, Moran (2000) shares this understanding of authenticity: "Authentic moments are those in which we are most at home with ourselves, at one with ourselves" (p. 240). Indeed, when I feel most comfortable with myself, it is usually because I have acted according to what I perceive to be my inner truth. Heeding my conscience, I have put my house in order. When, on the other hand, I ignore that voice, my house grows cluttered; the longer I remain deaf, the worse the clutter becomes, until it is hard to find myself there at all.

For Bachelard (1994) the house image is the "topography of intimate being" (p. xxxvi). "Our house is our corner of the world," he writes (p. 4). In fact, "all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home" (1994, p. 5). Inhabitation, then, is the key to home. For some of our students, their homes of origin might never have felt like home. Sinclaire (1994) writes: "My family lived in separate solitudes …" (p. 5). She wonders: "Where is my home, then, if it is not the house in which I grew up? Can I find that sense of home for my soul somewhere else?" (1994, p. 13). Perhaps our classrooms might provide that missing sense of home. In what ways might we, as teachers of writing, create classrooms where our students feel comfortably at home? In the square classrooms where we teach, with their concrete walls and small windows, what is needed to transform architectural space into

inhabited space? "A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 47). Understood in this way, would not *the unfolding of lives on the page in the company of others* convert a lifeless classroom into one that is fully inhabited?

Another writer speaks of "the practice of being home" as grounding all mystic and creative activity (Connelly, 1993, p. 30). She reminds us: "We are with ourselves wherever we go, not even aware of how much life is living us, gripping and training us, how much we are one with all else" (p. 32). Being with ourselves means being home, yet (especially for teachers), it means being in the fray:

> There is no "safe seat in the audience." What we are addressing here is the adventure of being alive, the being in the "thick of the scrimmage" at all times. There is no respite from life, no stopping. There is peace and stillness possible only in the heart of action. (Connelly, 1993, p. 33)

Teachers have this moral charge to stay connected, with themselves and with their students: "She also knows," writes Connelly, "that as teacher she is student, learning to be home herself in all the domains of her life. Homing is wanted everywhere" (pp. 36-37). As teachers of writing, we are called to examine our lives, to live in a way that preserves our moral integrity. Even as we ask our students to reveal themselves on the page, we are also under obligation to do the same, for it is through writing about the tensions in our lives that we journey home. "Experiences carrying the most tension are in some significant way, and often in every way, leading us back and back again to this original memory of true home. It is in this sense that life events are an inestimable teacher" (Estes, in Simpkinson et al., 1995, p. 36). We teach well, only to the extent that we remain open to being taught.

We describe a physical place that invites lingering as being "homey." What does it mean to create hominess in a writing classroom, encouraging an atmosphere where students can fully inhabit their words? Is not the teacher's acknowledgement of each student's uniqueness integral to building a home? What is needed in a writing classroom to welcome students, so that they cast off artifice and feel at home on the page? What lights might we lower into the water to guide students home?

A Third Space

> In tensioned ambiguity newness emerges. (Aoki, 2005e, p. 318)

As a scuba diver, one of the most frequent questions I am asked is: "How deep do you go?" The query puzzles me, because moments of greatest pleasure have not occurred at depth, but in another place that divers call "perfect buoyancy." This place is literally in-between the surface and the abyss. It is a place reached through proper weighting, bodily relaxation and slow, even breathing. Casey (1993) captures a similar sense of the mediating power of place:

> Primordial depth is more like a *medium* than an axis or line … Such depth (which I prefer to call "primal") is therefore not a matter of space or time. It is a matter—perhaps even *the matter*—of place. The uniqueness of place, its idiotropism, is best seen in its depth-dealing power. (p. 68)

The experience of hovering in a state of perfect buoyancy does not fill me with awe because I am at a particular depth in the water column; it emanates, instead, from a realization that I *am* there having lost awareness of myself. I feel merged with the very water itself, a sensation both revelatory and deeply humbling. I am *in place*; or as Casey says, "implaced:"

> The true ecstasy of human experience may not be temporal, as Kierkegaard and Heidegger both believed it was. Nor is it spatial, as Descartes and Merleau-Ponty thought. It is *placial*, for it is in place that we are beside

> ourselves, literally ec-static. In becoming implaced, we emerge into a larger world of burgeoning experience, not only by ourselves but with others. (1993, p. 111)

For teachers of writing, how might we calm the waters to support students to "emerge into a larger world of burgeoning experience"? Aoki (2005b) identifies a third space which he calls "indwelling in a zone between two curriculum worlds: the worlds of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived experience" (p. 159). Tracing the pedagogic practice of one 5th grade teacher, Aoki writes:

> Miss O knows that it is possible to regard all tensions as being negative and that so regarded, tensions are "to be got rid of." But such a regard, Miss O feels, rests on a misunderstanding that comes from forgetting that to be alive is to live in tension; that, in fact, it is the tensionality that allows good thoughts and actions to arise when properly tensioned chords are struck, and that tensionless strings are not only unable to give voice to songs, but also unable to allow a song to be sung. (2005b, p. 162)

Thus, if "to be alive is to live in tension," might not a pedagogic praxis of in-between acknowledge this existential and encourage writing students to (in Aoki's words) "dwell aright within it?" (2005b, p. 163).

By the time students enter college, they are used to teachers who view curriculum as being the sum of lesson plans, objectives, assignments with deadlines, and exams. The pedagogy employed is teacher as director "getting all the gizmos straight." There are right *or* wrong answers. Instead of this singular place, a pedagogy of in-between allows a third space, one where learning unfolds in the "and:" Aoki says:

> Thoughtful teachers tell us … that pedagogy is located in the vibrant space in the fold between curriculum-as-plan and live(d) curricula, at times a site of both difficulty and ambiguity and also a site of generative possibilities and hope. (2005f, p. 322)

Do we not wish for our students—and for ourselves?—classrooms where excitement for learning gathers heat? It takes courage to step into places where questions abound. As teachers of writing, are we up to the challenge of saying we do not know? Are we up to the responsibility of providing our students with a vision of hope, rather than despair? The third space that is in-between is, indeed, presented to us in:

> the structure of a bind, a site of tension between this and that, a site of difference that speaks of two or more things at the same time. Could it be that what is at work is a situational paradox of sorts? Could it be that awareness of binds is a call to remind us that we, as humans, live in a divided way, in a realm of both this and that? (Aoki, 2005d, p. 292)

Torn between choices, students feel they must choose either/or. In recognition, we, as teachers of writing, might be well situated to help students become wide awake through their writing, as a way to explore the paradox, the difficulty, and the energy of a middle realm. Like the humpback whale and the dolphin and the mermaid, what haunting voices might we hear when students sing songs about their in-betweens?

Celebrating Questions

> The question is the prize. (F. Hultgren,
> class notes, February 8, 2001)

Openings

Nepo (2003) writes: "The only thing I've done longer than teach, is, of course, learn. And not very far along it became clear that teaching is learning with others by living into the questions that experience opens" (in Intrator & Scribner, p. 142). Like Nepo, I believe that the heart of teaching, learning and writing is in the opening up of questions, an in-between space. Writers delve into the page; scuba divers lower themselves into the sea; and phenomenological researchers descend into the question.

Questioning opens up the text of life for an interpretation that invites understanding. Indeed, in the absence of "final answers" to the dilemma of living, questions may provide sanctuary. Gadamer (1960/2002) writes:

> Understanding begins, as we have already said above, when something addresses us. This is the first condition of hermeneutics. We now know what this requires, namely the fundamental suspension of our own prejudices. But all suspension of judgments and hence, a fortiori, of prejudices, has the logical structure of a question. The essence of the question is to open up possibilities and keep them open. (p. 299)

What is the lived experience of teachers of writing as they develop a pedagogy of in-between? Phenomenology rejects the objectivist belief that "things exist as meaningful entities independently of consciousness and experience, that they have truth and meaning residing in them as objects" (Crotty, 2003, p. 5). Instead, phenomenology claims that "Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed" (Crotty, pp. 5-6). (One might add that there is no meaning without a body, either.)

Just as the phenomenologist must be mindful of presuppositions, it is also important for the writer and the teacher of writing to engage in "a fundamental suspension of … prejudices," as Gadamer (above) suggests. Otherwise, the creative channels are piled with debris, rather than opened. Still, keeping possibilities open creates tension. How much more soothing to imagine that there might, finally, be *the* answer. Comic Woody Allen has quipped: "Half the battle is showing up." Might there be a clue, here? Does not "showing up" (showing oneself?) imply a commitment to be present to, and for, others? In my past, whenever I searched for The Answer, *it* slipped away, like fine stemware held with soapy hands. Something

inside troubled me, feeding anxiety. Things weren't right. Along the way, I had come to believe that if I made all the "right" decisions, took charge of my life (and that of others), I would reach a happily-ever-after. But instead, there was this continual *wondering*, this continual *wandering*. What had I missed?

Now, as a budding phenomenologist, I discern the epistemological flaw behind such a view that there is some objective It, some truth to be gotten, much as one might "get" a new car, a speeding ticket, or a case of flu. A belief in that worldview leads to dis-ease (as in unease) and distress. Later in life—as I accepted active engagement with thorny questions—I grew to accept my anxiety. As Aoki would say, I "lean on" Heidegger here: "Does such an attunement, in which man is brought before the nothing itself, occur in human existence?" Yes, Heidegger says, "in the fundamental mood of anxiety" (1993c, p. 100). "Anxiety leaves us hanging," Heidegger (1993c, p. 101) writes. To be left hanging is a tensionality against which we humans struggle in our search for answers. However, in struggling against what Heidegger calls our existential condition, do we not miss out on what the engagement with unanswered questions opens up?

To live, thus, is to live in a richly unfinished sense. There is movement in becoming, in coming-to-be. Might not in-between as a pedagogy in the teaching of writing offer up a dynamic place where persons breathe in the air of uncertainty, filling their lungs with what the ancients called spirit, as the word, "air" itself, once denoted? Such persons are in-spirited, daring, coming-to-be, works-in-progress. Questions rise up, not to be answered, but in phenomenological inquiry, to crack the window, to let in the fresh air: "What is the nature of?" or "What is it to be...?"

Gadamer (1960/2002) speaks to the way in which hermeneutics allows searchers to open up being-in-the-world:

> Hermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness; but this polarity is not to be regarded psychologically…but truly hermeneutically—i.e., in regard to what has been said: the language in which the text addresses us, the story that it tells us. Here too there is a tension … The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between. (p. 295)

In some respects, my early conjecture about the word, "phenomenology," was correct: it *does* have to do with *specialness,* "a polarity of familiarity and strangeness." Lived experience when addressed hermeneutically reveals itself as text replete with tension. The work of hermeneutic phenomenological research is to bring forward the mystery—the *in-between*—through a speaking that reveals.

Poetic Naming

> Poetry puts language in a state of emergence, in which life becomes manifest through its vivacity. (Bachelard, 1994, p. xxvii)

Van Manen (2003) heralds the speaking that poetic language allows: "By way of metaphor, language can take us beyond the content of the metaphor toward the original region where language speaks through silence. This path of the metaphor is the speaking of thinking, of poetizing" (p. 49). Poetry is the "yes" to many of the deepest quandaries we humans experience. Are metaphors the *meta-language* for what we know about knowing, and by extension, for what we know about teaching? "What letters spell this living? What words/name this living-in-the-middle of things*?"* one poet asks. He invites us to

> Discover the
> World below, recognize the importance of
> The fall. The crazy need to measure
> Mystery. To (never) resolve …
> (Rasberry & Leggo, 1994, no pagination)

Poetry swirls the naming, sustains the "mystery." This "living-in-the-middle of things" implies "the importance of /The fall." We are back with Heidegger: "left hanging." Other writers and teachers also attest to the potency of poetic language to speak to our mysteries and remind us why—and for whom—we teach:

> Those of us who care about the young and their education must find ways to remember what teaching and learning are really about. We must find ways to keep our hearts alive … Poetry has the power to do all of this … (it) has the capacity to empower us … Poetry has forever helped us to remember what it means to be human. (Palmer &Vander Ark, in Intrator & Scribner, 2003, p. xviii-xix)

In addition to poetry, hermeneutical researchers turn to texts drawn from history, art, and literature to nourish on-going phenomenological understanding. Van Manen (2003) writes: "Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the 'texts' of life …" (p. 4), varied as those texts might be. Attention to life-as-text is the key.

The Storywaters

> Exploration, description, revelation are at the heart of story, as they are at the heart of authentic or vital lives. (Metzger, 1992, p. 53)

Where do stories reside? The Tjapukai seem to know. Aboriginal people of Queensland, Australia, the Tjapukai have a special name for their creation myths. While other Australian aborigines refer to a time before time called "Dreamtime," the Tjapukai locate their people's history in the waters of the ocean, which they call "The Storywaters." Since they believe that all life originated in the ocean, the ocean is primordial flesh (Tjapukai, n.d.). Their sung stories lack beginning, middle, or end. Instead, they recount what Abram describes:

> A time out of time, a time hidden beyond or even within the evident, manifest presence of the land, a magical temporality wherein the powers of the surrounding world first took up their current orientation with regard to one another. (1996, p. 164)

If for the Tjapukai, water is indeed "storied," if Storywaters "link the past to the present," (Sawyer, 2002, p. 10) then how natural it is that water sustains human beings in a state of perfect buoyancy. Suspended in-between—having let oneself *relax into the tensionality* between floating and sinking—the diver experiences a sensation of centered flight. For writers and teachers of writing, what pedagogy invites students to loosen contracted writing muscles and soar on the page?

Phenomenological researchers seek stories. We ask: "What is it like…?" and "Tell me about a time when …" We listen and record the lived experiences of our conversants, in order to approach the meaning of that experience for them. At the same time, they only tell us what they tell us. What is left out might be laden with meaning, as well:

> Given that things will be omitted, moments will be truncated, experiences will, at best, be rendered partially, we learn to communicate through silences and absences as well as through disclosure. (Metzger, 1992, p. 57)

We learn, as attentive researchers, to listen closely to silences, to the meaning between the words. And always, story remains the lifeline to lived experience. "Every life is a story. Telling the story and seeing our life as story are part of the creative process" (Metzger, 1992, p. 49). Aoki, turning to the stories of teachers, asks: "What insights, what deeper seeing into teaching does this story allow?" (2005c, p. 192). Story helps a person speak her life, and provides the phenomenological researcher with a rendering of that life.

Attuned to the Text

In hermeneutic phenomenological writing, the act of writing and the work of research go hand in hand. In fact, according to van Manen (2003), doing phenomenology would be impossible were we not literate beings:

> When we speak of "action sensitive understanding" then we are orienting ourselves to this tension (between understanding and experience, reflection and action) … In other words, it is a certain kind of writing that we are concerned with here. It is the minded act of writing that orients itself pedagogically to a notion that is a feature of lived experience. (p. 124)

The method of phenomenological research *is* writing. "The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible" (van Manen, 2003, pp. 125-26). As a writer and a teacher of writing, I have often counseled students suffering from writer's block to just "get it down" on the page. "Think of your words as if they were clay," I often tell my students, "a lump of clay. You work the clay, and it works you." I know that in the construction of text we make ourselves visible to others. Our words embody the persons we are. No wonder unsure writers are so nervous about sharing their work. Once on the page, it *(they)* are exposed, and might be judged. "Writing constantly seeks to make external what somehow is internal … It is the dialectic of inside and outside, of embodiment and disembodiment, of separation and reconciliation" (van Manen, 2003, p. 127). Writers dwell within that dialectic, moving in and out at one and the same moment. Teachers of writing stand alongside their students' endeavors.

As a writer, I tune in to the world: to the sudden flash of a red cardinal across the sky; to the sweet juiciness of Maryland tomatoes; to the aria of a mockingbird

atop a blue spruce; to the high sweet ache of a violin playing Bach; to the smoothness of Wisteria body lotion over my skin. Only by remaining present to experience is it possible to find *coherence* in living, to grasp a sense of life's essence, of what matters. Writer Katrina Kenison discovers that a key to feeling less stressed is to do less, and attend to life more: "I've come to accept that I'll never manage to do all the things that I'd like to … Instead, I give myself time to find and follow a different rhythm, time to fully inhabit my own life from one moment to the next" (2001, p. 119). She wants to "fully inhabit" her life, a life grounded in corporeal presence. She seeks to recapture the world. Merleau-Ponty (1964) writes:

> We grasp external space thorough our bodily situation … Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space … For us the body is much more than an instrument or a means; it is our expression in the world, the visible form of our intentions … Now if perception is thus the common act of all our motor and affective functions, no less than the sensory, we must rediscover the structure of the perceived world through a process similar to that of an archaeologist. For the structure of the perceived world is buried under the sedimentations of later knowledge. (p. 5)

Hermeneutic phenomenologists shovel away some of that sediment by staying present to their presuppositions about the phenomenon at hand. They attach themselves to the world, in a movement *toward* the world, not away from it. In the unfolding process of interpretive understanding, phenomenology has its way with us. We become the question that we pose. As van Manen (2003) says, phenomenological researchers "stand in the world in a pedagogic way" (p. 1). As a writer and a teacher of writing, I turn to phenomenological methodology as the research methodology that will enable me to explore a pedagogy of in-between. The pedagogical aim of my study is to support a praxis that allows teachers of writing to *be with* their students in the tensionality of a "perfectly buoyant" place.

The Dive Plan

Dive masters draw pictures of the underwater dive sites, calling attention to unusual coral formations, precipitous drop-offs, swim-throughs, and prevailing currents. They mention the possibility of marine creature sightings: yellow snapper, Queen Angelfish, white tip shark, spotted moray eel, green turtle, eagle ray. Yet while the dive masters ready divers for the plunge into the ocean, they cannot predict with certainty what encounters will ensue. Similarly, the following description of my inquiry into the lived experience of teachers of writing who develop a pedagogy of in-between articulates my intentions, but cannot "pin down" what I would anticipate finding. Those treasures are revealed in Chapter Four. To surface these treasures, I structure this phenomenological inquiry around the following six methodological components as described by van Manen (2003).

Turning to the Phenomenon

Turning to the phenomenon is born of my reflection on the in-between as a pedagogical site for teachers of writing. As I recall in Chapter One, in-betweens have permeated my being since I was a child, heightening my awareness of the challenges and possibilities of that space. The state of perfect buoyancy in scuba diving offers up a metaphor that resonates with me as I reflect on the in-between. From a pedagogical stance, in-between tantalizes me by what it invites. Van Manen (2003) says, "This starting point of phenomenological research is largely a matter of identifying what it is that deeply interests you or me" (p. 40). Indeed, my turning to the phenomenon of the lived experience of writing teachers who engage in a pedagogy of in-between springs from the dialectical power of in-between in many

areas of my life. In Chapter One, I recount the persons, situations, and events that pull me to consider the lived dimensions of in-between. In Chapter Two, I explore the in-betweens of writing and the teaching of writing. In Chapter Three, I turn to hermeneutic phenomenology to ground the philosophy and research of this study. In Chapter Four, I unpack the lived experience of the pedagogical in-between as I engage in conversations with six other teachers of writing, and then open up emergent themes. Throughout, I raise questions that invite possibility and hopefully, deepen pedagogical understanding. As phenomenological researchers, "We 'live' this question … we 'become' this question" (van Manen, 2003, p. 43). Phenomenological inquiry unravels a pedagogical concern less to solve it than to bring it forward as "a mystery in need of evocative comprehension" (van Manen, 2003, p. 50). **What is the lived experience of teachers of writing as they develop a pedagogy of "in-between?"**

Investigating the Experience as Lived

The second component of phenomenological research is the investigation of lived experience as it is lived rather than as conceptualized (van Manen, 2003). In Chapter Two, I explore the phenomenon of personal and pedagogical in-between through myth, poetry, journals, research on the teaching of writing, informal conversations with teachers of writing, and anecdotes of scuba diving. The gathering together of this lived material was my initial "data collection," in the original sense of "datum" as "something 'given' or 'granted'" (van Manen, 2003, p. 54). I remain mindful, with van Manen, that "experiential accounts or lived-experience accounts—whether caught in oral or written discourse—are never identical to lived experience

itself" (2003, p. 54). This is because all experience is recalled reflectively and as such, has already undergone transformation. Phenomenology allows us to "find access to life's living dimension" through close attention to personal accounts, a tracing of etymological sources, and idiomatic phrases (van Manen, 2003, pp. 54-62). Throughout Chapters One through Three, I offer etymological tracings to get closer to the meaning of words that have, over time, lost some of their original power. In Chapter Four, I converse with teachers of writing, continuing the gathering-in process in order to generate text for further hermeneutic reflection. I also mine poetry and journals as other sources of lived experience to investigate the pedagogy of writing teachers who reside in the in-between.

Reflection on Essential Themes

The third component of van Manen's methodology is reflection on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon. As he points out, "Phenomenological reflection is both easy and difficult" (2003, p. 77). The easy part arises from the fact that we all have ideas ("pre-reflections") about what people and things are like (van Manen, 2003, p. 77). As an example, he offers up the idea of a teacher. Immediately we "know" what van Manen means by "teacher," but do we know the essence, or "lived meaning," of what it is to *be* teacher? For van Manen, "The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (2003, p. 77). This reflective process involves an analysis of themes emerging from conversations, because conversations articulate a person's lived experience of the phenomenon under study. In human science research, a

theme is not a construct externally applied to the data at hand; rather, it is "a free act of 'seeing meaning'" (van Manen, 2003, p. 79). The pivotal word here is *meaning*:

> Human science research is concerned with meaning—to be human is to be concerned with meaning, to desire meaning … (we) "desire to make sense," "desire to make meaning." Desire is not just a psychological state; it is a state of being. (van Manen, 2003, p. 79)

Alertness to themes requires an openness to the text, a readiness to discover the threads of meaning embedded in the words of conversants. This orientation of discovery, while inherent to the research process, is deeply pedagogical in phenomenological research. Thematic insights call us as researchers to "be practically responsive, as author, to the text of life" (van Manen, 2003, p. 90). In Chapter Four of my study, I open myself to what the six conversants say about the in-between in the teaching of writing. I carefully read the transcribed text of their experiences, and looked for phrases or sentences or groups of sentences that stand out with the potential of shedding light on the phenomenon of the in-between. Then, I engage in what van Manen (2003, pp. 95-96) calls "linguistic transformations of the themes;" this process calls on my creativity to bring the themes forward, and represents my "attempt to grasp the pedagogical essence" (van Manen, 2003, p. 78). I draw an analogy from scuba diving: just as a diver's air bubbles well up from below to break in clusters at the surface, so do themes emerge from the text. As a phenomenological researcher, I view themes as markers for lived experience, much in the way that—to someone observing from a dive boat—bubbles signify life.

Describing the Phenomenon through Writing and Re-Writing

I begin in Chapters One through Three to write and rewrite about the phenomenon of the lived experience of teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy

of in-between. In phenomenological research, writing and research are one. Van Manen (2003) asserts: "Language is the only way by which we can bring pedagogic experience into a symbolic form that creates by its very discursive nature a conversational realm" (p. 111). At the same time, he reminds us about silence and its special place in hermeneutic phenomenology. For example, in the conversational realm, there may occur a *literal silence*. As researchers, we are advised to respect that silence rather than jump in quickly with words of our own (van Manen, 2003, p. 112), in order to encourage our conversants to respond more reflectively. Similarly, "leaving things unsaid" in our writing may create a more evocative text. In Chapter Two, I write about white space and reading the writing between the lines—unsaid, the "silence" is eloquent.

Another silence comes to bear on phenomenological research: *epistemological silence*, as when we encounter "the unspeakable" (van Manen, 2003, p. 113). At those moments, we sense the power of mystery, yet might be unable to put it into words. Sometimes, other people (perhaps our conversants) may be better able to speak the ineffable. We might reflect on poetry or art to express our wonder. Phenomenological writing makes room for these ways of evoking mystery. The third silence of which van Manen writes is *ontological silence*, "the silence of Being or Life itself" (2003, p. 114). When a conversation or a reading has moved us, we may fall silent, in awe of the insights that flood us. In summary, these four dimensions of silence speak volumes to the phenomenological researcher.

As a writer and a teacher of writing, I am at home on the page. Years of authorship and teaching have solidified my trust in the writing process. Writing is the

method of phenomenology. As van Manen (2003) says, "Writing fixes thought on paper … As we stare at the paper, and stare at what we have written, our objectified thinking now stares back at us" (p. 125). In this hermeneutical phenomenological study, I welcome the opportunity to write my way through to understanding of the lived meaning of writing teachers' pedagogy of the in-between. This melding of writing and research helps "make some aspect of our lived experience reflectively understandable and intelligible" (van Manen, 2003, pp. 125-126). In Chapters One through Three, I engage in the writing process to see more clearly and to show what is at work behind the words. Chapter Four is where I thematize. That chapter, together with Chapter Five on the pedagogical implications of my study, were written and revised multiple times in as artful a way as possible.

Maintaining a Strong and Oriented Relation

Throughout my study, I strive to maintain a strong and oriented relationship to the lived experience of teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between. In Chapter One, I describe my own in-betweens, drawing on my experience as a biracial person, and as a scuba diver who finds metaphoric resonance in the state of perfect buoyancy. In Chapter Two, I continue the process by mining a variety of lived sources speaking to a pedagogy of in-between. In that chapter I write about writing and the teaching of writing as in-between sites. I remain focused on the pedagogy of writing teachers, because it is that which animates my interest as a researcher who stands in the world in a pedagogic way. In Chapter Three, I ground my work in the writings of phenomenological philosophers, and address the difficult

issues surrounding Heidegger. In Chapter Four, I continue my engagement with the study through conversations with six writing teachers.

Balancing the Research Context: Parts and Wholes

Van Manen's final component of phenomenological methodology is to balance the research context by considering parts and whole. The strenuous work of phenomenological human science research proceeds on many concurrent and overlapping dimensions; there is always a possibility that the researcher gets "so involved in chasing the *ti estin* (What is it?) that one gets stuck in the underbrush and fails to arrive at the clearings that give the text its revealing power" (van Manen, 2003, p. 33). Van Manen advises a "step back" from the total study in order to consider the relationship of parts to whole. This step back occurs in Chapter Five.

Van Manen reminds us that "The end of phenomenological research (is) to construct a text which in its dialogical structure and argumentative organization aims at a certain effect" (2003, p. 33). The methodology described by van Manen is dynamic and layered, not a lockstep formula for the way in which inquiry proceeds. Still, the researcher needs to consider the integrity of her entire study as each new section takes shape. There is a special quality to phenomenological inquiry, a certain "spirit" that suffuses the work (van Manen, 2003, p. 34). Perhaps this spirit is the aliveness of the persons with whom the researcher speaks. Perhaps this spirit is the animation of the researcher herself who wishes to unravel the mystery of lived experience. Just as one might apprehend a spotted fawn in a clearing, so does the researcher tread lightly and ready herself for the unexpected.

The Process of Engagement

My study involves extended conversations, together with the gathering of lived experience descriptions of the teaching of writing, from six writing teachers at Towson University in northwest Baltimore, and at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Van Manen (2003) points out that in phenomenological research, the conversational interview is pursued "as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner … about the meaning of experience" (p. 66). Furthermore, the participants' writing about their experiences as writers and as writing teachers provides me with additional text on which to reflect. Before embarking on the conversations, I orient myself to the question at hand: **what is the lived experience of teachers of writing as they develop a pedagogy of "in-between?"**

Gadamer (1960/2002) writes about the way in which language and human understanding coalesce:

> It must be emphasized that language has its true being only in dialogue, in <u>coming to an understanding</u>. This is not to be understood as if that were the purpose of language. Coming to an understanding is not a mere action, a purposeful activity … Human language must be thought of as a special and unique life process since in linguistic communication, "world" is disclosed. Reaching an understanding places a subject matter before those communicating like a disputed object set between them. Thus the world is the common ground trodden by none and recognized by all, uniting all who talk to one another. (p. 446)

Gadamer reminds us that dialogue between persons has the potential of making the world visible to us; thus, through conversation with the persons in my study, along with study of the transcribed audiotapes, I hope to reach understanding about their lives as teachers of writing who dwell in in-between realms. The text of our conversations gives residence to "the process of coming to an understanding"

(Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 446). In addition, as in Socratic dialogue, "Dialectic is nothing but the art of conducting a conversation and especially of revealing the mistakes in one's opinions through the process of questioning and yet further questioning …it confuses one's opinions … (but) at the same time … opens one's eyes to the thing" (Gadamer, 1960/2002, p. 464).

There are four women and two men in my study, ranging in age from their mid-thirties to their mid-sixties. They have been teaching at the university level anywhere from two years to over thirty. Two of my conversants are persons of African American heritage. Two of the conversants are full-time lecturers in the College of Liberal Arts at Towson University; one is a full professor in the College of Liberal Arts; and two are adjunct professors in the College of Education at Towson University. The final person is an assistant professor in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Five of the six conversants are Teacher-Consultants with the Maryland Writing Project at Towson University. My process of selection rests on an attempt to bring in persons of varying degrees of teaching experience, from a broad age span, of diverse background, and of both genders. Of the six participants, five are colleagues through the Maryland Writing Project. I know these five persons to be dedicated writers, as well as energetic and reflective practitioners of the teaching of writing. I had previously observed three of them in classroom situations, and had heard positive things about the other two from mutual friends and colleagues. One of the writing project participants was one of my teachers when I attended the Maryland Writing Project Summer Teacher Institute in 1994. I was only casually acquainted with the sixth participant, a professor of

English at Towson University; however, we share a mutual friend who highly recommended him to me as a potential conversant.

Once I had made my selections, I telephoned or emailed each one with an invitation to participate, together with a brief explanation of my study. I mentioned to them the way in which scuba diving had suggested to me the metaphor of in-between. Each person responded with enthusiasm. I then prepared and sent out the Letter of Invitation (Appendix A) and the Letter of Consent (Appendix B). By the time I received signed consents from all participants, I had completed a move to South Florida. Communication between us took place through email exchanges and occasional telephone calls and letters. Prior to our first conversation, I asked each participant to respond in writing to the following two questions: "When and how did writing claim you?" and "Describe how you came to teach writing." Their initial responses served as a way to begin our first individual conversation. For that, I flew up to Maryland in March, 2006; each conversation was audiotaped, and lasted approximately one to one and a half hours. Returning to Florida, I transcribed the tapes, and then arranged a second round of conversations for April, 2006. Before the second conversation, I made notes based on the transcriptions, and used my questions as a jumping off point. In addition, during the course of the second conversations, I asked participants to describe the in-betweens in their own teaching and writing, to tell about a time when their teaching both supported and complicated their own writing, and to respond to the following statement by Cameron in *The Artist's Way*: "Leap, and the net will appear" (1992, p. 2). I also asked them to tell me whether their students would describe them as "The sage on the stage, or the guide on the

side." Our conversations took place at Towson University, at Starbucks, at Barnes and Noble Bookstore, at a bagel shop, and at the homes of two participants.

As mentioned above, I transcribed each audiotaped conversation in its entirety. Occasionally, if I had questions that arose in-between our conversations, I would email or telephone the participant. Before our final conversation in May, 2006, I wrote several pages around some of the themes that had emerged during individual conversations. I provided each participant with an email copy of that draft, and asked them to read and reflect upon it before we met. My initial thoughts on themes served as the focus of the final group conversation. However, it is important to emphasize that while my orientation to the question at hand remained focused, my conversants spoke on lived dimensions in the teaching of writing that brought the delight of the unexpected. It should be noted that two of the six conversants were unable to attend the final conversation due to family obligations. This was, of course, partially due to my need to cancel a previous meeting because of the settlement on my house in Maryland. Upon my return to Florida, I provided each of the absent participants with both a transcript and an audiotape of the final conversation. I then had a telephone conversation (recorded through use of the speaker phone) with one of them in order to hear her thoughts about that final talk. The sixth participant did not respond to the final conversation transcript and tape. I sent letters of thanks to each participant. The thematizing that followed from the conversations is rendered in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five discusses the implications of this phenomenological study for a pedagogy in the teaching of writing. To understand phenomenologically is to "try to grasp the essential meaning of something" (van Manen, 2003, p. 77). For my

conversants and for myself, I wonder about the realm of in-between as a pedagogy: What is it like for teachers of writing to hold themselves at once near enough *and* far enough away from a student's text to encourage growth? What opportunities and challenges reside in being both writer *and* teacher of writing? As a phenomenological researcher, I pose questions about the teaching of writing because I am *pedagogically concerned* with the answers. I hope to understand the good that might come of residing in the *and* with one's students, as well as the challenges intrinsic to that dynamic space. What might such a pedagogy of the unknown allow? And what do teachers of writing need in order to be with their students in that way? I seek to unfold the lived experience of writing teachers whose passion is their students and the written word. They are teachers who wish to *educate* students in the selfsame spirit of that word's root meaning: *edu-care,* "to *bring forth."* Phenomenological research, with its emphasis on "the things themselves," makes this exploration possible. This is an exploration whose valued end is greater pedagogic sensitivity to what is needed for writing teachers whose work addresses what is yet to be "written" on the pages of their students' lives.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE PARADOXES OF THE BETWEEN

> Pedagogy is a much messier and more inconclusive affair than the vast majority of our educational theories and practices make it out to be … I've been persuaded … that the pedagogical relation between student and teacher is a paradox. (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 8)

Our images of teacher summon up a person who is knowledgeable in his or her subject matter, up to date on the latest teaching methodology based on scholarly research, and confident that the classroom has been set up to accommodate the diverse learning needs of students. As well, it is expected that the teacher will be a demonstrably caring individual. While engaged in conversations with the writing teachers in my study, I was impressed at the degree to which each person reflects this description. In addition, though, another notion began to take shape just behind my awareness. This was a notion that I had—up until that time—sensed as being a resonant, yet unarticulated dimension in my own experience as a writing teacher. Intrigued, I attended closely to the insistent chord as my conversations continued with the persons in my study.

The perception of which I speak is paradox. As defined, *paradox* refers to statements or phenomena that appear to be contradictory, yet "nonetheless true." Etymologically, *para* + *dox* refers to that which is "beyond opinion." Since the word "opinion" itself derives from Middle English and French roots meaning "to think" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 1235), it might be said that *a paradox reaches beyond conscious thought*. Such was my experience as "contradictory statements" about the teaching of writing worked their way into my awareness. What I discerned was at once jarring and reassuring, "in conflict with preconceived notions

of what is reasonable and possible" (OED online). For indeed, while paradox both frustrates and tantalizes, it is the slippery slope on which I—together with the teachers of writing in my study—seek to gain footing. Donald Barthelme offers a writer's perspective on paradox: "I see no immediate way out of the paradox—tear a mystery to tatters and you have tatters, not mystery" (1997, p. 19).

That the teaching of writing *is* saturated with paradox became more apparent to me as I engaged in, and reflected upon, the conversations with the persons in my study. Tantalizing elusiveness flows through the question at the heart of writing pedagogy: "What is needed to bring students along in their writing?" Indeed, the underlying concern guiding this chapter is the way in which paradox illuminates a pedagogy of in-between in the teaching of writing. No tearing of this question to tatters—instead, I intend to gently lay out the fabric of paradox named by writing teachers in my study. Along with Barthelme, I do not seek a way *out of*, but rather, a *way in,* to more fully consider the textured weave of paradox in the context of my searching.

Paradoxical Pedagogues

> Paradox is not only an abstract mode of knowing. It is a lens through which we can learn more about the selfhood from which good teaching comes. (Palmer, 1998, p. 66)

Before turning to a discussion of the pedagogical insights of this study, I would like to introduce the six individuals with whom I have conversed over the past year. My hope is to impart to readers a sense of these persons in their uniqueness, vulnerability, and courage. When I invited these six to join me in the study of a pedagogy in the teaching of writing, each responded enthusiastically, demonstrating

their characteristic generosity. It is that spirit which pervades their lives and illuminates their praxis as writing teachers. I was fortunate to have been acquainted with all of them in connection with my own work as co-director of the Maryland Writing Project at Towson University, as well as my adjunct teaching in the colleges of liberal arts and education. As I mentioned previously, five of the six are Teacher-Consultants with the Maryland Writing Project—as such, they have attended five-week summer teacher institutes and now incorporate many writing project practices in their classrooms. In fact, I have had the pleasure of collaborating closely with three of them who assumed positions of leadership within our writing project site. All six of my conversants, however, embody the both/and of persons who struggle with, and reflect on, the joys and uncertainties of writing and teaching. I believe that close conversations with these writing teachers will help unpack a pedagogy of in-between in the teaching of writing.

DaMaris is a small, round woman of African American descent who is a lecturer in freshman composition at Towson University. In her 30's, DaMaris exudes energy through her rapid speech with its New Jersey accent, and her ample gesticulations. However, beneath her animated exterior lies a quiet person with solemn eyes who has taken refuge in her poetry writing ever since she was a teenager. Describing herself as a rebellious teenager, she says, "I'd never do things the way that people told me to do them; I always do them kind of the way I wanted to." In a related vein during our second conversation, DaMaris describes her passion for writing: "Okay, I want to preface this by saying I'm crazy and I'm okay with it!" As she speaks, I am struck with her focus as a writer, as well as her sense that writing

gives her the ability to transcend limits, and dream a new reality: "I guess … I don't remember a time when I didn't dream." It is this fervent wish to show her writing students new possibilities—to overcome gender, racial, physical, or socioeconomic barriers through writing—that motivates DaMaris. Before coming to Towson, she taught reading and writing in challenging Baltimore City Public Schools as a middle and high school teacher for several years. As an undergraduate she was fascinated by cognition and linguistics, and then went on to obtain her teaching certification. While teaching, she began to gravitate more toward creative writing, and completed a Master's in Professional Writing. She went through the Maryland Writing Project Summer Teacher Institute in 2004, and—before being hired as a full time instructor in the English Department—taught as an adjunct in the College of Education. Deeply spiritual, DaMaris considers human beings to be "God's kiss on earth."

In 1996 as a graduate student in the Secondary Education Department, **Cheryl** had stopped by the writing project office to inquire about doing an independent study in our student writers' workshop the following summer. A tall, slender woman with long blond hair, she sported two nose rings and carried a motorcycle helmet under one arm. Returning a couple months later to assist the writing project teachers with the young writers, Cheryl had lost the nose rings, but not the Harley-Davidson. From the beginning, I noticed her keen sense of humor and perceived a sort of wariness in her blue eyes. Later, I would come to understand that—being in formal or academic situations where she might be expected to act or speak a certain way—sometimes makes her uncomfortable. A working class girl from a modest neighborhood in East Baltimore, Cheryl financed college with scholarships and bartending at a local tavern

where many of her biker friends hung out. She has never forgotten her roots, nor her own struggles with writing: "Writing has always been something that I just did and didn't do too well … I enjoy reading, and writing is something I *have* to do." Her attitude makes her "a sympathetic soul" with writing students. She emphasizes the importance of encouraging the writer's voice, a topic reflected in the focus of her Doctoral dissertation: "to show that society's idea of what 'real' writing is silences some people, especially those who aren't middle class." Cheryl taught middle and high school language arts in Harford County for about seven years before getting her graduate degree in Professional Writing from Towson University. In 1997, she attended the Summer Teacher Institute of the Maryland Writing Project. While teaching high school full time, Cheryl taught writing as an adjunct to pre service teachers; in the summer, she worked with the high school students in the MWP student writers' workshop. Two years ago, she was hired ABD to teach English methods and reading in the Education Department at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Cheryl is now working on her dissertation at the University of Delaware. Her wish for her student writers? "Know thyself."

Rus is a person constantly in motion, passionately over-committed, and frequently late for appointments. He exudes a warm presence that makes itself known the moment he enters the room (usually in a great rush). A portly man in his 40's, Rus has thick red hair and favors loose-fitting flannel shirts and corduroy slacks. As a writer, a teacher and a teacher of teachers, Rus rivets his listeners with the energy and intelligence of his ideas. He carries his daybook and laptop with him wherever he goes, a practice that he has his students emulate: "Out of the 100% that's in here"

(and he taps his daybook), "five per cent is worthy of taking someplace … when you trust the process … you're so inside the circle, you don't even know where you went until you come back." Rus has had many creative non-fiction articles and stories published in literary magazines and in newspapers; he has authored a few books, including an historical book on a devastating fire that ravaged Baltimore City long ago. Currently teaching high school English in Howard County, Rus has logged over 20 years as a teacher, primarily at the high school level. Rus holds a Masters in Writing from Goucher College. As a longtime adjunct, he also teaches writing courses at Towson University. Rus went through the Writing Project in 1989, and has been a leader ever since, as coordinator of the graduate-level Summer Teacher Institute, as an in service teacher in area schools, and as a teacher in the young writers' workshop. A devotee of Donald Murray, Rus emphasizes to his writers the necessity of revision and the ways in which authentic writing gives the writer power and pleasure. Reflecting on the place of risk in his writing, Rus says, "If I'd failed, I still would have succeeded, because—this sounds crazy, this sounds absolutely crazy—but in the failure, that's part of the success … we tried, and it's up to us what we take from the experience." Ongoing growth through learning from one's mistakes lies at the heart of Rus's pedagogy as a writing teacher. As for the quality of his response to writing students, Rus reflects, "It's a lot about asking questions instead of telling them."

Judy has been a full time lecturer of writing at Towson University for several years. A tall, graceful woman with short brown hair and sparkling eyes, Judy has a calmness that draws people to her. Originally from the Midwest, she taught high

school English for a number of years, "retired" to raise four children, and then returned 20 years later to obtain her Masters in Professional Writing at Towson. She went through the Maryland Writing Project in 1998. Recently widowed, Judy's outlook on life is informed by her faith: "I love light … though I'm fine with darkness and not afraid of it … I think that teaching is enlightening for the teacher as well as for the student. Illuminating." She continues about the wonder of teaching: "It just *boggles* my mind … you can never tell if the light bulb is on by looking at people … because not everyone responds with a big *light* on their facial countenance … and then some of the things (she) writes show that she is *definitely* engaged." Judy is herself a wonderful poet whose delicate imagery reveals struggles that she would otherwise keep private. Writing teacher colleagues and writing students admire Judy's commitment to try out new ideas—yet she herself gives away the credit. When students share their literature photo projects, "we all bring food and drink and walk around and read everybody else's." She tells them, "'I … get to have all the fun, and that's not fair! I really want you to show everybody how great you are!'" At the core of her practice is attunement to others, especially when critiquing a student's work: "It's really *tender*," she says.

Claire is a teacher's teacher who is known for asking questions that make people think. Beneath her quiet, even sober, demeanor is Claire the writer who "must" write, and who shares her writing with students in order to open up discussion: "*Embrace* the discourse that might follow," she says, "understanding that there's someone waiting who has something to say more powerful … than *I* do … but (they) don't know how to *speak*, because they've not heard someone take that *risk*

and speak *first*." Claire is a statuesque African American woman in her 50's who wears loose, flowing garments of subdued jewel shades. Because of her height and dignified demeanor, Claire commands attention. Deeply private, she seems to hold herself apart until she steps into the classroom, or sits down one-on-one to talk. Then, her caring nature shines, and she is completely present to those who find themselves in her company. Claire has earned both Master's and Doctorate degrees in Education. A retired middle school teacher from the Baltimore City school system, Claire has worked as an adjunct professor teaching writing at Towson University for many years. In addition, she has been a leader and coordinator of graduate programs within the Maryland Writing Project since she attended a summer institute in 1991. Integral to her work as a writing teacher is her commitment to sharing herself through her writing, and showing students the importance of revision: "It means *I* have homework, and everything I turn in is not camera-ready … and that's another thing to understand: revision doesn't mean it's always wrong, it's something that's an alternative to what exists; it's an enhancement, a departure from." As a writing teacher of other writing teachers, Claire emphasizes the strengthening of student voice: "You have to respect your writing privately, and understand that it's almost like undressing in public, because every letter exposes this lifeblood." Furthermore, this is a delicate process: "My students come out of hiding, but not necessarily *willingly*." Although it can be difficult, Claire respects her students' wish for the "privacy to be in hiding."

David is a full professor in the English department at Towson University where he has been teaching for 33 years; he holds a Doctorate in English Literature.

Of the six conversants in this study, David was the only one with whom I was less acquainted. However, my colleague recommended him as a potential participant because of his enthusiasm, excellent teaching, and scholarly commitment to writing. Although I was reluctant to impose, he invited me to his home in Charles Village where we could talk informally, with his two mongrel dogs curled up at our feet. David was relaxed and generous with his time, despite the fact that he was deep into writing a book, preparing for an NCATE accreditation visit, and teaching three courses. He is a dark-haired man of medium height who sports a small mustache and—when teaching—a distinctive bowtie that signals his individuality. At Towson, David describes himself as "a utility in-fielder," teaching courses in British literature, Victorian literature, poetry writing, lesbian and gay autobiography, and elements of fiction. His own poetry has been widely published, together with numerous scholarly articles and books. While eloquent and thoughtful, David peppers his conversation with clever and gently self-deprecating references. "The other thing you discover as a writer is that you think, 'God!' you don't know how much you're revealing about yourself, or you wouldn't write at all!" As for teaching, he talks openly about risk-taking: "You have to … take that risk … of failure. And in the middle of this, because the students were absolutely silent as they worked, writing, I thought, 'Oh, this is crazy! It's not going to work at all! … I was frightened; I was terrified." He refers to his advancing deafness, and what it makes possible in his classes: "I would advocate teachers *pretending* that they're going deaf, because first of all, it makes you vulnerable in some ways. You have to admit to the students that you can't hear, but it also forces them to speak up and articulate and speak more slowly … and it also

really indicates that you're *listening*!" For David, part of the pleasure in writing and teaching writing "is that … there *aren't* any formulas all the time."

Now that the conversants in this study have been introduced to you in all their paradoxical complexity, I will embark on a rendering of our many conversations about pedagogy in the teaching of writing. The thematic renderings revolve around the paradoxes of this Pedagogy of the In-Between.

Knowing and Not Knowing

> Acknowledging the infinite complexity of the universe makes certainty problematic, and that can be unsettling. I have long been conscious of my own uncertainty, but it has been a private concern. (Dudley-Marling, 1996, in Heshusius & Ballard, p. 35)

> Yet even (or especially) the best educators temper their practice with the knowledge that we all often fall short and do not always know what is best. (van Manen, 1991, p. xii)

Teachers speak of many tensions in the teaching of writing. Across the board, they are uncertain whether they have helped their students become better writers in the space of a 15-week semester. At the same moment, the writing teachers in this study embrace that very uncertainty as the core of what it is to teach students. When I ask David, a veteran professor, how he knows that a student has become a better writer, he replies, "I think … you don't! You absolutely don't!" And then, after an imperceptible pause, he adds, "Well, you do and you don't!" Aoki (2005e) invites educators such as David to be drawn, as he is, "into the fold of a discursive imaginary that can entertain 'both this and that,' 'neither this nor that'—a space of paradox, ambiguity and ambivalence" (p. 317). In the oscillating space of "and," a teacher of writing moves within and between knowing and not knowing. She greets conjunction for what it makes possible. As Aoki writes:

> The tensioned space of both "and/not-and" is a space of conjoining and disrupting, indeed, a generative space of possibilities, a space wherein in tensioned ambiguity, newness emerges. (2005e, p. 318)

Some persons cleave to the view that teachers are persons who know the answers, answers which it is their task to challenge their students to find. Yet one paradox in teaching, and in the teaching of writing, is that *not exactly knowing* ("You do, and you don't!") names the lived experience of the teachers in my study.

Aoki (2005b) writes about a related paradoxical gap in which teachers find themselves: "Miss O soon finds that her pedagogic situation is a living in tensionality that emerges, in part, from indwelling in a zone between two curriculum worlds: the worlds of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived experiences" (p. 159). Here, Aoki poses Miss O's dilemma: she must follow a certain curriculum plan (as subject matter), and at the same time, she is called to attend to her students as living, breathing individuals. This situation puts Miss O smack dab in-between the tensions that these two curricula generate. She is called on to make pedagogically sound decisions within this realm of simultaneous pulls.

> The teacher in becoming involved with his [or her] students enters their world as he [or she] allows them to enter his [sic] and engages himself [sic] with students mutually in action-reflection oriented activities. (Aoki, 2005a, p. 131)

Such involvement lies at the heart of what Aoki calls "critical venturing together" (2005a, p. 131). The nature of the pedagogic journey is one in which awareness of our students and awareness of subject matter co-exist.

Writing as Tensioned Space

It seems to me that the teaching of writing within the tensioned space that Aoki calls "the Zone of Between" is even more challenging due to the nature of

writing itself. For writing is very difficult to pin down. As Murray (1999) suggests, writing is a kind of thinking on paper, thinking that unfolds in the very doing. We engage in writing as a way to navigate in thought. Concurrently, we know that the only way *out* of tangled ideas is *through* actual writing. Imagine the young writer, perplexed until the words start tumbling onto the page; then, and only then, gazing at the script, or the word processed font, does he or she perceive a possible direction. In essence, the writing process is tension-laden. Might we not say that writing is an elongation of knowing and not knowing? Experienced writers and teachers of writing identify the elongation in various ways. Murray asks: "What will you write? You don't know. Most of all, writers write to surprise themselves, racing into the unknown in search of the known" (1999, p. 1). Barthelme says: "Writing is a process of dealing with not-knowing, a forcing of what and how" (1997, p. 12).

The teaching of writing thrives when teachers are also writers. Indeed, for the past two decades, best practice in the teaching of writing has emphasized the importance of teacher-writers who write along with their students. The National Writing Project, established in 1974 as a professional development organization for teachers of writing to improve the teaching of writing, has stood at the forefront of the movement. That teachers of writing must also write is one of the NWP's basic assumptions. A Writing Project Co-Director articulates a core belief guiding writing project work:

> When teachers write, we give ourselves a chance to test our own writing assignments … we help demystify the act of writing … we learn empathy for our students … we become partners in a community of writers … Writing makes us experts on teaching writing. (Gillespie, 1985, n.p.)

In planning this study, I intentionally selected five Writing Project teachers who—being writers as well as writing teachers—are practitioners of what they teach. The sixth conversant, a published poet and professor of writing and literature, is also open with his students about his process as a writer. Thus, I knew that my writer-teachers were craft persons, used to honing meaning.

"And" Musings

> I feel really bad that I haven't written in two days … and that day I'll write three or four entries and it's great stuff … coming out … It's clean, it's flowing … but it's tough. I hate it. (Rus)

Embodying their craft, the teacher-writers in this study share their experiences as writers, and the way in which writing (or not) interacts with their teaching. *Not* writing emerges as an embodied source of tension for many. Rus describes it as feeling "So clogged up that it takes maybe …. 500 words to … get that cleared out of my system before it can flow again." And Judy adds, "It's a tension … kind of like too much coffee!" This not-writing erodes Judy's confidence as a writing teacher, one who views active engagement with her own work as a matter of integrity:

> I can find a million excuses not to write … during the school year, I really put everything I've got into the classes … I don't have any time left, and I don't have any energy left, so that's why I don't write. And then I'm saying, "I'm a charlatan." I pretend I'm a writer, I tell my students I'm a writer … How can I be a writer and not write?

As she wrestles with this question in our group conversation, the other writer-teachers jump in to offer perspective. Cheryl muses: "Writing is hard work." Yes, Judy agrees, "Hard, but exciting work." Hearing the energy in Judy's words, Cheryl suggests that Judy may just be a "spurter," someone who writes best in small

increments of time, rather than the type of person who says, "I can't even put on clothes until I've written 500 words." Judy considers this, nodding.

As the teachers exchange thoughts on Judy's unique writing process, quiet settles over the group. I realize that we are conferring with Judy, just as we often do with our students. Teachers of writing mediate—they stand in the middle of what writing students discover in early drafts and the place where fledgling meaning travels. And the student's understanding is amplified to the extent that we share our own angst with the writing process. As Atwell comments, "I could relate to my students as a writer because we were all acting on our intentions as writers; insights from my writing experiences helped me to help them" (1998, p. 15). Furthermore, as writing teachers we have much to learn from our students, and they from each other: "My students have always instructed me," writes Graves: "I have told worried, inexperienced writing teachers to get their students writing … Get them to tell you and the class how they wrote and the curriculum will evolve" (1991, p. xiii).

During the reflective silence we share, I recall Claire who is unable to be present for this group conversation. She is one of those persons for whom writing is "like music … with little notes running through my veins." Pausing, I remark: "But then *other* people say, 'It's hard, it's not easy to do.'"

"I don't know if there's a contradictory statement," observes David. At this, I grope through the words I have just uttered: "Did I say 'but'? I should have said 'and'—it's really in the 'and.'"

Rus nods: "A pretty important conjunction!"

Deleuze (1977/1986) agrees. He points to the stumbling, rich ambiguity residing in "and." It is in the place where we stammer out meaning that meaning emerges. So, writing both flows and stops for us as writers. Here, the "and" suggests the struggle in which we are perpetually engaged, the tension to both push through and let go. While Barthelme (1997) imagines writing as a "forcing of what and how," he can also refer to the agility of words to combine themselves in unique ways, apparently beyond the writer's control. As writers we maintain ourselves within this tension, and are thus positioned to support our students. Atwell (1998) puts it well:

> I have almost overcome my anxiety about revealing to the world how hard and slow writing is for me, and how wildly off-base my first attempts can be. I learned that I only have to write a little better than my students for them to learn from my demonstrations … in conferences, students believe I know what I'm talking about when I sit down with them and their writing. I can only become their mentor, someone whose advice carries weight and truth, because I know writing from the inside, and I've shown them I do. (p. 26)

To sustain themselves as writers, most of the teacher-writers keep journals, or daybooks, which serve as repositories of thoughts that might later be woven into longer pieces. Rus, for example, looks forward to those precious moments carved out from his schedule as writing teacher and the father to three young children, to write in his daybook. The practice of daily writing is one that Murray (1991) views as essential for exploration: "Never a day without a line … writers write… the time at the writing desk can be short (or) you can write during breaks at work, in the car, waiting for someone to pick you up" (pp. 47-48). And in fact, Rus describes the pleasure of sitting in the parking lot outside his daughter's gymnastics class and writing in his daybook. Sliding back the front seat, he takes out his daybook, and immerses himself in the pages. In so doing, Rus emulates what Murray (1991)

suggests: utilize small fragments of time. So it is not surprising that when not-writing, Judy senses the disconnect between herself as writer and as teacher of writing. Perhaps she is also afflicted with perfectionism, which proves deadly to all writers, no matter how experienced. We all might heed Murray's antidote for inflated standards on early drafts: "Write badly if you have to but finish so that you can visualize the entire draft and see what needs to be done when you revise" (1991, p. 48).

The writer-teachers in this study recognize the conjoined challenges and possibilities inherent in being a writer. For most of them, it is essential to write, *and* it can be hard, exciting work. When the writing flows, as it occasionally does for my conversants—Judy included—the experience exhilarates. She reflects: "I honestly am thrilled when I'm writing and I've looked out the window and thought, *It's morning,* and I'm writing and writing and then, *It's getting dark!* How did that happen?" And Claire says: "It's a matter of necessity—I *have* to write." Even Cheryl—whose lifelong struggle to write well increases her empathy for her own students—even Cheryl experiences deep satisfaction when a piece works: "When I *do* write something that is successful … then I'm extremely proud of myself!" DaMaris even confesses annoyance over the fact that her body forces her to take breaks from writing. Sometimes she wishes that she was immune from the call of nature so that she could continue to write, "despite the fact that I may be embarrassed—writing and expression is that important to me, where all these other things are not."

Thus, the writer-teachers in this study confront the highs and the lows, the loves and the hates, the flows and the clogs of writing. Because of their struggles to

remain immersed in the writing process, they can honestly relate to the difficulty their students have in getting started, in making sense through slow revision, and in deciding—within constraints of time and energy—when a particular piece of writing is "done." As the National Council of Teachers of English position statement on the teaching of composition notes: "Writing teachers should themselves be writers. Through experiencing the struggles and joys of writing, teachers learn that their students will need guidance and support throughout the writing process, not merely comments on the written product" (National Council of Teachers of English, 1985).

Paradoxically, the teaching of writing may hinder the writing teacher's writing. A common dilemma is not having enough time to devote to one's own work, a quandary that Judy so well expresses. Referring to the NCTE position statement recommending that writing classrooms have 20 or fewer students, Lindemann (2001, p. 256) points out that most writing teachers teach many more students than that. Such numbers inhibit the one-on-one coaching so necessary to assist students with their drafts. Additionally, the reading of 80 or more student essays at home diminishes the opportunities for writing teachers to engage as writers themselves. For although teachers may set aside blocks of time during class for writing, and write along with their students, other writing projects that demand sustained focus and energy must usually be relegated to weekends or longer breaks. As for getting feedback on his own writing, Rus cautions teachers to not take too much from those sessions when students read the teacher's draft-in-progress. Students may give a generally positive response that misses some of the finer points of craft. In order for him to stretch and grow as a writer, Rus turns to his own writing peers for tough,

penetrating critique. His tolerance for unadorned feedback has grown as his experience as a writer has expanded. Our own writing students, less practiced in giving and receiving critique, may tread more softly. Still, when all is said and done, writing teachers need to remember that "We too are writers and, like our students, wrestle with the difficult process of creating meaning through language" (Lindemann, 2001, p. 305).

All the teachers in this study have reflected on the teaching of writing, drawing on their experiences as writers who have traveled the writing path for many years. Whether their genre is poetry, creative non-fiction, journals, fiction, scholarly papers, or drama, these teachers personify what they believe about the best practice in the teaching of writing. As writers and as teachers, they are stretched by the pedagogical demands of a craft that is constantly in the process of becoming what it not yet is: "When I am in language, writing what I do not yet want to write, something happens and I am led by words I do not expect to meanings I had not foreseen" (Murray, 1991, p. 47). Here, Murray alludes to the dynamic exchange between *thinking* and *writing*. Levin (1985) reminds us of the "Potential-for-being of which we are capable by virtue of the gift of our hands" (p. 122). Heidegger's reflections on thinking, craft, and hands also provide rich connections:

> The hand is something altogether peculiar. In the common view, the hand is part of our bodily organism. But the hand's essence can never be determined, or explained, by its being an organ that can grasp …
>
> But the craft of the hand is richer than we commonly imagine. The hand does not only grasp and catch, or push and pull. The hand reaches and extends, receives and welcomes—and not just things: the hand extends itself, and receives its own welcome in the hands of others … Every motion of the hand in every one of its works carries itself through the element of thinking, every bearing of the hands bears itself in that element. All the work of the hand is

> rooted in thinking. Therefore, thinking itself is man's simplest, and for that reason hardest, handiwork. (1993e, p. 381)

Thinking on paper, the teacher-writers in this study seek to make their *own* handicraft transparent to young writers. In so doing, these teachers embody the "and" between "writer" and "teacher," a space of conjunction where tension and possibility co-exist.

Not Knowing as a Starting Point

Teaching challenges the practitioner's integrity. As Palmer (1998) says, "The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul" (p. 2). If writing is the working out of questions on the page, a process of *re-solution* in the sense of solving issues over and over again, so then is the teaching of writing. In this realm, writing teachers encounter their own reflections as persons. "To be a person requires both honesty and courage," writes Lindemann (2001, p. 305). She continues: "To be a person is much more difficult than being an authority." Indeed, it is the person to person encounter that grounds us as teachers. David finds that articulating his uncertainty as a person strengthens trust between his students and himself. It comes down to admitting one's own "comfort with not knowing … That's a very difficult space to create … we're (teachers) made to feel uncomfortable by that," he reflects, for teachers are expected to know the "right" answers. In illustration of his point, David recalls a seminar he attended where the renowned lecturer expressed confusion about a poem under consideration, at the same time inviting students to help her figure it out. Her candor created an opening for David: "It was a wonderful thing to have the teacher make as her *starting point* her inability

to understand something, to *invite* the students to help *her* understand." In his own classroom, David disarms students by telling them, "It's taken me 30 years to become as stupid as I am!" Such willingness to appear unsure, when coupled with kindness and grasp of content, reassure the unsure student. For to lay aside pretense, admit fallibility and incomplete understanding is—as writing teachers—to reside in the gap between themselves and their students. Graves (2001) once more emphasizes the importance of the teacher's truthfulness:

> It is the quality of our own lives as we engage with the world that is one of the major sources of energy for our students. It is the questions you ask aloud about the world, your curiosity, the books you read, and your personal use of writing that teach far more than any methodological course you've ever taken. Yes, there are approaches to teaching that we need to know but they take second place to the conditions for learning. You, the teacher, are the most important condition in the room. (p. 35)

Indeed, for David, Rus, Judy, Claire, DaMaris and Cheryl, personal integrity stands out as "the most important condition in the room."

Palmer (1998) is another advocate for the notion that our personhood shapes our teaching; he refers to "the inner landscape of a teacher's life" (p. 2). He writes: "Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse" (1998, p. 2). Charting the terrain that makes good teaching possible, Palmer says:

> Reduce teaching to intellect and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to spiritual and it loses its anchor to the world. Intellect, emotion, and spirit depend on each other for wholeness. They are interwoven in the human self and in education at its best. (1998, p. 4)

Comfortable to be Uncomfortable

Teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between dwell with their students in a paradoxical realm. The paradox resides in the paramount need to create a comfortable classroom environment where students feel safe to open up and share writing that may not only be unpolished, but also written on subjects of a sensitive nature. As writing teachers, we strive to line the nest with reassuring words and actions so that our students' public flight does not end up as a crash landing. Phrases such as "a safe place" and "comfort zone" pepper our many conversations about writing classrooms. Judy characterizes her work as a writing teacher in this way: "That's just what I'm trying to help people do … be comfortable and confident." David adds:

> You need to have a sufficient openness so that students become uncomfortable. It has to be comfortable enough so that they can become uncomfortable, so we're constantly both trying to make students free enough and tell them it's all right to be uncomfortable.

Judy's use of the phrase "just what I'm trying to help people do" reveals an orientation that is not lost on her students. For Judy's humility speaks of her tendency to move into the background, even as such a pedagogical position allows one's students to move into the foreground. As Rus says, "It … comes down to the teacher to provide that environment … where they (students) can begin the process of unlocking and taking those risks."

Wounded, Hurt, and Scarred

Rus has thought deeply about the willingness of students to take risks. He traces their reluctance to early experiences in school when they began to receive grades for their work: "Those are the first set of hoops that are put in front of them …

'This is what you have to do for your A …' And so, even as early as eight years old, they're learning to go through hoops to get these rewards."

Throughout school where students are expected to perform a number of mental acrobatics, they quickly learn the expectations of individual teachers. Students soon figure out the pattern of hoops through which they're expected to jump. It becomes habit to attune themselves to an outside system of rewards and punishments. Students forget to trust and value the work they have done. "If we touch the oven at an early age, we learn not to touch that oven again," says Rus. To avoid getting burned, students back away from risk-taking, and try to play it safe: "'I can't take risks because taking risks means I might get a lower grade … I don't want to be hurt, I don't want to be wounded, I don't want to be scarred with a lower grade.'"

Rus remarks on his many undergraduate students who are "wounded and hurt and scarred." Their pens are effectively clogged due to prior experiences when a teacher or other severe critic ambushed them as writers. One student's writing had been received with comments such as: "I don't get it! What are you doing? … This isn't even a complete sentence … Didn't you go to school at all?" Lindemann (2001) observes: "Most of these (negative) attitudes developed slowly, as students sat year after year in English classes where … the teacher's comments on papers rarely praised strengths or offered practical suggestions for addressing weaknesses, where students never had opportunities to draft several versions of an assignment before it was due" (p. 190).

Indeed, one of Rus's greatest challenges as a teacher of writing at the undergraduate level is to salve wounds, those sore places in the soul that are shielded

from further hurt. He observes: "They take what measures they need to make sure they don't get hurt again … it's very tough for them" to venture away from writing that is safe, predictable, and formulaic. Some still think that all writing must be done according to the five paragraph theme. Lindemann (2001) notes: "Writing teachers often spend considerable time relaxing their students' grip on the five-paragraph model" (p. 134). Encouraging students to lower their guard takes patience and experience, Rus finds. They seek to appear invulnerable, a stance that can be lethal to one's growth. As O'Donohue (1999) says: "We cannot let the heart be too easily seen, or we will get hurt … The extreme response to hurt is to close the heart. Yet to make yourself invulnerable is to lose something very precious. You put yourself outside the arena of risk where possibility and growth are alive" (pp. 153-154).

Recognizing that many student writers remain unsure, Rus prepares the ground for risk-taking by providing ample opportunity for his students to engage in daily, ungraded writing, such as in the daybook. Writing without worrying about a grade, his writing students experience a glimpse of "greater possibilities." He says, "You open up these doors for a newfound appreciation and confidence and passion for writing." The daybook becomes a place of safety, where regular low-stakes writing practice eases students to "take those risks and practice the *writing* of it, not just the knowledge of it." Murray (2001) has coined the phrase, "the practice school of writing," while Lindemann (2001) draws this analogy to teaching: "Knowing about teaching does not always translate into being an effective teacher, any more than knowing about writing makes students effective writers" (p. 253). In short,

practice—while not making perfect—extends one's range of motion, whether as writer or as teacher of writers.

A term borrowed from Donald Murray (1999), the daybook to which Rus refers is, literally, "a book of days." Daybooks help students engage in the construction of personal meaning while they compile a valuable resource to mine for future writing. Rus chooses to neither collect nor grade student daybooks, out of the conviction that all writers need a place where external judgment is absent if they are to explore genuinely. Lindemann (2001) also supports the use of journals in writing classrooms: "Journals offer students a place to write without fear of making mistakes or facing criticism for what they have to say" (p. 117). In Rus's classrooms, daybooks are for exploration, not exposure: "A daybook is the place where they should be able to go where there is absolutely no judgment—and all risks should be taken in that book, because they're always in possession and always in control." In the daybook, a student might reclaim the power of his or her thoughts, finding a place to voice what matters personally. Murray considers additional ways in which his daybook functions:

> The daybook stimulates my thinking, helps me make use of small fragments of time, which on many days is all the time I have to write. There is no sign of struggle. I'm not fighting writing, I'm playing with writing. If it isn't fun, if nothing is happening, I stop and wait until the magic begins. (1999, p. 13)

Most writing teachers who maintain a daybook or journal of their own are able to impart to students the pleasure that comes of having somewhere to appear, free of censure. DaMaris writes:

> Every time I write (in my journal), I live freely outside of myself and I'm liberated from my body and in a sense from the things that cripple me, like my

> height, my color, my gender, my fears of being imperfect. When I write, those things disappear.

How ironic, and another paradox of being, that the embodied act of writing can—at the very moment it occurs—give to the writer a sense of liberation from her body. The body encloses us and makes possible our transcendence. DaMaris expresses her ambivalence about being contained within a body whose mind ranges far and free. DaMaris says, "I really believe that human beings are dirt and divinity … God's kiss to earth." At the same moment, our confinement within skin and bones is a source of frustration to her: "One of God's worst punishments!" Was God playing a cosmic joke on us when He gave us our mortal, flawed selves? Yet, DaMaris appreciates the limits of her body, too: "The body brings balance, and it allows me—when I'm going too far—to know where I'm headed, it allows me to know that things aren't okay." A moment later, she considers the power we as humans have when we write: "When you write, it's kind of almost in-between, because it's a way to articulate everything. It's a way to articulate everything that's going on in your mind." For DaMaris, the physical act of writing is an act of discovery. Writing by hand in her journal helps DaMaris experience what Chandler calls "a resonance of privacy and informality … which makes it a supportive medium for the initial expression of tentative ideas" (n.d.,n.p.). Might the embodied act of writing, then, be in-between groundedness ("dirt") and transcendence ("divinity")? As Barthes says, "The pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas" (1975, p. 17).

DaMaris finds that her writing students look forward to their weekly journal assignments because (they know that) "I'm not going to limit the direction in which

they're going … students are able to make a lot of connections … (to) some of the emotional things that … may constantly be on their mind." She sums up her hopes as a teacher of writing: "I really want them to grow as people; I think it's more important that they grow as people than as students." With a smile she recalls a particular student:

> I don't even think she was conscious of what she did (we were writing about independence) and what it means to them … and she equated independence (to) a jump rope game: 'Sometimes you get hit in the face with the rope.' And she went into all the things that independence has given her and … it was so beautiful! I was really impressed!

In contrast to Rus's hands-off policy when it comes to daybooks, Claire does collect her students' journals on an intermittent basis, making a point to respond briefly to what they have written. In this way, she keeps her finger on the pulse of what is happening in her students' lives as writers. For Judy's part, while having revisited the daybook concept over the years, she now has students maintain a learning journal that she collects and to which she responds. To her delight, many students who are reticent about contributing verbally in classroom discussions may turn to the learning journal to express their thoughts about readings and other issues. In this way, Judy is able to "see" and "hear" the voices of all her students, even the shyest. For Judy, as for the other teachers in this study, making student voice audible is fundamental to their practice as teachers of writing. Murray (1991) points out that "Voice is the most important element in writing. It is what attracts, holds, and persuades your readers" (p. 137). While voice (formal or informal) will vary according to the writer's message and writing situation, Murray believes that "the focus should be on the voice of the individual text" (p. 141). Lindemann (2001)

concurs: “We need to encourage them to listen to their material and help them discover options for organizing it” (p. 133).

Carefully listening to that voice yields to the student writer and to the writing teacher a strong sense of what is needed, what is just right or what requires additional work. The use of informal journals or daybooks reacquaints students with the sound of their voices, the unique cadence of their sentences. Not only this, but the voice of this text is one of intimacy and authority, author and hearer being one and the same. In the daybook or journal, there is no right or wrong, no hoops to jump through.

Many of my writing students, although initially resistant to daily daybook writing, describe a growing fluency in their writing accompanied by a sense of release. Might not this release be akin to the freeing up that DaMaris mentions earlier? Certainly, many students enter our writing classrooms with a view of writing—not as a source of liberation—but as a prison demarcated by deadlines. Interestingly, the term “deadline” comes to us from the prison system, a deadline being “A boundary line in a prison that prisoners can cross only at the risk of being shot” (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 466). By contrast, journal writing—with its absence of both hoops and deadlines—sets up zones of safety for writing students. There, they can “sound off” without worrying that someone is going to shoot them down. Indeed, for the writing teachers in this study, their classrooms are also places that foster an atmosphere of safety and comfort,“like a big daybook,” Rus says.

The Privacy to Hide

Writing with honesty—whether in essays or daybooks—implies risk-taking. Chief among the pedagogical concerns of writing teachers is how far to push a student into the public arena. Claire recalls a female student who always used to sit in the back of the room with a row of desks separating her from the rest of the students. In a journal exchange, Claire validates her student's choice of seating as a statement of the young woman's comfort level. Indeed, she continues, "They totally understand that I respected their privacy, including their privacy to be in hiding." Whether that hiding takes place in the classroom or on the page, teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between need to honor the space that students carve out for themselves. Still, in what emerges as yet another paradox that troubles pedagogy, writing teachers continue to encourage students to venture out. A recent encounter with one of my writing students brings out this tension.

Stan is a tall, dark haired 19-year-old enrolled in my freshman composition class. At the first class meeting, he tells me about his ADHD and certain accommodations to which he is entitled, such as extended time on tests. Two weeks into the semester, I detain him after class to ask him how things are going. Fine, he says. Then, the day before his class's first writing support group, during which students read and critique the second draft of an essay, Stan lingers after the others have left. "I have a problem," he says. I immediately think that he has been unable to generate the revised draft. Then, I take a good look at Sam—his eyes are moist. I feel my heart contract, feel myself called to Sam's presence. As van Manen (2003) observes, "Pedagogy announces itself not as entity, behavior, feeling, or emotion but

through them" (p. 50). Pulled toward Sam, I listen. The topic of his essay is his family's recent discovery of a certain kind of hereditary cancer. In the draft that I have already read, Stan describes his dismay upon learning that he, too, carries the gene; he candidly expresses his utter loneliness upon hearing the diagnosis. "My family doesn't want anyone else to find out," he tells me now, looking away. And we both know that it is Stan, too, who wishes to hide from his peers.

I am momentarily filled with guilt. Although I have been teaching writing for many years, I realize that—when giving Stan's class this essay assignment—I had neglected to remind them what the syllabus lays out: that they would be sharing their essays in small groups. I consider whether Stan's feelings might be an amplification of students' reticence to read their writing to peers. When I ask my students at the beginning of the semester how they feel about sharing their work, they respond that while they don't have a problem letting the teacher read their writing, they are reluctant for other students to do so. Still preoccupied with a recent move to Florida and the preparation for a new teaching job, I forget that certain students—and these Florida students were only freshmen—might write about something which they were unwilling to share with others. It feels to me as if I have missed, or misjudged, the persons whom my students are. In truth, to fully attend to my writers sometimes makes me feel as if I am more therapist than teacher. I am not alone in this perception. David remarks:

> Most writing classes become therapy classes because the problems in writing, beyond the mechanical things, really have to do with what people will permit themselves to say or to feel or to think, and that's all psychological.

While these thoughts swirl through my brain, I realize that Stan is waiting for my response. Just as the Miss O in Aoki's essay (2005b), I am torn between curriculum as plan and curriculum as lived. There is my empathy for Stan co-existing with my belief in peer response as integral to the writing workshop format of our class. Without a doubt, it would be a violation of Stan's right to hide to insist that he read against his will. As a teacher of writing, I firmly believe that reading his work out loud to other students will help Stan arrive at helpful insights about his draft. Murray (1991) agrees: "I read aloud, listening to my draft. The music of a draft, perhaps more than any single element, tells me what I may choose to develop from the first draft" (p. 58).

Accordingly, I weigh my words carefully. Would it be possible for him to bring *some* piece of writing to class on the next day (if not this essay), in order to take part in writing support group? Silently, Stan considers my suggestion. The air is charged, and I feel suspended between the words that I've just uttered and Stan's answer. I am alert, my scalp tightens. If ever there was a Zone of Between (Aoki, 2005b), here it is. After several seconds, Stan speaks in a soft and halting voice: "Okay. Maybe." He pauses. He will speak with his family tonight and—if they have no objection—he will share *limited* portions of the essay. I nod, deeply relieved.

As I watch Stan leave, I am struck with the mystery of the person he is. At the same time, I feel grateful that he came to me with his dilemma. I feel humbled at the immensity of my students' lives and reawakened to the reality that our interactions take up such a small space in those lives. I reflect on my relief. In a sense, Stan and I have reached a common ground—somewhere in the in-between—within the tension

of his comfort zone and mine as teacher who seeks to bring him forward. Pedagogically, we teachers are suspended between curriculum as plan and curriculum as lived (Aoki, 2005b). Ours is a relationship founded on mystery. As Ellsworth (1997, p. 9) says, "The pedagogical relation itself is unpredictable, incorrigible, uncontrollable, unmanageable, disobedient." Sam and I have "resolved" the irresolute tension.

Stepping Forward and Stepping Back

> Tact means to step back whenever possible, but remaining available when things turn problematic. By stepping back, the adult creates space in which the young person is enabled to make decisions and act in his or her own way. (van Manen, 1991, p. 162)

Rus remembers his early days learning the choreography of teaching: "I wanted things to happen immediately, I wanted to see changes … And I got frustrated." Before long, he realized that such an expectation-laden focus toward his writing students could set up barriers to their learning. As a novice teacher, Rus may have unwittingly shaped a course in which his dynamic style of delivery dominated. As Lindemann (2001) points out: "While teacher-centered courses have value, they do not make effective writing courses … when students become the significant 'who,' the observer views quite a different scene" (p. 258). Before long, Rus came to the realization that teaching is "never about you (the teacher) … it's always about them."

> I've learned that you may not get those "Ah-hah!" moments with them for some time—it may not come until the end of the semester, for some of them it may not come until five years later that you're in the SuperFresh in your …dirty sweats and it's late and … a student comes up to you and says, "Thanks! It took me a year after your class to realize what a good writer I am …"

Rus quotes from Lao-tzu: "Do your work and step back." The complete quotation of the Chinese philosopher is: "Do your work, then step back. The only path to serenity" (Lao-tzu, n.d., n.p.). Yet, what is it to "step back?" If in a process-oriented writing course it is the student, not the teacher, who is the significant "who," then where does the writing teacher stand? Lindemann (2001) notes that the teacher remains the one who helps orchestrate the writing scene through having "planned, coordinated, and managed activities for every student in his [sic] class" (p. 258). She graphically depicts the writing teacher as being in a rhetorical relationship with students. She draws a triangle with the writing teacher occupying the lower left hand corner of the triangle, the "content" (writing) at the apex, and the writer at the lower right hand corner. To me, it is the space *within* the triangle that appears as a pedagogically rich site. For even as the teacher of writing creates a physical space between himself and the student, is not an opening created between them that allows for movement and growth? Heidegger writes of a "clearing." He says, "We call this openness that grants a possible letting appear and show 'clearing'" (1993h, p. 441). Tracing the origin of the German word, *Lichtung*, Heidegger describes "clearing" as a space emerging from a dense forest (p. 441). As writing teachers whose stepping back pedagogy guides students toward clearings, we help ensure that our students' voices come out into the open. Is that when, as the Chinese philosopher suggests, serenity descends?

When to approach and when to step back, when to insist and when to give way, when to speak and when to listen—all conjoin in the teacher who is *deeply interested in* her students, "interested" in the original embodied meaning of *inter-esse*

as being or standing in the midst of something. This, then, is where—as writing teachers—we stand: in the middle, with the persons our students are. Van Manen (1991) reminds us:

> Tactful action is thoughtful, mindful, heedful … In a sense, tact is less a form of knowledge than it is a way of acting … Tact is the effect one has on another person, even if the tact consists, as it often does, in holding back, waiting. (p. 127)

Paradoxically, the place that Rus has come to as a writing teacher both draws him up short and allows him to go forward in his work. He says, "All I can do is just jump in and say, 'Here's what I have to offer …'" One might say he steps forward unarmed with nothing but open arms, right into what Ellsworth (1997) calls "the impossibility of teaching" (pp. 8-9). For "Embracing teaching as a paradoxical relation—allowing it its paradoxes—paradoxically, allows teaching to happen" (Ellsworth, p. 16).

Slack and Taut

In the experience described above, I recall the seconds as I await Stan's response. Should I press him more? Should I retreat? The tension felt as I "felt him out" reveals a paradox that Claire names: "There has to be an environment that is safe, but also inviting to someone who's at a point of taking a risk, so a teacher of writing has to be sensitive—it's a combination of sensitivity and firmness."

Teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between seek to frame tactful responses to students venturing out in their writing. For writer-teachers realize that writing exposes vulnerabilities; cognizant of students' resistance to self-disclosure, teachers nudge their students toward the precipice of taking risks, and

eventually, of going public. Donald Murray (1991), writing about the revision process, discusses why many beginning writers resist re-writing:

> There is a logic to this. Writing is always an act of self-exposure. When we finish a draft all writers feel vulnerable. Writing strips away our intellectual clothes and shows the world what we know and what we don't know; it reveals what we think and feel. (p. 2)

Bass (2000) also emphasizes the self-revelatory dimension of revision: "When students are given time and encouragement to think about their thoughts written down, they are reflecting on their written work and on themselves as writers and as human beings" (p. 251).

Ironically, in a university setting where ideas are purportedly valued, and where students are supposed to broaden themselves intellectually through interpretation and analysis, they have little or no opportunity to write *themselves* on to the page. The academic environment values objectivity and the finished product over subjectivity and process; it is no wonder that students shy away from authentic writing that reveals the persons they are, costuming themselves instead in intellectual finery. As Palmer (1998) notes: "Though the academy claims to value multiple modes of knowing, it honors only one—an 'objective' way of knowing that takes us into the 'real' world by taking us 'out of ourselves'" (p. 18).

Following this line of thought, it is not surprising that when we ask students to "get real" in their writing, their apprehension escalates. As teachers of writing, we are attuned to their fear. We take heed, sharing with them *our* nervousness in exposing our writing to other readers. As van Manen (1991) says:

> In a real sense every human being is vulnerable; every human being is mortal and subject to fears and dangers. Every human being is my other. The other is

> actually or potentially weak and vulnerable, just as I know myself to be actually or potentially weak or vulnerable. (p. 141)

Thus, while we do not disregard our students' reticence, we seek to lead them out from their comfort zones through empathy.

Several years ago, I made a collage, using as the centerpiece a photograph in which two rocky bluffs are spanned by a crude rope bridge. Clambering hand over hand along the rope is a sole climber, suspended above a yawning abyss. That particular photograph resonated with me. For sometimes as a writing teacher, I envision myself as my students' writing partner, standing on one of the bluffs. As the student advances inch by inch, I call out encouraging words. Sometimes I hold the rope taut to give stability; sometimes, if a strong wind comes up, I give slack. Patiently I wait, for she cannot go too fast, nor always according to my pace. Instead, I must exercise the utmost tact, feeling what she needs by way of the tension in the rope. As Rus observes:

> You get a clean sense for when someone is trying that key … and when to back off, when to give somebody some room and that's where the veteran part comes in … But in the end … we don't really know, and we can't worry about it … we'll drive ourselves crazy.

There will be times when the student writer feels exposed to the elements. At such moments, it helps to have a writing teacher who pays out the rope with gentle firmness. However, what about the times when we feel as if we are pulling students in, hand over hand, much as a cowpoke tries to bring in a recalcitrant calf? Perhaps we are simply doing too much of the work—instead, we might direct our attention to another site.

Taking Attendance and Being in Attendance

> Parenting and teaching derive from the same fundamental experience of pedagogy: the human charge of protecting and teaching the young to live in this world and to take responsibility for themselves. (van Manen, 1991, pp. 6-7)

Do you know where your children are?

It is 8:05 am on a Tuesday morning. I glance down at my roster and realize that one third of my freshmen have not yet arrived. Sitting before me are 15 or so sleepy-eyed students with pillow-tousled hair. Now, gazing out at them, I ask what in some ways feels like a rhetorical question: "How *are* you?"

Den Mother and Gatekeeper

Something David has said echoes in my ear: "Den mother—sometimes I feel like (their) den mother." Yes, today my students remind me of young wolves just awoken from a long winter of hibernation. But this is Florida, not Alaska, and better that I ask them rather than assume I know what they are experiencing. By a show of hands, half of them indicate that they have not eaten breakfast, nor do they rarely eat before an 8:00 am class. A number of my students are athletes who have been working out and practicing since 6:00 a.m. I appraise their faces, feeling a tug at my heart. My parental instincts kick in with the realization that these young people are approximately the same age as my own children. I think about the teachers who spend their days with Sarina and Mike, and I hope those teachers are kind. For, as van Manen (1991) writes, "Generally, (parents) are concerned that the teachers 'like' their child because parents sense that a positive affective relationship may benefit the child's school experience" (p. 8). It is common sense to me that hungry students have more problems paying attention than those who are not. My students and I discuss

the options, and decide that once a week, we will hold class in a quiet corner of the dining hall where they can eat breakfast.

Teaching composition to 18-year-olds for the first time in several years, I mull my dual roles as both den mother and attendance keeper. I have what might be called a strict attendance policy: unexcused absences in excess of three lower final grades; chronic lateness or early departures also affect their grades. For in a classroom where a student's absence affects group work, showing up is—as Woody Allen once quipped—half the battle. And of course, unless we all come together as a community of writers, our work cannot progress. As van Manen has pointed out (1991), the teacher depends on the presence of her students in order to teach. The irony embedded in an attendance policy does not escape my notice: for while, as undergraduate teachers, we want students to want to show up, there will be times when—in the new-found freedom of living away from parental vigilance—they choose not to. Then, we as teachers *in loco parentis*, step in to establish course guidelines that we believe will enhance our students' opportunity to learn.

The following week when I give my morning class the thumbs-up to go to the dining hall, I find myself torn. Watching them carry their breakfast trays to the table where we have decided to sit, I steal a glance at my watch. Ours is a 75-minute class and it is already 8:20 a.m.; we still have to study the student essay that serves as a model for writing their descriptive essays. Once more, I am poised at the center of the tension between curriculum as plan and curriculum as lived. This is a junction where I often find myself situated. It is a place where improvisation is born:

> A teacher who is more than a mere instructor is constantly required to know instantly what is pedagogically the right thing to say or do. In other words,

> like the jazz-musician who knows how to improvise in playing a musical composition … so the teacher knows how to improvise the curriculum pedagogically (for the good of the students). (van Manen, 1991, p. 160)

Van Manen refers to this improvisation as a hallmark of pedagogical sensitivity, or tact. At any rate, I emit a sigh, take a sip of coffee, and wait for my hungry students to join me at the table. Theirs are not the only faces that arrest me.

In my other morning class, I wonder: Why is Tim frequently absent? Why does Michelle look so sallow with those dark circles under her eyes? Does smiling Ian, who tells me that he wants to be an attorney, but who doesn't bother to spell check his papers, understand the connection? Attending to them as persons, I am compelled to respond *in loco parentis*: teacher and parent merge—I am both/and. I invite Tim to come in to talk about his absences. He oversleeps, he says. Problem-solving, Tim thinks that a dorm neighbor, another student in our class, can wake him up each morning. Apparently this works, because Tim arrives on time at the next class meeting. Elated, I send him an email applauding his effort. I refer sickly looking Michelle to her freshman year mentor; she continues to attend class, but still looks ragged. Eventually, because she is not doing any of the assignments, Michelle drops the course. After giving Ian a D+ on his essay, I ask him whether his full time job at the car dealership interferes with his studying. A few weeks later, he catches up with me after class and comments that he has greatly reduced his working hours so that he can pay more attention to his grades. As teachers who attend to our students, we count as small victories the times when our concern helps guide students. The important thing is to pay attention to what may be unseen, but lying close to the surface.

The Unseen Roster

I am mindful that taking attendance is far more than the ticking off of names. When I am most present to my students, I look into faces and read body postures. When, due to rush or distraction, I ignore those embodied cues, I sense a certain performative bent to my words and gestures, somehow disconnected from students.

Ellsworth (1997) presents a further dimension of teaching. She writes about the paradoxical nature of the teacher-student relationship—it is never exactly what it appears to be—due to the power of invisible "modes of address," an analytical term she borrows from film studies. For example, a film's mode of address is concerned with the "dynamics of social positioning;" that is: Who does this film think you are? (p. 1). Ellsworth contends that mode of address is relevant to our thinking about teaching pedagogy since curriculum is embedded with assumptions: Who does this curriculum think you are? Thus, given the uniqueness of—and unconscious forces at work within—each student, there can *never* be a perfect fit between curriculum and student. For Ellsworth, the gap between consciousness and unconsciousness is a productive space where creativity and meaning live. Between teacher and student, "The unconscious is the third participant" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 64). Thus, as we scan our students' faces and test the emotional waters in the classroom, we make ourselves present to our students; we work the pedagogical gap between our intended curriculum and the unanticipated and never exactly known. It is within that gap "That education should *embrace* … as a space of *agency*" (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 43).

My students people my reality. Some nights I lose sleep for thinking about certain individuals. Suddenly, it feels as if I have not just two, but fifty-five, children.

Am I doing the right thing by them? My questions multiply, rather than diminish. I might take comfort in Gadamer, who speaks on "the priority of the question" (1960/2002):

> We cannot have experiences without asking questions. Recognizing that an object is different, and not as we first thought, obviously presupposes the question whether it was this or that … the openness essential to experience is precisely the openness of being either this or that … so also the logical form of the question and the negativity that is part of it culminate in a radical negativity: the knowledge of not knowing. (p. 362)

Steeped in "the knowledge of not knowing," I—like Judy—have invoked a higher power: *"Please God, tell me to do what they need!"*

Within a 15-week semester, we often barely skim the surface of curriculum as planned. We study our rosters to note who is present and who is absent, but what truly catches our hearts and makes us wonder are the faces before us, the voices, and the body postures. Teaching evokes questions and questions mark our thinking things through. Again, Gadamer reminds us: "Only the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his [sic] questioning … The art of questioning is the art of ever questioning further—i.e., the art of thinking" (1960/2002, p. 367). We are unable to ignore the individual student who appears at our elbow, emails us, or pokes a head into our office. We live in the relationship: person-to-person with our students, we understand *why* we teach.

Taking Up Residence in the In-Between

Pinar (2005) observes in his introduction to the collected works of Aoki:

> The educational question is one of meaning. It has an ethical meaning, as the teacher recognizes her or his moral obligation to recognize the individuals in the teacher's midst … But in such ethical recognition the teacher does not disappear into the concrete world of the everyday; he or she remains attentive

> to the curriculum-as-plan, but not obsessively so. The teacher works from within; he or she resides "in-between." (p. 15)

As a teacher, what does it mean to take up residence in the "in-between?" When Pinar speaks of the "moral obligation to recognize the individuals in the teacher's midst," to what, exactly, is he referring? Teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between grapple continually with the number and types of essays assigned within a semester and the lived realities of their students. Taking up residence in the in-between might well be the existential state of teachers, a matter of "*placing oneself at the center of the tension* in order to make the best choices" (Hultgren, class notes, February 12, 2002). "Our most insightful and creative moments come at moments of tension …" as we juggle the questions: "'What can I do?'" and "'What must I do?'" (Hultgren, class notes, February 12, 2002). Being at the center of the tension is a familiar place for the teachers of writing in this study. Judy says:

> I just remember working so hard … and worrying so much that I wasn't doing what they needed and trying so hard to do it right … I don't really remember feeling one moment when, 'Oh yes … I'm good at this!' I think it's a day to day thing, and sometimes an hour to hour thing. Don't you think?

I did, and I do. For Judy, working those hours, working those days, being in relationship with the students, and loving them, eventually leads her to a sense that she *might* be doing good. Yet she wonders if it sounds "weird" to admit that she loves her students?

I am reminded of what van Manen (1991) writes about the *in loco parentis* relation between teacher and student, in which "teachers often develop deep affection and love for their students" (p. 7), a love akin to that of parents for their children. Of

course, the love of parent or teacher toward the child is different from that experienced between two lovers or two friends; pedagogic love has intentionality directed at encouraging the potential in the young person. Furthermore, the love that Judy feels for her students depends on a pedagogical relationship wherein her students recognize and accept Judy as their teacher. Van Manen writes about our dependence on students to make it possible for us to do our work in a loving way: "The adult can only have pedagogical influence over a … young person when the authority is based, not on power, but on love, affection, and internalized sanction on the part of the child" (1991, p. 70). Thus, it is a sign of her caring and pedagogical thoughtfulness (not of "weirdness") that Judy speaks about her love for students. For theirs is a relationship that pivots on the students' fond acceptance of Judy as their teacher. It is within the crucible of relationship that, in time and over time, mutual caring is forged. And yet caring only develops within time that is embodied. If anything, clock time interferes with relationships: here is another paradox that creates tension for teachers of writing who hope that students will, "in time," learn to entrust them with their work.

Process Under Pressure

Teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between support their students in written exploration where ideas are seeded and—with revision—coaxed to full bloom. If, as Murray (1999) says, "Writing is a way of thinking on paper" (p. 12), then it follows that writing is more recursive than linear: thoughts fold back on each other, firing new thoughts. The subtext is the making of meaning. Barthelme (1997) speaks of

> The combinatorial agility of words, the exponential generation of meaning once they're allowed to go to bed together, (that) allows the writer to surprise himself [sic], makes art possible, reveals how much of Being we haven't yet encountered. (p. 21)

Indeed, good writers often move slowly, this being a pace that allows for surprise at what has been written. "Taking it slow" also makes possible inner reflection and encounter with the beings we are, and are becoming.

Detours and Staying On Track

The writing teachers in this study do their best to support such slowing down by having the young writer engage in multiple drafts, writing his or her way into ideas that have yet to take shape. Lindemann (2001) advises writing teachers to offer students planning strategies, but to emphasize flexibility:

> Inflexible plans that slavishly follow an outline or cram ideas into a prescribed form can undermine the effectiveness of a student's work. When students adhere too rigidly to their original intentions, they seem less likely to make choices that might improve the piece. They also prevent themselves from discovering the material's organic unity and finding new implications in the subject. (p. 132)

Lindemann points out here yet another paradox in the teaching of writing: the need to balance structure and flexibility. For while we offer to writers a variety of structured and non-structured ways to generate ideas, through "pre-writing" that might include talking, drawing, role-playing, listing, mapping, outlining, etc., as well as suggestions that might help them better organize the text of later drafts, we simultaneously encourage writers to venture off road to take written detours. "Tell me more," or "Where do you think this idea might be going?" or "What was going through your head at that moment?" are our invitations for them to pause within the forward motion of the text.

As writing teachers, we ask students to step to one side, ponder those comments written in the margins of their papers, and take productive detours. We encourage students to slow down and dwell in the text because—as writers and as teachers of writing—we understand the potential inherent in what they have not yet written. Roderick (1991) writes:

> When viewed as possibility, detour has the potential for creating a context in which we see opportunities for welcoming the serendipitous, for making connections, and for living with what at first might seem to lack continuity but which has potential for becoming part of the fabric of the larger journey. (p. 107)

Roderick articulates that toward which writing teachers strive: student understanding of detours in writing as weaving "the fabric of the larger journey." In nudging their students in the direction of those compositional detours, teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between express the value of "turning away from the most direct or shortest route" (Roderick, 1991, p. 104).

To foreshorten the circuitous path of composition is to set up roadblocks to the creative process. Indeed, as writers, the writing teachers in this study appreciate the opportunities afforded through detour. David reflects: "We can show students possibilities of expression that they might not have thought of. We can't tell them *what* they can do, but we can show them. In that way, we can also provide ways out of blockages." Interestingly, blockages can sometimes be circumvented through detour. Rus reflects on his own circuitous journey as a writer:

> I just thought I was writing a story about going back to my playground … with a girlfriend who didn't understand … and every reader I've given it to said, "My, you've done a pretty good job documenting about all the times women have hurt you in your life …" and I re-read it and … I didn't even realize this was coming out of me!

Naming that out-of-nowhere place, a space between what he consciously thought he was writing and what ended up on the page, Rus ends up with a piece of writing that surprises him. He coaches students to go with the momentum of their writing, too. Rus relates the story of one young man in his advanced composition course. Feeling safe in Rus's writing classroom, this student wrote on a topic which he had never dared to write about before: the death of his best friend. Later, this young man told Rus that entering a dark memory proved to have a cathartic effect: now he was able to write "about anything."

What is needed for student writers to feel safe to share their work, fully and paradoxically aware that they never know how others will respond to what they have written? Clearly, the student just mentioned perceived that he could risk the exposure that authentic, difficult writing involved.

The Bewilderment of Surprise

Of course, many students resist taking the time to go through rough terrain, along those roundabout ways. Those students who are most afraid of detour insist that the teacher draw them a detailed roadmap. The writing teachers in this study discuss their students' aversion to risk as well as ways in which they pedagogically attempt to undo years of schooling that rewarded those who never strayed from the main highway. For example, Rus describes how "In the first couple weeks I … ask them to take risks without that grade … to open up an environment where they … feel comfortable … to know that they're not going to get slammed." While Judy agrees with the importance of making students comfortable by lowering the stakes, she acknowledges that students are used to molding themselves to the teacher's

expectations. For her, a pedagogical challenge resides in avoiding the "I'm looking for this and that," which might well forestall a sally into new writing territory, *while at the same time* being "as clear as a bell." She does not want students to be asking, "What the *heck* happened?" at the end of the 15 weeks. She hopes that surprise comes from a student's growing sense of his or her writing potential, not from the grade they receive. Navigating this tension is tricky, for as Cheryl articulates, students attune themselves first and foremost to, "Let's figure out what the professor wants." The "want" of writer-teachers in my study is for students to take some chances on paper, a want that may come as another kind of surprise to students. As Murray points out: "Most people fear surprise, but the writer-explorer must become comfortable with surprise" (1991, p. 26).

Another dimension arises when our students are fresh out of high school, "freshmen" in every sense of the word. As such, they are even less likely to venture out on the page, preferring safe topics and safe patterns of organization such as the five-paragraph theme. Because our schools shape curriculum through set objectives and their measurement, they typically offer few opportunities for a student to engage in critical reflection. Since revision and reflection are synonymous, it is no wonder that a freshman feels off-balance when entering a writing classroom where revision is expected. Not every student will come away as the one who Bass (2000) describes: "He has come to understand that one can revise more than an essay" (p. 255). Instead, when writing teachers suggest explorative detours, students may balk. I am reminded of Brooke, a freshman in my English composition course.

"I'm not sure what you want," Brooke frowns. Her forehead is furrowed. "I already wrote about wrecking the car, so I don't know what else to say." We are sitting knee to knee in my office and going over Brooke's second draft. Because she had looked distressed yesterday when I returned the paper with additional comments written in the margins, I invited her to come by for a talk. "Here," I say, indicating a sentence where she alludes to her poor driving, "Is this a place where you could tell the reader about your previous fender-benders, if there were any?" She frowns. I continue in a gentle voice, meanwhile wondering if I am suggesting too much: "Perhaps that would emphasize the irony of your getting a job as a pizza delivery person?" While Brooke now seems to understand, she cannot suppress a small groan: "Do I have to write about *all* those accidents?" I reassure her that she does *not* have to do that. In fact, if I believe what I tell students, Brooke does not have to buy in to *any* suggestions that her readers have, even her writing professor. This is her work. Still, I press on, thinking on my feet: "Well, would you just consider expanding more on that one comment?" "Okay," Brooke sighs.

What does Brooke's sigh say to me as her writing teacher? There is no debate: revision—re-visioning and re-thinking—*is* more work. Brooke sighs, and I wonder if she has resigned herself—once more—to what the teacher wants? Yes, I have nudged her. Has it been too far? If so, then I have encroached on this young woman's writing territory. As much as I would like Brooke to be there, perhaps she is not. Perhaps my wanting for Brooke the writer is far different from her own wish to draw connections from what she has written. As Murray remarks, "Rewriting is, above all, a matter of attitude, and the teacher must model an attitude that emphasizes

discovery and then communication" (1999, p. ix). Perhaps Brooke just wants to be "done" with the essay.

Still, I have discerned another Brooke through her writing and her comments in class. Do her tight, midriff-baring clothes camouflage the intelligent and independent young lady that she now and then demonstrates herself to be? Coaching her on this essay, my approach is rooted in Heidegger's notion of *technē,* "As knowledge experienced in the Greek manner … a bringing forth of beings in that it *brings forth* what is present as such *out* of concealment" (1993f, p. 184). I am hopeful that Brooke will dig more deeply. For, as Murray (1999) writes, "Writers are born at the moment they write what they do not expect and find a potential significance in what is on the page" (p. ix).

The possibility of understanding lies within the texts student write. Gadamer (1960/2002) speaks of the power of text in "disclosing what is enclosed:"

> All such understanding is ultimately self-understanding … Even understanding an expression means, ultimately, not only immediately grasping what lies in the expression, but disclosing what is enclosed in it, so that one now knows this hidden part also … A person who understands, understands himself [sic] … his [sic] possibilities. (p. 260)

For Brooke, that moment for peeling back the layers to see what her writing encloses had not quite arrived. Yet this story does not end there; instead, our conference may have marked the beginning of another dimension of communication and discovery between Brooke and me. A couple weeks later, looking closely at her, I see that her face is gray and tired, and that she slumps down in her seat. She tells me after class that she is working 40 hours a week and trying to keep up with school. As I question her about the toll that this schedule is taking on her, she begins to weep. Her life is

impossible, she says. How can she quit a job that pays her expenses through school? We talk for a long time about alternative ways to make the rest of the semester more bearable. Several days later, she comes to class smiling: she has spoken to her work supervisor and arranged to reduce her work hours. She thanks me profusely. When, during our last class, she exclaims, "Oh, Professor De La Ysla, I'm going to miss you!" I feel like hugging her. Instead, I bask in the "hug" she has given me. As Heidegger (1971) reminds us:

> The hard thing is to accomplish existence. The hard thing consists not only in the difficulty of forming the work of language, but in the difficulty of going over from the saying work of the still covetous vision of things, from the work of the eyes, to the "work of the heart." (p. 138)

I am grateful to Brooke for struggling with the language in her essay. Even more so, I am grateful that she is sharing with me the hard work of her life.

Wild Places

When there is neither a right nor a wrong answer, students find themselves confused, disoriented. In his poetry writing classes, David lays out a syllabus that describes "what I'm looking for." At the same moment, his "directions" push students toward the detours of risking and thinking. He remarks: "(They) said they don't understand … They had to *think it through* … they weren't being given directions." Pausing, he adds: "'It's okay, *be* confused. It's all right' … We *owe* it to our students to make them bewildered from time to time."

What is it to bewilder? "Bewilder" means "To confuse or befuddle; To cause to lose one's bearings; disorient" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 175). David remarks: "What I want them to do is … have the room to think." Implicit in this pedagogy is his supportive presence as a teacher of writing. He would never

think of stranding his student in the wilderness; to do so would leave them desolate. As Casey (1993) writes, "The word *desolation* signifies an intensified solitariness. To be desolate is not only to be without hope—dis-consolate—but to feel that one is entirely alone without the resources normally offered by friends and family in a familiar dwelling place" (p. 192). No, instead, David is always within reach. In a classroom where the writing teacher wears a face of detachment and judgment, the student feels hopeless. Casey (1993) puts it this way: "The desolate physiognomy of wilderness is doubtless felt most poignantly in circumstances of isolation … The more I feel myself to be isolated (not only geographically but also socially, culturally, linguistically, etc.), the more I tend to find my surroundings desolate"(p. 197). What are the implications here for a pedagogy in the teaching of writing? As David suggests, we want our students to think, to *be* bewildered, implaced in a realm yet uncharted. We hope to impart to them what might lie out there in the wilderness of the page, and, with Casey (1993), show them that "The desolate landscape can comfort the human heart and console it, giving to the solitary human being in its forbidding midst a sense … of not being entirely alone, of being-with the land's own austere presence" (p. 193).

For bewilderment values the experience of what wilderness makes possible. An etymological tracing of "wilderness" yields this definition: "wild and uncultivated land" as "distinguished from *desert*, in that the latter denotes an uninhabitable and uncultivable region, and implies entire lack of vegetation" (OED online). One might regard wilderness, then, as a place of in-between, neither desert nor town. It represents a fertile expanse where *anything* might grow. Imagined as such, does not a

pedagogy of bewilderment assume new dimensions? If the essence of teaching resides in leading out, where might our students emerge, if they are encouraged to think "wildly" on paper?

As teachers, we are obliged to dislodge students from stuck places in their thinking. As teachers of writing who understand writing as thinking on paper, are we not also asking students to release their grip, temporarily lose their bearings, as they generate a draft? Fletcher (1993) draws an analogy with mountain climbing:

> While scaling a sheer rock face, mountain climbers face a dilemma that forces them to act in a way that is counter-intuitive and would seem to go against all common sense. For a moment, a mountain climber must let go of whatever perch he has secured to reach to the next higher place … It's hard not to see this story as a parable for many moments in life: loving, learning/teaching, and writing. Writers of all ages face myriad subtle temptations to "freeze to the face" by writing something safely mainstream and formulaic. (p. 22)

Reflecting on Fletcher's metaphor, do we not owe students *the opportunity to release* a death hold on writing that is still finding itself? Loosening their grip, students may think and wonder, ending up confused and confronted with more questions than answers. As writing teachers, we do not baffle students out of whim, or because *we* have relinquished our wish for certain valued ends. No, we bewilder students toward that uncultivated region where creativity grows. Kohl (1994) describes his work as a teacher: "One of my roles … is to insinuate complexity into the lives of my students" (p. 58). Here is another paradox: we seek to clearly define where powerful, authoritative writing resides: in the student as *author* of his or her writing instead of in us as the authority who authorizes what students write. Simultaneously, we seek to bewilder our students into realms where meanings might lie. Such tensions *are* the complexity of bewilderment.

A Passion for Ignorance

Like all of us, David wants his students to think for themselves. But as Rus and the other teachers in this study point out, students coming up through our educational system have grown skilled at what Rus calls, "jumping through the hoops." They have learned to minimize risk, to play it safe. Ellsworth (1997) writes, "Ignorance is not a simple absence of information or a passive state of lacking the motivation to learn" (p. 56). Instead, "Forgetting or ignoring or not hearing (is) an active, yet unconscious, refusal" (p. 57). Kohl agrees: "Deciding to actively not-learn something involves closing off part of oneself and limiting one's experience" (1994, p. 4). Thus, for students who seem to chafe against thinking, there might well be forces at work shutting out what rattles basic premises, including a conception of teaching and learning in which it is the teacher who will provide answers. Those students who resist the hard work of thinking present us with challenges. We want them to "get it," but if they choose not to trouble themselves, we cannot beat them into submission, crying "Bloom, damn you! Bloom!" like W.C. Fields, striking out with his cane and "chewing out flowers in his garden for 'refusing' to open their buds for a visiting friend" (Fields, n.d.). As teachers of writing, we tend the garden that is our students, yet we are not in control of when and how they bloom. Students open up when they are ready, not before. Hopefully, Rus observes, we will witness that moment, but if not, we should not drive ourselves crazy. Judy puts it this way:

> I feel that I really am in relationship with the students I work with … they're just such beautiful people and they have so much in them that is valuable and important and it really is an emotional thing for me teaching them, really an emotional thing …When I see a response on their faces, and if I read these intuitive reactions …to what they're reading, I just feel, "Oh yes, they get it!" and I don't know if it's really something that I'm doing.

Judy is unable to pinpoint a "doing" that helps her students learn. Indeed, it is less her doing, and more her way of being with students, of seeing the beauty and value in what they have to offer, that allows her students to "get" what—as Heidegger notes—they already have:

> Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is to let learn. Indeed, the proper teacher lets nothing else be learned than—learning. His conduct, therefore, often produces the impression that we learn nothing from him, if by "learning" we now automatically understand merely the procurement of useful information … The teacher is far less sure of his material than those who learn are of theirs. (1993e, p. 380)

Judy has intuitive understanding that her work is to let learn. As writing teachers, Judy and her teacher colleagues lay the groundwork for learning to write, yet are beset with doubts about whether students have grown. As Rus reminds us, even if we feel that students "learn nothing" during our watch, we ought not to berate ourselves, for learning will unfold in its own time. The pedagogical relationship is one in which *we* are "far less sure" than our students; as teachers, we inhabit a shaky place that has little to do with our knowledge of subject matter. For Judy, the other writing teachers in this study, and for me, students are our text, a text at once transparent and opaque.

Interestingly, the word, "text," is derived from the Greek, "teks," which means to weave, or to fabricate. *Tekhnē*, which we encountered earlier in this study, once meant an art, craft, or skill (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 2050). If, as writing teachers, our *tekhnē* is synonymous with the art and craft of bringing students into their own—then students truly texture our pedagogy. Barthes (1975) unravels this more in his elegy to text: "*Text* means *Tissue*… hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden,

meaning (truth) … In the tissue, (is) the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving" (p. 64). Closely-woven strands connect teacher with student.

Hurrying Reflection

Revision and reflection take a massive amount of time and energy, for both student and teacher. University writing teachers typically teach four sections of composition, with a total of approximately 70-80 students. In fact, a National Council of Teacher of English position statement on class size states:

> Teachers of English, on average, work longer hours than their colleagues in other disciplines. A teacher with 125 students who spends only 20 minutes per paper must have at least 2,500 minutes, or a total of nearly 42 hours, to respond to all the students' papers … No other nation requires teachers to work a greater number of hours a day and year than the United States. (National Council of Teachers of English, 1999)

With multiple drafts, writing teachers will be reading and commenting throughout the week on student work. Such a teaching load makes difficult the kind of thoughtful teacher response that helps students revise.

Many teachers find a partial solution to the paper crunch by the way in which they frame the semester's work. Rather than purport to be the authority of, and sole audience to, student work, writing teachers in this study help students learn as much as possible about their process as writers. It is a long-term vision crammed within a short term. And, as Rus points out, it may not always happen within one semester. Still, such a pedagogy is deeply rooted in Heidegger's notion of what teaching is about:

> Teaching is a giving, an offering; but what is offered in teaching is not the learnable, for the student is merely instructed to take for himself what he

> already has … True learning occurs only where the taking of what one already has is a *self-giving* and is experienced as such. (1993g, p. 275)

Heidegger speaks about "what one already has," and about the learner's experience of this "self-giving." What is at stake here? It seems to me as if the teacher offers up a mode of being with students, one that embraces the unique in each student. This pedagogical stance welcomes, and hopefully reassures, the mistrusting student who has lost confidence in teachers as nurturing persons. Such a pedagogy encourages students to regain trust in themselves as learners. David views it this way: "One of the things we have to say to students is, 'What you learn is your responsibility, whether you learn it or not is your responsibility.'" Reminding students of their own power—that learning is there for their taking—restores balance to the pedagogical relationship.

Heidegger (1971) writes: "Language, understood rightly, is the original way in which beings are brought out into the open clearing of truth" (p. xiii). As teachers of writing, what pedagogy draws students toward "right understanding" of language? We devote ourselves to helping students show themselves more clearly through their written thoughts. We believe that writing embodies the persons our students are. Hearkening back to the Greeks, Heidegger (1993f) speaks to the power of works of art to disclose the essence of being:

> The Greeks called the unconcealment of beings *alētheia*. We say "truth" and think little enough of the word. If there occurs in the work a disclosure of a particular being, disclosing what and how it is, then there is here an occurring, a happening of truth at work. (pp. 161-162)

The priority of truthfulness is articulated by Rule and Wheeler (2000): "When you write about your life and the lives around you … you will discover insights …

Writing is a lens for seeing yourself and the world, a vehicle for re-seeing and reevaluating. It can change your life. It can become a way of life" (p. 8). Here, to reflect about life is a *self-giving*, insights being the reward. Through revision, one layer after another is gently disclosed, unconcealed, until one approaches the truth. The same authors reassure writers about the merit of truth-telling:

> When you write about a subject that's close to your heart, when you reveal secrets, your readers will not think, "What a mean-spirited, stupid, cowardly person." Instead, they will recognize themselves … By writing the truth, you will have shed light on their lives, expanded their understanding of the human condition. (Rule & Wheeler, 2000, p. 217)

DaMaris comments on what truthful writing allows: "I've found that the writing really does give me a glimpse into who my students are and how they think … And it's nice to see people come out." We sometimes say that students come out of their shells—come into their own. When students reconnect with themselves in this way, teachers of writing experience profound satisfaction. Nevertheless, when we expect students to "spend time" with their drafts, we are referring to both clock time and lived time in the text. Learning a way to dwell in the tension of these two perceptions of time is yet another paradox in the teaching of writing.

Orchestrating Time

The teachers of writing with whom I spoke mention the challenge of teaching writing through revision within the confines of a 15-week semester. They have come to accept the reality that we cannot control what writing students take with them when they leave our classrooms. As Rus describes it, we do our work, step back, and try not to drive ourselves crazy:

> I think it's just wrong for us as teachers to go into any class with expectations of what we may see happen in the classroom while we're there. We have to

> trust the process and know that if we model taking those risks … 'You can do this' … and trust that what they get out of these 15 weeks is going to benefit them somewhere along the line … it may not happen in those 15 weeks—their lives are much bigger than this one class.

As a writer who teaches writing, Rus "hates" the words "skills" and "strategies." "These are just 'instruments' … that they can choose to play when they want to play … the more instruments they have, the better the music is." Our purpose is to grow their independence and power as writers. Among those instruments that we spend clock time to introduce are the "skills" of conventional English, adapting Atwell's (2002) approach: punctuation and grammar are taught through short mini-lessons within the context of the student's own writing—more effective communication to one's audience being the aim. When we plan mini-lessons of 15-20 minutes, we rely on "clock time." Our students will likely perceive the passage of time as being just what the clock reflects, what Flaherty (1999) calls "synchronicity." Between our students and us is "awareness of social expectations" (p. 99) that when we say 15 minutes, we mean just that.

Another tool that strengthens student writing is response and revision. Because we know that revising deepens meaning, and—indeed—gives rise to "feelings of confidence and self-worth and pride that emerge from their realization that problems can be overcome, struggles with language and ideas can be resolved" (Bass, 2000, p. 271), the writing teachers in this study require students to revise several times. As such, we schedule regular class periods for writing support groups, for conferencing one-on-one with us, and for actual writing. Each of the writing teachers in this study prefers a longer block of class time, because extended periods

(75 minutes to three hours) allow for mini-lessons, group sharing and response, and writing, itself.

In a less "hurried" or distracted atmosphere, students are able to slow down and engage deeply in the processes that nourish their writing. Paradoxically, writing classrooms ought to be places where time both passes slowly *and*—in retrospect—seems to have flown. In his study on the perception of time, Flaherty (1999) describes what he calls "paradoxes of lived duration" (p. 24) which give rise to a "puzzling elasticity to the perceived passage of time" (p. 26). Those paradoxes are when "Time is perceived to pass slowly in situations of abnormally high or abnormally low overt activity," and when "The same interval of time which is experienced as passing slowly in the present can be remembered as having passed quickly in retrospect" (1999, p. 24). The pedagogical implications for teachers of writing are provocative, especially when we consider the way in which emotions shape the perception of time. For example, it is "not the emotions themselves, but the way they facilitate a concentration—a narrowing of focus" (Flaherty, 1999, p. 69). Thus, when students are engrossed in their writing, or when participating in writing support groups, it might be argued that they are actively engaged in the work at hand. Certainly, doing the work of meaning-making on the page takes great concentration. In addition, it requires considerable presence and focus to listen to other students when they read their writing out loud. Similarly, it is a challenge to listen closely when they respond to something that *you* have written. Emotions are activated and time seems to stand still. That focused period may be recollected as one of "temporal compression," epitomized in the expression, "'Where has the time gone'" (Flaherty, 1999, p. 104)?

Perry (1999) has also studied "flow's timelessness" as it applies to writers: "To enter flow, you have to be doing something that presents enough of a challenge to use your skills [sic] so that you feel truly engaged, neither bored nor anxious" (p. 11). She emphasizes that "If you live in flow, in the moment, *each* moment, you don't need to live in fear of loss. Each moment is all moments" (1999, p. 1).

Here arises yet another paradox in the teaching of writing: while we emphasize the value of revising and sharing, we operate within an institutional framework that complicates this process. We construct syllabi with detailed guidelines, assignments, and assessment criteria—all organized by the socially accepted construct of synchronous time. Yet every writing teacher in this study understands the importance of seizing moments to detour from the schedule. Rus describes the tensions of teaching within the confines of the academy:

> The good thing about teaching at the university level is that there is a structure to those 15 weeks. There *is* a syllabus, there *are* assignments, there *are* hoops that they must go through to help them along the way, but I like to think those hoops are translucent, so that … by the time the class ends, they're nonexistent … they can still leave and get 15 weeks' worth of "good writing knowledge" … but it's bigger than that, and that's what I hope they'll take with them … the opportunity for greater learning.

"Translucence" often refers to the quality of cloth through which one can view what lies beyond. For Rus, as for the other teachers of writing in this study, time is organized in a synchronous fashion (Flaherty, 1999) through syllabi. But over and beyond the "hoops" lies something else: "it's bigger than that." These writing teachers strive to orchestrate classrooms where time is felt to slow down and pass quickly and where writing students see through to the possibility of "greater learning." That learning best unfolds within the fullness of embodied writing time,

times when students are engaged, and present. For, as Heidegger (1993a) reminds us, "Beings are grasped in their Being as 'presence'; that is to say, they are understood with regard to a definite mode of time, the *present*" (p. 70). Whereas writing classrooms are temporal sites for presence, a place where writing teachers orchestrate scores to the best of their ability, they are also places where other "scores" disrupt the process of powerful writing.

The Sustenance of Response

The challenge for the writing teacher is how to respond to his or her student in ways that respect the student's voice; pose questions of an evocative, rather than a directive, nature; reflect one reader's sense of what the piece is about; and refrain from overly-zealous editing. Indeed, feedback—and grades—came up during every conversation I had with the teachers. While they believe in, and struggle with, issues of feedback and evaluation ("Yeah, they want feedback;" "Feedback that's concrete"), they *detest* grades:

"How can we ask … our writers to take risks if we're going to evaluate the quality of their work *from* that risk-taking?"

"Grading papers…is so awful that I want to do anything else!"

"The grades are the greatest obstacle to learning in some ways."

"I resent having to put a grade on a paper … If I could just write comments, that would be drawing things out of them … But we have to give them a judgment."

"It's more of an *ending* point when you put that final letter grade on it that says, 'We're done with this,' and … 'If you want a new grade, you need to start a new project' … So I don't like the finality of that grade."

"Grading *sucks!*"

This gut-level antipathy can be summed up in David's observation: "There's clearly a real disconnect between the institutional processes and what *we* know as teachers—or what we think we know—and what we feel as teachers." As Judy says, "If I could just write comments, that would be drawing things out of them." Clearly, as writing teachers, they view their role as drawing out what lies within.

Unfortunately, however, each of us recalls students who have been damaged ("wounded and scarred," as Rus would say) by a grading system that pronounced them deficient. DaMaris describes what some of her undergraduate students have been told about their writing: "'Oh, it's your structure; it's your grammar.'" Her students conclude: "I'm just a bad writer." Indeed, DaMaris feels that she has accomplished something of worth when students, believing in their inadequacy, end the semester with a more positive view of themselves as writers. Holaday (in Tchudi, 1997) agrees: "I cannot ignore the very real impediment to writing that these strongly held negative attitudes pose. In fact, I see changing them as the only really effective means of improving my students' writing" (p. 35). I, too, wish the same for my students. However, recently, I was reminded of the power of heartless critique to spawn negative attitudes. Martin, who struggled with generating a first draft, asked me: "I write like a barbarian, don't I?"

"'*Barbarian*?'"

He nodded. "Yeah, they tell me I write like one."

Martin's stoic acceptance of someone's harsh judgment pained me. Who is the "they" to whom he refers and defers? My anger flared: "Poopyheads," I

thought—Cheryl's word for those who would spoil things: "Don't let the poopyheads spoil it!" she tells her writing students.)

I do my best to reassure Martin that his critics do not know everything, that within his first draft are some interesting ideas. He seems skeptical, but slightly hopeful. Later that semester, reading from his laptop, he shares a poem with the rest of the class. Taken off guard by the unexpectedness of Martin's poem about feeling lonely, the class falls silent. In the days that follow, although I continually encourage him to let me see his prose writing, he misses all deadlines. A colleague suggests I mention Walt Whitman, who celebrated *his* "barbaric yawp." Unfortunately, Martin is so traumatized by the judgmental voices in his head that he is afraid to put anything else out there beyond the one early draft.

DaMaris's observation definitely applies: "A lot of high school writing educators don't think of writing as a process, they think of it as a talent: some students have it, and some students don't. And I think that's where these polarized perceptions of writing develop." Firmly convinced that he lacks "it," Martin accepts someone else's characterization of him as an uncivilized (non-writing) brute. I believe that he understands the need to write well, and would like to write better; clearly, he wants others to know him, or else why would he brave his classmates' response by reading his poetry? Still, he is too afraid of having his prose judged by others to continue with his earlier drafts. I can only hope to encourage Martin for the remaining weeks in the semester—perhaps he will someday soon haul away the rocks that obstruct the opening to his cave. For a poet hides there.

Grading Inclinations

The word "grade" reminds me of the divided four-lane mountain road near the Northern California town where, for several years, I lived as a child. "Steep Grade," signs warned. Most drivers hugged the far right lane, leaving the left for motorists in a hurry. My stepfather at the wheel, we would slowly inch up the mountain while casting glances over the guard rail into deep gorges forested with Ponderosa pines. I shivered, imagining us hurtling over the edge. I also felt a thrill of anticipation as we neared the top of the grade, because I knew that in a matter of moments, we would be rushing down the other side. Then, my stepfather would tighten his grip on the wheel, skillfully controlling the descent by tapping brakes and downshifting gears. Maneuvering steep grades was tricky. Similarly, making their way around grades proves challenging to the teachers of writing in my study.

Fighting Gravity

Erickson and Strommer (1991) stress the need for college professors to tighten up their grading practices by linking grades to the student achievement of specified course objectives. This proposal reflects the technical orientation of the current outcomes-based assessment prevalent in American schools and colleges. Unfortunately, as O'Hagan (1997) points out, grades have been the subject of hotly debated controversy ever since they were introduced into American schools in the 1850's: "Grading became part of the system in the late nineteenth century as the nation grew and legislators passed mandatory attendance laws that resulted in a larger and more diverse student body" (p. 3). The subjectivity of grades in the area of writing instruction was particularly studied and critiqued as early as the early 1900's;

for example, while some teachers graded neatness and spelling, others based grades on right or wrong answers (O'Hagan, 1997, p. 4). Zemelman et al. (1998) have a more trenchant take on the history of grading: "Grading and testing historically have been harnessed to the screening, sorting, and classifying of children into categories of 'merit' and 'intelligence'" (p. 246). In the case of writing, "Most teachers are still wedded to evaluation procedures that are ineffective, time-consuming, and hurtful to students" (p. 247). Of those practices, they rate the correction of errors on the page as being "completely useless," because it does nothing for the "future growth and improvement" of the writer (Zemelman et al., 1998, p. 247).

"Unscientific" subjectivity is one of the primary concerns voiced by Erickson and Strommer (1991). They decry the fact that many professors resort to grading attendance and effort. Those are dimensions too difficult to "measure," and because they elude, they must be banished from criteria used to assess learning. When such subjective criteria are applied, then, it is no wonder that many colleges are accused of grade inflation. However, when one considers the passionate dislike of grades shared by the writing teachers in this study, and the go-with-the-guts subjectivity that many of us employ when deciding to give a student a B+ versus an A-, then it is obvious that the current grading system is deeply flawed. O'Hagan (1997) poses this question: "Would a company like IBM keep producing a computer model if research demonstrated that their machine made the consumer's work harder and ruined all confidence in the process?" (p. 3). Her answer, of course, is in the negative.

The notion that subjectivity is inappropriate in academia reflects the scientific-technical orientation that drives curriculum in American schools and colleges. The

technical orientation stems from a basic assumption about the purpose of curriculum: to teach students with rigor, focusing on objective facts and skills that—in their sum total—imply "mastery" of content. It is, then, necessary to measure the acquisition of those skills by assigning grade or percentile values to the student's learning—and hence, as Zemelman et al. (1998) suggest earlier—to then consign him or her to the proper "slot" in society. In this understanding of curriculum, the teacher is held accountable for the student's achievement, and is responsible for assessing the student's attainment of certain course objectives.

Applebee (1996) argues against this approach and proposes another understanding of curriculum as founded on conversational domains within discourse communities:

> When instruction is conceived as providing support for students' participation in significant conversational domains, the teacher's role changes from one of judging how well a student has performed to one of helping the student perform better … rather than seeking to ensure that they reach a particular endpoint. Questions, partial apprehensions, false starts, and new beginnings become part of the natural process of learning, encouraged and expected in reaching for new accomplishments. (pp. 114-115)

What Applebee envisions here is a curriculum reflecting the practical interest as opposed to the technical. Based on ways of knowing that emphasize the knowledge-in-action instead of knowledge-out-of-context (Applebee, 1996), a curriculum organized around the practical interest requires a paradigm shift in the way we think about teaching and learning. In their article on language that reflects the nature of qualitative research, Arminio and Hultgren (2002) suggest certain words: "Rendering, thoughtfulness, passionate, evocative, sensitive, spirited, discerning, awakening, reverberating, and resonating" (p. 451). Surely, the practitioner whose praxis

embodies these qualities is one to whom students can turn for encouragement and guidance on the uphill climb. As writing teachers, where will *we* situate ourselves in relationship to those inclines?

At the Center

Lindemann (2001, p. 7) views teachers as residing "at the center of the paradox." She writes:

> Writing teachers confront paradoxes. Because we acknowledge a world dominated by mass media and sometimes narrow definitions of "professionalism," we help students develop those writing skills that will advance their careers. At the same time, we also recognize that writing does not serve mainly a utilitarian function. That is why we encourage students to appreciate writing that discovers meaning, form, and self. *Writing teachers must place themselves at the center of this paradox.* (p. 7) [my emphasis]

Thus implaced, the writing teacher is faced with the challenge of emphasizing to students the process of uncovering personally meaningful text; at the same moment, the writing teacher reminds the students of the way that a facility with English language contributes to a finished piece that is clear, precise, stylistically pleasing, and comprehensible to different audiences, future employers among them. The writing teacher continually straddles that juncture between monitoring conventional correctness in a student's work and coaching fledgling ideas. For above all, it is essential to cheer on the potential in students' early drafts.

Accordingly, some of the writing teachers in this study make themselves ignore the majority of student errors in language and conventions, so as not to overemphasize "correctness" at a time in the writing process when ideas are first being generated. Writing about early drafts, Murray (1991) observes: "Normally we are brought up to look for error, to correct mistakes, to make everything right—the

way the reader expects it to be. The time does come for dealing with the traditions of form and language, with the expectations of the reader … but the time is not now" (p. 26).

Before students submit final drafts, all the writing teachers in this study help students edit their work; some teachers highlight errors, and then have students correct by explaining on small post-it notes what was unconventional and what they did to rectify the glitch. Nevertheless, we consider this responsibility to point out errors in convention with some reluctance. As Blaauw-Hara (2006) notes wryly, "Few of us were drawn to English by, say, an irrepressible desire to master the subjunctive" (p. 165). Still, "Students also need fluency in standard written English" so that they "learn how to engage with and manipulate ideas with the sort of fluency required in college and the work world" (p. 165).

As Atwell (2002) points out, "The word *convention* comes from the Latin word for agreement" (p. 197). To ignore language conventions of spelling, punctuation, and grammar is to ignore one of the primary purposes of written communication, as defined by another writing scholar: "Writing is a process of communication that uses a conventional graphic system to convey a message to a reader" (Lindemann, 2001, p. 10). Indeed, Atwell (2002) emphasizes the reader at every step: "Readers need *conventionality*: for writers to hold up their end of the written language agreement. Readers count on writers to follow the rules and observe the forms; otherwise, we can't act as readers" (p. 196). In short, it is essential that the writer employ correct language that elucidates rather than confuses the reader. Fortunately, learning "a conventional graphic system" is, as Judy points out,

accessible to all writers. Paraphrasing advice from William Zinsser, Judy says, "Skills you can learn … the skills are there for everyone."

Poised between encouraging student voice and emphasizing correct language usage, the writing teacher at times finds herself at odds. As wordsmiths, writing teachers key in on error, a propensity against which they must constantly be on guard, as Zemelman et al. (1998) point out. Searching for the strengths in an early draft can be derailed if the teacher starts to mark up the errors in convention. Overemphasis on correctness at the exploration phase of the writing process can prove toxic to the student writer. For writing teachers must be mindful of not only what currently appears on the page, but of what is yet to be written. As Murray says:

> Most writing instruction by teachers … is error oriented. Everyone looks to find out what is wrong. But effective writing is built from what is right, not wrong. I don't even like those words *right* and *wrong*. They seem too clear, too absolute, and writing isn't like that. Everything in writing is relative … Writing takes place in a complex context of subject, reader, form, and language. (1991, pp. 55-56)

In what ways and for what purposes, then, do we give students feedback about their writing? If we shy away from right and wrong, good and bad, how are we able to guide students toward better writing? David urges pedagogy that goes beyond skills: "We're in for the long haul if we're going to do any good whatsoever … We want quick fixes to problems … (but) we have to look at student progress in much longer terms than we have allowed ourselves to look at it." When we abandon the tendency to first look at "what's broke," then we also abandon the illusion that writing well is about quick fixes; we hunker down with students "for the long haul."

Alongside Behind

"Where am *I*? At the bottom. Alongside." (DaMaris)

The image of the steep incline surfaces during one of my conversations with DaMaris. DaMaris is a writing teacher who emphasizes conventional written English *and* her passion for writing. As we discuss the whole notion of grades, I describe to DaMaris the image of a steep incline where the student pauses at the bottom, gazing up. Where, I ask her, would she place herself as a teacher of writing? I find myself anticipating her answer: perhaps at the top, pulling her student up? But no: "At the bottom, alongside," DaMaris says firmly. What is the nature of a writing pedagogy that places the teacher alongside her student? When I conference with students on their essays, we often literally sit side by side in my office. We read the piece silently or aloud, either the student or me. Together we consider meaning, both marking up the page with our pens, or turning the page over to make notes. An alongside stance has both teacher and student gazing together at the climb up. It helps to have another person along to struggle against the gravity of a hard climb. Alongside is a supportive pose, two bodies poised over the page, two minds focused on the printed page. We begin at the bottom, so to speak, working our way up, together. Thus, while DaMaris expects her students to meet certain conventional standards in their writing, she is available to them from the beginning of the climb, and always, alongside.

David admits, "You never … know *exactly* what's going to happen, and when you're trying to push students through problems, it's not easy to know how far you can push." David describes a push from behind, much as a parent will push a toddler on a swing, hoping that the child will soon learn how to maintain the momentum by

pumping his own legs and leaning into the trajectory of the arc. For the work of teaching writing calls for a pedagogy of supportive pushing, rather than a forceful *pulling* as one might on a resistant weight. Even as pushing requires strength, it depends on faith. As Judy laughs: "I really think that sometimes when you try so hard, you can't fail all the time!"

It might do well to voice a cautionary word here: when the writing teacher finds his or her arms tiring from doing *all* the work, so to speak, then something might be awry in the teaching situation. Perhaps the teacher is doing too much, making him or herself the center of the classroom through lecture, direct instruction, or through zeal to "cover" the course schedule. When that is the case, it will be difficult for students to discover the rhythm and power of their own legs. At times, we must stop ourselves from pushing too long or too hard, or else our students may fly off the swing, entirely. Again, it becomes a matter of modulating the tension, gauging at what point we can move away so that the student can propel on his or her own.

Revisioning Judgment

Teachers of writing in this study express ambivalence when it comes to giving grades to student writing. They are uncomfortably aware of themselves as institutional gatekeepers: grades affect students' current and future opportunities. For most, the responsibility to give students honest feedback and to assign a grade seems to work at cross-purposes for many writing teachers. Judy traces a common quandary:

> As a teacher, I resent having to put a grade on a paper … if I could just write comments, that would be drawing things out of them—that would be *so* much more helpful. But we have to give them a judgment. I *hate* that, the judgment piece.

At the same time, Judy recalls that teacher comments on her papers *occasionally* taught her to write better. Both Rus and David decry the practice of issuing grades: "How can we ask … our writers to take risks if we're going to evaluate the quality of their work *from* that risk-taking?" Rus wonders. David agrees, adding: "There's clearly a disconnect between the institutional processes and what we know as teachers—or what we think we know as teachers, and what we feel as teachers." Cheryl jumps in to defend teachers: "The fault lies not only with teachers, it's also parents and society because … as soon as someone writes something, they judge it … We structure ourselves way too much to be perfect, when writing is hardly ever perfect." Judy recalls her adolescence, describing her early notions about external judgment:

> Everything I did had to be perfect … maybe it was being judged … and graded …all of a sudden, you become intimidated by others, and you don't feel that way naturally, but it's something you learn … to be cautious and wary and protect yourself, and so you don't allow this natural act—which I think writing really is—you don't allow that to come out.

Being perfect has the implicit assumption that—when applied to writing—perfection can be "achieved." Unfortunately, we do students a disservice by writing "Perfect" at the top of their pages; "perfect" and "imperfect" lie at the opposite ends of an imaginary pole: one implies rightness or success—the other, wrongness, or failure. David recalls his early days in school: "In third grade, I wanted to do things right!" As Judy says, she became intimidated and wary because of a heightened awareness that those outside her were judging her writing and would find it to be flawed. Rus comments that his own eight-year-old daughter is already deeply aware of her teacher's expectation for the right answers.

The "judgment" to which these writing teachers refer is experienced as "the pronouncing of a deliberate opinion upon a person or thing, or the opinion pronounced; criticism; censure" (OED online). "Judge," derives from the Latin, *iūdex* (<yewes-dik), "one who shows or pronounces the law" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 2024). More etymological detective work reveals that the Latin meaning for "judgment" was quite different from the earlier Greek understanding; for the latter, judgment was "phronesis." The ancients defined "phronesis" as "wisdom personified … thought, sense, *judgement*, practical wisdom, prudence< to think, to have understanding, to be wise, prudent" [my emphasis] (OED online). What does this notion of judging have to do with our pedagogy as teachers of writing?

A short journey into Greek mythology opens up new territory. According to the story, Phronesis—or Prudence—was a young woman who exercised exceptional wisdom. Of the three intellectual virtues (*episteme*, scientific knowledge; *technē,* craft/art; and *phronesis*, ethics), "Aristotle was explicit in his regard of *phronesis* as the most important" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 370). The embodiment of wisdom and judgment is "the person possessing practical wisdom (*phronimos)* … *Phronesis* is a sense or a tacit skill for doing the ethically practical rather than a kind of science" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 372). "Tacit skill"—or tact—means having the right touch. Indeed, David remarks on his approach with students who are insecure: "You have to be very gentle." David feels his way, much as one proceeds when handling something fragile. Similarly, Claire perceives that a student's shyness makes her seek out a seat all the way at the back of the classroom. "I told her I would make sure that there was always a seat behind the last row so she could sit there." In the best sense of

phronesis, Claire acts wisely—she validates her student. Judy also understands the importance of a classroom "that is accepting and comfortable." She embodies a teacher who makes it possible for students to "laugh together, or cry together" in the knowledge that "no one is going to laugh at them."

Because writing exposes vulnerabilities, teachers are called to be in touch with students. The writing teacher is called to be—in a very real sense—"a soft touch." Rus admits that once, at the end of a school term when his writing students thanked him, he began to "bawl." His very softness lies at the heart of teaching a craft where students are encouraged to come out into the open. Perhaps in a classroom where *everyone* can laugh and cry together, we, too, will show our vulnerability. Claire speaks of writing about the loss of her own mother on an especially beautiful day: "You have to embrace that warmth in the midst of pain … because that pain is important … it reminds you that not only did that person physically exist, but *you* still exist!" O'Donohue (1999) reminds us:

> Vulnerability is an infinitely precious thing. There is nothing as lonely as that which has become hardened … Though vulnerability leaves one open to pain, one should somehow still be ultimately glad of vulnerability … Some instinct within us knows that we must be careful about exposure. We cannot let the heart be too easily seen, or we will get hurt … (yet) You put yourself outside the arena of risk where possibility and growth are alive … The slow and difficult work of living out your vulnerability holds you in the flow of life. (pp. 153-154)

When judgment is needed, let it be the judgment that we will tread softly and "be ultimately glad of vulnerability," our own and theirs.

<u>Failing Together</u>

> Scientists know that failure is essential, central, and necessary to their trade. They experiment and from the experiments that don't work … they discover

> the questions they need to ask … and eventually, some answers. They revise. (Murray, 1991, p. viii)

Whether teachers of writing have taught college for two years or for thirty, they remain ambivalent about what counts for "success" in the writing classroom. "Failure," on the other hand, plays a prominent role in their teaching practice, for it is not only the ground on which revision thrives, but points to fundamental processes of learning. Rus points out: "As writers, we don't really work on a 15-week course for our projects … they're ongoing and there's a lot of failure involved in that … we're constantly failing and succeeding and failing again at the work we do." Murray, in a refreshing departure from the notion of failure as something negative, extends this invitation: "Write along with me … It is all a matter of trial and instructive error. I try to say what I cannot yet say and fail but find the failure instructive. It shows me another way to attempt to say what I have not before said. Fail with me" (1991, p. 5). Such an enticing statement turns the craft of writing into a sort of rehearsal, wherein one keeps trying out one's lines with the hope of reaching one's audience. This is why Murray and the other teachers of writing in this study adhere to the belief that all writing is re-writing benefiting from "trial and instructive failure."

For some teachers, "failure" ought to be banned entirely from pedagogical discussion. As Ellsworth (1997) writes, "Most often, teachers address students in ways engineered precisely to eliminate, minimize, or contain the messy social, historical, and unconscious stuff that might confuse "getting" an educational text, as in understanding or comprehending it" (p. 45). David, too, notes the institution's poverty of language: "I think that maybe one of the interesting things is that the word "failure" came in there. Maybe those are the terms that were *imposed* on us by an

educational institution and have almost *nothing* to do with writing." Van Manen (2003) broadens the discussion:

> Herein lies the irony of a profound contradiction: the language by way of which teachers are encouraged to interpret themselves and reflect on their living with children is thoroughly imbued by hope, and yet it is almost exclusively a language of doing—it lacks being. We do not know how to talk of our being with children as a being present with hope for these children. The language of objectives, aims, teacher expectations, intended learning outcomes, goals, or ends in view is a language of hope out of which hope itself has been systematically purged. (p. 122)

Draper (2000), a recipient of the National Teacher of the Year award, recounts a conversation with a reporter who asked her what ought to be changed in education. She replies: "I told him I'd get rid of failure. No child would ever fail … Every child would know the power and joy of success" (p. 56). For Draper, teachers are persons who open doors. That is, rather than pronounce the student a success or failure, teachers give the learner "permission to 'color outside the lines.' By encouraging questions and fostering thought. By creating an atmosphere where dreams can grow and blossom" (2000, pp. 68-69). For do not dreams catapult the individual into a sphere where the possibility of possibility blooms? In such a world, there is no room for "failure." Perhaps there is a mediating pedagogy that supports the nurturance of dreams. Kohl (1994) believes "Teaching is a form of questing with my students for their inner strengths. It is a matter of patience and faith … The concept of failure has to be eliminated from the mind of the teacher … teaching has to be considered an absurd activity, a joyful foolishness" (pp. 64-65).

Successful Risk and Other Blessings

> Success is … my students' understanding that they're the ones in control … Success for *me* is when *they* trust that process and they take … risks to say, "I'm experimenting, I've never done this before … I'm writing about a

> different topic … I'm not in that comfort zone … I've grown as a writer … as an individual." (Rus)

As stated above, Rus wants his students to take control of their process as writers. He finds that a sense of ownership invigorates student writing; in fact, Rus uses student investment as a barometer that growth is taking place. For while we want our students to "make the grade," we want even more that our pedagogical intent for their good be transparent in our teaching. Let them "trust that process." We want our students to feel *inclined* to make the grade, to work against gravity that presses them back. But whether or not they accept the challenge is ultimately up to each person. As writers, we want students to discover the power in writing about topics that matter to them; we want them to take note of the way in which their writing strengthens from one draft to the next. Therefore, it is often difficult for us to "let learn." In fact, our solicitude might stifle students at a time when they need plenty of space to branch out. When I ask Rus how he senses "growth" or "success" in his writing students, he turns sober: "My answer is grounded in my philosophy that you cannot have the expectations for one … that you have for another … what is one child's success might be another child's failure." He illustrates his ideas by describing the differences he has noted between one writer and the next: one might be satisfied with having written a heartfelt memoir, while another might only feel satisfied if he sees it go to print in a magazine. "What *I* deem 'success' for each of my students may or may not be what students deem success for themselves." In Rus's writing classroom, the student is fundamentally the final arbiter of his or her success as a writer.

Cheryl views success as students going beyond themselves. Her word for it is *stretching*. She says, "It's good to make them stretch … that's why I like doing it …

it's getting a person to stretch." In stretching, muscles are prepared for exertion; as those same muscles grow flexible, one can stretch even more. And being flexible decreases the possibility of injury. Just as students stretch, so does the teacher. Draper (2000) describes this:

> It's all about reaching and teaching. When I first started teaching, an elderly black woman who had retired after thirty-five years of teaching took me aside. Her name was Mrs. Brady. She said, "Honey, you're going to be a great teacher. But you've got to reach 'em if you're going to teach 'em.'" (pp. 46-47)

For Mrs. Brady, "Love them as if they were your own" tops the list, followed in close succession by "Their world is bigger than yours … You are an interruption to their lives. Find yourself in it;" "Treat your students with dignity and respect;" "Success always works better than failure;" and "Don't expect miracles. A miracle might take a lifetime, and you only have until the end of the bell" (Draper, 2000, p. 47). This is a language of love, hope, and caring that reflects pedagogic sensitivity. Stretching and reaching elongate the muscles and add to flexibility. As teachers, ours is a practice of limbering up, not of tightening.

Avenging Angels

The student's understanding of "success" remains elusive. For as Duckworth 1996) points out, "Thoughts are our way of connecting things up for ourselves. If others tell us about the connections they have made, we can only understand them to the extent that we do the work of making these connections ourselves" (p. 26). Rus says, "It may not happen in the time period when I'm blessed to be with them." What does Rus mean here by "blessed?" A tracing of "blessed" yields definitions of both consecration and happiness; "enjoying supreme felicity … pleasurable, joyful,

blissful" (OED online). If Rus, as teacher, is present when learning occurs for a student, then he feels himself to be blessed by something holy. The original meaning of "bless," according to OED online, is "to consecrate by some sacrificial rite which was held to render a thing inviolable from profane use of men and evil influence of men or demons." Might there not be a connection with our pedagogy as teachers of writing? If our students, as beings of value, write themselves to understanding, do we not experience the joy and protection of something bigger than ourselves? We feel thankful for this holy gift, as if we've been passed over by the avenging angel of Biblical times. Our pedagogy thrives on hope, on the possibility of hope. O'Donohue (1999) invokes this prayer: "May you arise each day with a voice of blessing/whispering in your heart that something good is going to happen to you./May you find a harmony between your soul and your life" (p. 143).

In what ways do the teachers of writing in this study create classrooms of sanctuary where blessings flow? O'Donohue (1999) describes nature as a sanctuary that reminds us of our connection to the earth. Yet a certain way of being with our students might also create a peaceful place "where the mind and heart find rest … (then) you have discovered a sanctuary for your soul" (p. 16).

Sympathetic Souls

Cheryl calls herself "a sympathetic soul," a person who has struggled throughout her life with writing, and therefore, feels empathy for her students. She ponders why students seem comfortable in her writing classroom:

> I think people like to talk about themselves … have a place where you feel comfortable … (where) you can actually talk about yourself … and writing classes are one of the few places where that can happen … I had two or three students whose parents passed away in the middle of the semester—one was a

> terrible accident … they only missed two days of class and then they're right back, and I'm like, "Are you okay?" And they're like, "Actually, this is the best class because I can talk through it, I can work through it … I can write about it."

While Cheryl says "talk about yourself," I believe she is not only referring to conversation between persons, but talking to oneself on paper, too. Rule and Wheeler (2000) contemplate the ways in which "Strong writing often springs from negatives …Writing is dwelling. We hoard what affects us deeply and can't be explained … these stories, experiences, feelings, almost-insights build up steam. When we let them out, energy pours onto the page" (p. 70).

Writing never stands still; its nature is dwelling (or wandering) on the page. The original sense of dwelling is recaptured by tracing "to dwell" to its earlier meaning of, "to wander" (OED online). This etymological history once more points up: "It is language that tells us about the essence of a thing, provided we respect language's own essence" (Heidegger, 1993d, p. 348). He continues to unravel the philosophical implications of dwelling and building: "We do not dwell because we have built, but we build and have built because we dwell, that is, because we are *dwellers*" (1993d, p. 350). Thus, just as Rule and Wheeler (2000) propose above, writing makes it possible for us humans to find ourselves in our wanderings on the page, because that very wandering (dwelling) resonates with our nature as dwellers on earth.

Cheryl believes that it is essential for students to write about what matters to them. In his re-conceptualization of curriculum as conversation, Applebee (1996) concurs: "Today we recognize that there are many conversations, not one. They offer us alternative perspectives, new ways of knowing and doing, not a single set of truths

winnowed by time … All of these groups gain what they know through processes of 'putting it into words'" (p. 41). In order to speak in divergent ways about what matters to them, writing students do best when amidst sympathetic souls. There, they will find a sanctuary to explore the "irrational" wish to have a nose job on what others describe as a perfect nose; to pursue the sudden realization that one does not even *want* to be a teacher, but a vet; and to admit that one's homosexuality can no longer be hidden—all these "matters" find expression.

Above, I write "sympathetic souls," because in the writing classrooms of the teachers in this study, the presence of other students who listen with respect and care goes far in creating a safe place to write and share. O'Donohue (1999) speaks to the power of sympathetic others: "The presence of a person who has stillness and contentment of heart engenders trust. They can sift from the chaff of talk and select what has weight and worth. Sometimes the dignity of their composure can bring the company of those present to a finer level of attention" (p. 19). As a writing teacher, Cheryl is the only person in this study who emphasizes the "hate" in the love-hate relationship of writer to text. Yet her honesty creates an opening for students who perceive her as someone who would never say that writing is easy; she literally feels their pain. Even to this day, Cheryl strives to write in a way that will please her dissertation committee, whose members criticize her for a "non-academic" style. In fact, the harshness of one person's email critique brought her to tears, and filled her with despair. As a good friend commented, that person was just plain "mean." Cheryl, on the other hand, would never be mean to her struggling students. Her pedagogical way of being with them "engenders trust" and transforms her writing classroom into a

sanctified site. Furthermore, she "transformed the (conversational) domain" (Applebee, 1996, p. 50). That is, Cheryl has shifted the conversation toward understanding and practicing one's process as a writer, as opposed to learning isolated facts about writing that represent "knowledge-out-of-context," rather than "knowledge-in-action" (Applebee, 1996, p. 3).

Joyful Foolishness

> Pedagogy as a social relationship is very close in. It gets right in there—in your brain, your body, your heart, in your sense of self, of the world, of others, and of possibilities and impossibilities in all these realms. (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 6)

If, as writing teachers, our way of being with students is "right in there," then pedagogy does not call for fancy techniques, but through being fully present to our students, paying close attention to voices, visages, and body postures. Judy describes her daily ritual when coming into the classroom: "(I) acknowledge their presence and *look* at them and speak their *name* … something pretty simple, actually … and smile at them … I'm happy to be there, it's not artificial, and I think that sometimes makes people *relax*."

I and You

Buber (1970) describes two modes of existence: the I-It mode posits an outer world in which "Man [sic] goes over the surfaces of things and experiences them" (p. 55). However, "The life of a human being does not exist merely in the sphere of goal-directed verbs. It does not consist merely of activities that have something for their object" (p. 54). So, what Judy refers to as "something pretty simple" is far from that, for her way of being with students acknowledges the personhood, or You-ness, of each student. For Buber, it is the I-You encounter that opens up the world of

relation: "Relation is reciprocity. My You acts on me as I act on it" (1970, p. 67). When Judy establishes eye contact with students and learns their names, she engages in an I-You mode of being with others that amplifies her own being. She herself reflects: "I feel that I really am in relationship with the students that I work with." Being unable to form the I-You relationship deeply troubled Cheryl when she taught high school. She says: "In high school, I had 165 (students) …you're lucky that you even know your students' names by the end of the year!"

Claire also reflects on the importance of tuning in: "Sometimes you have to be quiet and listen to the voices of those around you as well as your own inner voice." As Levin (1989) reminds us, "We need to learn a listening which listens with this bodily felt sense. In other words, we need to cultivate a listening that is deeply rooted in our body's felt sense of situated being" (p. 219). That Judy and Claire teach with their whole listening beings is evident from our conversations. Still, it is unlikely that Judy articulates to her students what she shares with me:

> I—this sounds corny and maybe weird—but I *love* them! And it's a real love, it's not just … they make me feel good or anything like that because it's not always that they do, but they're just such beautiful people and they have so much in them that is valuable and important and it really is an emotional thing for me teaching them, really an emotional thing.

Professing love for her students causes Judy self consciousness, yet is not the "real love" she describes another way of expressing her caring as a teacher? She perceives that her students "have so much in them that is valuable and important," a phrase that reminds me once more of the etymology of the word, "technique," or *technē,* as "a bringing forth out of concealment." The reciprocity of the I-You relationship stirs

deep waters within a person ("it really is an emotional thing for me teaching them"), and why should it not?

Perhaps love and caring are terms about which teachers ought not to be apologetic. Buber (1970) believes that love is embedded in the I-You relation: "Love is responsibility of an I for a You: in this consists what cannot consist in any feeling" (p. 66). Here, love *and* responsibility go hand in hand. Van Manen (2003) also views teaching as ongoing mindfulness about our responsibility toward our students, and the need for teachers to engage in loving "pedagogic competence." He says:

> We are interested in competence because we want to know what to do and we want to be able to distinguish what is good and what is not good for a child: as pedagogues we must act, and in acting we must be true to our calling. (p. 158)

Teachers of writing such as Judy relate to their students in a genuine I-You relationship, a relationship situated within love and caring, hard work, and a deep commitment to the "bringing forth" of students. Although the topics about which students write might be profoundly shadowed, the work proceeds in the light of encounter. Everyone is named and heard. Everyone is invited. Everyone is cherished. Given such a classroom, even wary students might be encouraged to venture out into risky places on the page.

Us and Them

As a person of color, DaMaris has struggled with unique obstacles throughout her life. She views "access" to education as being determined by a person's social, cultural, and political status. DaMaris says that it is her responsibility as an educator to "be as honest as possible and give them as much as possible because if you don't, then you're limiting them, and that's not fair." In her writing classroom, DaMaris

promotes journaling, for journaling has allowed DaMaris to transcend bodily, gendered, and racial barriers. She gives her own writing students access to journaling for it serves as "a diving board or a springboard … (they know) I'm not going to limit the direction in which they're going." Her students are invited to share journal entries on a regular basis, an exchange that helps them see "they're not the only person experiencing some of that social or psychological *blockade*." The "more" here is for writing students to realize their individual power, to be able to echo what DaMaris envisions for her students: "I, too, am possibility."

At the same time, the realization of personal agency cannot unfold in a vacuum. As persons, we are forever situated within a world of others, with responsibility toward them. As DaMaris says, "You *have* to come into contact with something else to learn … your mind has to be triggered by something … it's almost toxic to continuously feed off yourself, I think." DaMaris senses a sort of poison in writing exclusively for oneself, without the response from other readers who might show the writer when he or she is making meaning clear. While each writer is, essentially, his or her first audience for *any* piece of writing, DaMaris touches on a pedagogical dilemma that confronts the other teachers of writing in this study: in what ways do we help students strengthen their own voices *and* guide them to address themselves to a wider audience?

All the teachers heed the ethical call of communicating with others. "It can't always be about you," Rus says. "If it's all about you, then you're alienating the readers … what makes good writers: we (readers) can open up to it and say, 'I can

relate to that—this is a chunk … that I can take home with me in some way.'"

Barthes (1975) considers the pleasures and shakiness of writing:

> Does writing in pleasure—guarantee me, the writer—my reader's pleasure? Not at all. I must seek out this reader (must 'cruise' him) *without knowing where he is*. A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader's person that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, an *unpredictability* of bliss. (p. 4)

Barthes envisions a site of mutual pleasure where both writer and reader might meet, but one wherein the reader's desire to read on is never guaranteed. Thus, as writers, we have a responsibility to work in the darkness and unpredictability of text, hoping to capture the reader's bliss.

Van Manen (2002a) sounds the lament of every writer: "Sometimes the words just do not seem to come. Sometimes the text of writing seems so trite. Sometimes the writer simply does not know where to turn, what to do next. Indeed, at times it feels as if one is writing in the dark" (p. i). Writing through the darkness, we hope to find our readers on the other side. David views the challenge as, "How do we make out of all the language … something that is ours, but also something that is communal?" For her part, Claire has a profound ethical sense as a writer: "I have a deep responsibility because writing puts you at risk in a very public way, so you have to respect your writing privately and understand that it's almost like undressing in public, because every letter exposes this lifeblood."

As writing teachers, we are situated within our own private arenas, just as our students are. We dare to publish ourselves, continually striving to make our writing accessible to readers. We wish the same for our students of writing. It is this engagement with our students on a day to day basis, this artful juggling, guessing and

acceptance of "false starts" (Applebee, 1996) that strengthens our teaching. In fact, the paradoxes discussed below are sources of pleasure for teachers of writing in this study; although often neglected in discussions of writing pedagogy, their power is undiminished.

Pleasures of Paradox

"*What* could you say to this student that would make a difference, and *how* can you say it… in order to make a difference?" David asks. David's question moves close in to what it is to discern that which is not yet realized in our students. When we step into our classrooms on the first day of the semester, we feel nervous and excited. We have prepared carefully because we not only love writing, but we love the young writers. Our nerves prickle along our spines because we cannot predict or control that which our students will take from our courses.

They remain an enigma. It is their very unpredictability that delights and unnerves us as teachers of writing. It is what we—and they—have not yet brought forward in each other that creates the tension, a tension where possibility blooms. The difference between knowing and becoming is our pedagogical home. It is there where we dwell with students. Heidegger writes: "We attain to dwelling, so it seems, only by means of building" (1993d, p. 347). He traces the origin of "dwell" to the Old German, *buan,* meaning "to build." Continuing on, he reflects:

> The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be in the world as a mortal. It means to dwell … the old word, *bauen,* which says that man *is* insofar as he *dwells* … also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for. (1993d, p. 349)

When I was in the third grade, I had a young teacher who was the epitome of caring. A slender, dark-haired woman in her 20's, Miss Rittenhouse impressed me on the very first day of school. After pronouncing her name, she turned to the blackboard: "Here's how you say it," and then she wrote RIT-10, followed by a small house. Immediately, I—along with 29 other seven-year-olds—understood. We understood that she wanted—more than anything—for *us* to understand. Many years later, I wrote in my journal about the way in which Miss Rittenhouse influenced me in my future career: "She always listened closely, her brown eyes attentive. (She) made me want to teach too, someday, so that I might give back a little …(and) taught me how to respect and encourage each child" (De La Ysla, 1998).

The Presence of Its Absence

Although I write that Miss Rittenhouse taught me "how to respect and encourage," it is more accurate to say that this young teacher had *a way of being* that drew us to her. I remember most her eyes, her soft gentle hands, her quiet voice. I knew she was special—different. She looked into us and discerned our strengths, mine for third grade politics and Carol's for drawing. She complimented us on our talents, creating in each of us a sense of possibility. Within her eyes, I was cherished. Similarly, all the teachers in my study mention special teachers who made a difference in their lives by recognizing something precious in them.

In sixth grade, Rus had Mr. Delaney for language arts. "I was immersed in an environment with other writers," Rus writes. "We felt safe to take risks with our writing, and he coached me about using irony effectively in my writing … it was a great lesson!" Rus, who had "a great passion for words," met up with a teacher who

mined that love and helped Rus move forward in his writing. Mr. Delaney was, as Atwell (1998) writes, aware that children learn to write "by exercising the options available to real-world authors, including daily time for writing, conferences with teachers and peers during drafting … most significantly, students decided what they would write" (p. 12).

David, too, found a special teacher, Professor Daniels, who taught undergraduate poetry. While highly critical, the professor spent many hours helping David improve his work. I ask David: "Why do you think he spent so much time with you?" "I guess," David reflects, "he saw something in me." In an earlier conversation, David describes himself as having been a boy who never fit in, who felt isolated from his peers. Thus, to one day meet a professor who recognized in David "a poet in the rough," both astonished and humbled the young man. Being seen and heard made David willing to tolerate the professor's tough feedback. In many ways, Miss Rittenhouse, Mr. Delaney, and Professor Daniels made a difference by bringing *our* differences forward. Each teacher dwelled with us, built trust in us, and in so doing, won our deep affection and gratitude for seeing in us the persons we might someday become. Had our teachers recognized "the presence of its absence," as Moran (2000) describes Derrida's term, *différance* (p. 466)?

Derrida invented the French word, *différance,* (written with an "a" rather than with an "e") to express concurrent meanings: "*différance* as temporization, *différance* as spacing" (Derrida, 1982, p. 9). There are multiple dimensions to *différance*, especially in relation to linguistics. For example, writing is said to mean one thing or another; however, that meaning is illusory, since "all signs, by pointing away from

themselves, involve a deferral of meaning" (Moran, 2000, p. 466). Derrida writes: "When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present … we signify, we go through the detour of the sign … The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence" (1982, p. 9). In his interpretation of Derrida, Moran says: "The sign (writing) stands for the absent and represents the presence of its absence" (2000, p. 466).

In some ways, then, *différance* is another site of the in-between where teachers dwell with their students. As teachers of writing who stand out as being different, making a difference involves an actual distancing-from our personal agendas, so that in the "absence" created by our retreat, our students' full presence might appear. At the same moment, as teachers, we remain attentive to what is yet to emerge, to the difference residing in each person we teach. We intuit the presence of that which is still absent in our students. We stay attuned to the signs of promise. Aoki (2005b) sees the teacher's dwelling place as "a sanctified clearing where the teacher and students gather … a hopeful place, a trustful place, a careful place—essentially a human place dedicated to ventures devoted to a leading out, an authentic 'e(out)/ducere(lead)," from the 'is' to new possibilities yet unknown" (p. 164). Several times during my conversations with Judy, for example, she refers to the beauty within her students ("They are so beautiful!"). Calkins (1994) writes:

> If our teaching is to be an art, we must draw from all we know, feel, and believe in order to create something beautiful. To teach well, we do not need more techniques and strategies as much as we need a vision of what is essential … Artists know this. Artistry … comes from a sense of priority and design. (p. 3)

"In"Outside the Circle

David touts eccentricity as a virtue when working with students of writing. He dons a bow tie, in part to set himself apart from other male faculty who always wear ties. In addition, David admits that bow ties make him look rather comical, and somehow, draw students to him. He is willing to be genuinely, authentically different—as he says, "ec-centric" in the sense of being outside the circle. Students suspect that he lives and thinks "outside the boundaries" of what they have come to expect; they come to respect him for taking risks. On one occasion, David urged his poetry writing class to stop playing it safe: "I don't like nice," he told them. Discussing their use of polite, boring language, David encouraged them to try out whatever words they wanted in their poetry, profanity included. But no one dared to step forward. Finally, David let loose a stream of swear words. In the shocked silence that followed, he said: "There. Now the room is no longer a virgin, so you can say anything you want." Erupting in laughter, his students got the point. "There are essential and inessential insanities … Inessential insanities get one in trouble with oneself. Essential insanities get one in trouble with others. It's always preferable to be in trouble with others. In fact, it may be essential" (Robbins, n.d., n.p.). What does being in trouble with others allow for the teacher of writing and her students?

In an earlier conversation with Judy, the subject comes up of controversial readings which rile up her students. She remarks: "I have them reading literature that many of them would never read … I'm asking them to jump off from a comfortable place and consider others' viewpoints that they don't approve of, or they don't think about, or that they don't understand." When I comment that teaching, for her, seems

to do with evoking the trouble, Judy coins one of her husband's phrases: "'Shit disturbing' …I really think it's good to be a 'shit disturber' sometimes. I think you can be a nice person and still stir things up so people have to think."

David has been known to stir things up by telling students exactly what he thinks: a female student had written a rather confusing poem alluding to an altered state. After reading the poem, he called her in, and asked her what was going on in the poem. She was trying heroin, she admitted. "What are you doing a stupid thing like that for?" he challenged. And then added, with a small laugh: "You know, it should be a better poem—make it better!" David's reaction to his student was blunt, at a time when delicate words seemed unequal to the dangers involved. Although the student never re-wrote the poem, she did tell David at term's end that she had decided to stop using. She said, "Having written about it and talked to you about it, it didn't seem so much fun any more." What in David's eccentric demeanor reassured the student that he was a safe person who could be trusted with her confidence? Perhaps, as David himself says, his absolute willingness to appear "idiotic" at times engenders trust. As Heidegger (1971) says, "To dare is to risk the game" (p. 102). But what game is at stake here in David's classroom? The game of pretension, of pretending to be someone he is not?

Fundamentally, David worries and wonders about his students: has he failed them? As if the rest of us do not, he admits: "I make lots of mistakes!" Yet one mistake he does not make is being afraid to be himself. He steps over the line of convention from time to time, unlike those who prefer to stay within the proscribed circle of practice. Being humble and outrageous at the same time, David lowers

barriers between himself and students. In this manner, they can "see" each other much more clearly, as I and You. David reflects: "I think *every* successful teacher is sort of eccentric … and not afraid to be!" The courageous writing teachers in this study embody Heidegger's words: "Those who are more venturesome cannot be those who merely say. The saying of the more venturesome must really venture to *say*" (1971, p. 138).

Doing What They Love, Off-Balance

Even as the teachers of writing in this study describe the ways in which they are frequently off-balance as pedagogues, they point to disequilibrium as a source of pleasure: "I think that's the beauty and excitement of teaching, just … *never* knowing … always striving and always changing," says Judy. Claire concurs: "You have to be willing to admit that you don't know everything even if you're an expert in your field—there's always room to grow." For both Judy and Claire, change and the potential for growth loom in importance as sources of pleasure. Particularly with more "marginal students," Claire notes growth and the way in which they "accepted their limits and then worked around those." Judy revels in change: "I think it's exciting. I think to get too rigid and never change is deadly as a teacher. I can't imagine teaching … the same thing for twenty-five years." Applebee (1996) agrees. In his studies of the teaching of literature in high schools and colleges, he describes what he calls "deadly traditions:"

> Educators have relied on classroom practices that focus almost exclusively on memory, allowing goals of active reasoning and participation to fall by the wayside. Instead of the knowledge-in-action that both allows and develops through participation in culturally significant traditions of discourse, we have emphasized the knowledge-out-of-context that comes from studying its characteristics. (p. 26)

Judy's creative reinvention gives life and pleasure to her teaching, and thereby, keeps her classroom a vibrant place for students to learn.

For David, pleasure derives from the art in motion that is teaching:

> It's always a risk … teaching is constantly guessing what would be the most effective thing with this student … It's what makes teaching an art rather than a science, because if you knew exactly what it is you would say, then it would be a science, and then it would be less interesting to me.

Similarly, not knowing exactly "what it is you would say" suggests the process of writing, itself. Whether one regards writing as craft or art—I say it is *both/and*—"We cannot teach writing well unless we trust that there are real, human reasons to write" (Calkins, 1994, p. 12). The art of teaching writing springs forth from one's embodied memories "of a time when we loved writing … (for) If we have even once in our lives experienced the power of writing, our teaching will be forever changed" (Calkins, 1994, p. 13). As writers, we are "constantly guessing" as we work the medium of words—and as they work us—just as any artist engages in the give and take of creating a work of art. Similarly, as teachers, we and our students are situated in a writing workshop where we continually consider the question: "What would be the most effective thing?" This question reflects the *objet d´art* of our pedagogy: the crafting of wonderful writers. Furthermore, as Aoki views it, "The teacher works from within; he or she resides 'in-between'" (in Pinar, 2005, p. 15). In his introduction to Aoki's collected work, Pinar (2005) points to the importance of both watchfulness and thoughtfulness. "When teaching is thoughtfulness, Aoki suggests, teaching is 'an embodied doing and being, thought and soul in oneness of the lived

moment'" (p. 19). As writing teachers, we are the teaching; we seek to make our lives, and our work, into works of art.

During our conversations, David also advocates for "a curriculum of not knowing," one that generates question after question. For writers, "All of the issues of writing are never-ending, no matter how good a writer you are … the issues keep changing … that's what makes writing exciting … there aren't any formulas all the time." At the same moment that David advocates for a curriculum of not knowing, he also professes openly to students that he, too, sometimes lacks answers. Teaching is pleasurable, for the "issues" keep changing; indeed, there are no "formulas" to create relationships with students. Sometimes David is completely unsure about a new activity, and thinks, "Oh, this is crazy—it's not going to work at all!" At those times, David admits feeling "frightened … terrified." Yet, "If you're not willing to risk being an ass in class, then you're not going to be able to give them the (writing) atmosphere." Then, lacking precedent or formula, David holds on for the ride.

David describes his teaching as "constantly guessing." Why might constant guessing bring a sense of fulfillment? What is it about being at the center of the question that pleases a teacher? Perhaps, as Ellsworth (1997) suggests, "The fecundity of teaching lies precisely in its paradoxes and ironies" (p. 139). Cheryl reflects on one of these ironies from her first year as a middle school writing teacher:

> I think about how you grow and you learn as a teacher … I think back to my first year—"Oh, Lord, did I teach those kids anything?" … and then you run into your kids … and they're like, "It was great, it was so much fun!" … So I guess there's more … They're not *learning* in-depth stuff every day for 180 days; you've got to make it kind of fun in there … make them kind of be people, and human.

"I guess there's more," Cheryl says. Might not the "more" to which she alludes be a classroom space where students are in relationship with her and with one another, where they can be "human?" Ellsworth (1997) states, "What teaches is a structure of address … Might it mean that teaching is not a matter of what I say, but of how I say it and how I'm listened to?" (p. 63). Students have fun when they perceive their teacher to be, as Cheryl describes herself, "a sympathetic soul." When they tell Cheryl, "It was great!" are they not referring to a special quality in her classroom that made her different?

Kohl (1994) taps into the pleasure in the reciprocity of teaching. He asks: "What in our relationship released the teacher in me? I believe it was the pleasure I got from helping him reach out to me and through that experience learn ways of reaching out to other people" (p. 53). This dynamic relationship between student and teacher hints that we as teachers may need our students even more than they need us. Being in relationship with her students has to do with sharing. DaMaris says, "I like teaching what I love … That's what I like best … getting other people to love and enjoy writing, so I guess it's really narcissistic, but that's what I love." The same holds true for Kohl: "For me, writing on a chalkboard and going on about something I am dying to share with my students is one of the greatest pleasures of teaching. I don't feel a need to force them to love what I love or learn what I have learned. I just want to have an occasion to inspire them" (1994, p. 63).

Both DaMaris and Kohl refer to a speaking or a giving that recalls a forgotten dimension of the word, "teach," whose earlier origin appears to have derived from the Latin for *dicere*, "to say, tell" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 2024). Thus,

while teaching implies a saying or telling, it may not *necessarily* imply that the saying or the telling has the nature of a speaking that tells the student *what* to do. Rather, it might be that the Latin *dicere* recaptures an earlier sense of "to teach" as a *physical* act of speech. Perhaps the teacher-speaker is a person who speaks his or her passion, who tells what's closest to the heart. Duckworth (1996) recaptures this sense: "By 'teacher' I mean someone who engages learners, who seeks to involve each person wholly—mind, sense of self, sense of humor, range of interests, interactions with other people—in learning" (p. 162).

Where Paradox Leads

> Profound truth, rather than empirical fact, is the stuff of which paradoxes are made. But profound need not mean exotic or esoteric. We encounter paradoxical profundities every day simply because we are human, for we ourselves are paradoxes that breathe! Indeed, breathing itself is a form of paradox, requiring inhaling and exhaling to be whole. (Palmer, 1998, p. 63)

I find myself sighing (exhaling a deep breath) as I come to the end of this chapter, and in so doing, I embody paradox in the need to take in and let out breath. As Palmer says, while paradoxes are the cloth of profound truth, they do not have to be "exotic or esoteric." Throughout this chapter, I have reflected on the paradoxes that emerged during my conversations with the teachers of writing in this study. It took time before these paradoxes broke the surface of my awareness, for they are so embedded in the pedagogical practices of my conversants as to be invisible. Indeed, "paradox" riddles the teaching and being of these writing teachers. Now, steeped in paradox, I pause to consider what this chapter has brought me to recognize about the meaning of paradox in the pedagogy of teachers of writing.

Time and again, the teachers in my study refer to the elusive nature of both writing and the teaching of writing; they are deeply uncertain where these ventures will lead. In the tensioned space of writing, they struggle with the ongoing challenge of making sense on the page. They follow the writing into the darkness, "knowing" from past experience that the language will take shape through revision. It is this familiarity with, and growing trust in, the writing process that the writing teachers seek for their students as well. Yet, paradoxically, each person describes never knowing for sure whether or not what he or she teaches will make its point with students, whether students will come away "getting it." This holds true whether the teacher has taught for 30 or for five years. Writing teachers are thus suspended in the both/and of knowing and not knowing. This is a pedagogical paradox they live each day. Ellsworth (1997) says, "As a paradox, pedagogy poses problems and dilemmas that can never be settled or resolved once and for all" (p. 8).

In another paradox, the teachers describe the necessity of creating a comfortable classroom space where the "wounded" and "scarred" writer is once more willing to be uncomfortable and take risks. One way in which the writing teacher encourages writers to tackle greater risk is, paradoxically, to lower the stakes with non-judged, daily writing that allows students to reclaim their voices. There is also respect for the student who needs to hide out—this wary writer might be coaxed out of hiding through the writing teacher's intricate choreography of stepping forward or back, of paying out or bringing in the rope. What these images evoke is an in-between space, fraught with tension and promise. Teachers of writing in this study have a delicate touch, along with the agility to get out of the way when necessary so that the

student can move into the foreground. Our pedagogy seeks to create comfort with discomfort. After relating a story about one student who confided deep personal problems to him, one of my conversants laughingly remarks, "I must have been doing something."

The something to which he refers is less a doing than a way of being. Even as the writing teachers in this study carefully take attendance each session, they are *in* attendance by looking into faces, noting body posture, and listening to the voices, both confident and shy, of their students. The writing teacher's posture of attentiveness communicates that he or she can be trusted—students, like their writing, are vulnerable works-in-progress. Concurrently, the writing teacher is the gatekeeper who lays out the syllabus with its assignments, guidelines, schedule, and assessment policy. As the dispenser of grades and the monitor of the roster, the writing teacher is thrust into a difficult situation: we guide our students toward fuller expression, yet we are required to assign numeric grades to writing that may represent considerable risk-taking on the student's part. Giving a student anything less than an A might well be viewed by him or her as a kind of failure. We remain attentive to our students in all their aspects, yet paradoxically, at the end of most assignments, give grades that might shut down further risk-taking. This paradox is a poignant reminder of the power of grades, and the need—in writing classrooms—to devise alternate ways to assess student growth, such as portfolio use or student exhibitions at the end, as Applebee (1996) urges.

Writing involves staying with the task at hand, yet being willing to detour into the wilderness of not knowing where the piece will go. Our students want to know

"what we want," and *we* want them to be bewildered from time to time. We say, "Stay with it," and—at the same time—encourage them to wander here and there. Wandering along those compositional detours takes time, however, both clock and lived time; students may resist and we, as writing teachers, have to allow *and* give up expectations for where the student goes. This paradox of "letting be" is extremely difficult to practice, especially when—as the writing teachers in this study demonstrate—there is a personal investment in writing and what it makes possible. Paradoxically, our love of *students* must surpass our love of *writing*.

All the writing teachers struggle to find their place on the steep incline of grades. Because we deal with the lives of our students, as reflected in their writing, writing teachers have an aversion to grades. They want to stand alongside and behind their students who are in the process of inching along. They would exercise the judgment of wisdom and prudence, rather than pronounce the student writer guilty. The teachers even celebrate "failure" as instructive for further revision, an approach that disrupts the negative connotation of failure, itself.

A deep sense of integrity and courage matters more than technique for the writing teachers in this study. As Palmer (1998) writes, "Paradox is not only an abstract mode of knowing. It is a lens through which we can learn more about the selfhood from which good teaching comes" (p. 66). Accordingly, the conversants reveal themselves to be genuine persons who are often unconventional and, from time to time, as David admits, "idiotic." However, paradoxically, it is this unadorned authenticity and lack of pretension that appeal to students, and makes these writing

teachers more accessible as confidantes. Sympathetic toward their students, teachers sometimes become *anam cara* (O'Donohue, 1997): well-loved friends.

What is it in paradox that illuminates our pedagogy as teachers of writing? I turn to Parker Palmer for his thoughts on paradox: "We see everything as this or that, plus or minus, on or off, black or white; and we fragment reality into an endless series of *either-ors*. In a phrase, we think the world apart" (Palmer, 1998, p. 62). By contrast, Palmer sees paradox as helping us "develop a more capacious habit of mind that supports the capacity for connectedness on which good teaching depends" (p. 62). The power of both/and that resides in paradox might help us mend what has been torn apart. In the next, and final, chapter, I explore a pedagogy of in-between for what it suggests to strengthen the teaching of writing. For perhaps it is in the tensionality of paradox where growth and fullness flourish, for writing teachers and their students.

CHAPTER FIVE:

EMBRACING THE EQUILIBRIUM IN IMBALANCE

> What a fool I was to imagine that I had mastered this occult art—harder to divine than tea leaves and impossible for mortals to do even passably well! (Palmer, 1998, p. 1)

As I reflect on the lived experience of teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between, I am drawn to their adaptability. Perhaps it might be said that such teachers "go with the flow," aware of the pedagogic medium in which they are suspended: its power, beauty, and capacity to surprise. They navigate through all kinds of conditions: warm and clear, cold and murky, calm and rough. One thing is certain: they are situated within a fluid tension that calls for continual attention to not only what is present, but to what Derrida (1982) refers to as the presence of an absence. Staying afloat within this paradoxical realm of in-between calls for a simultaneous remembering *and* forgetting of curriculum—we dwell with our students in the vicissitudes of the everyday, occasionally "forgetting" what we hoped to uncover, for the greater good of remembering the persons who stand before us. Our students *are* the curriculum—first and foremost, we teach *them*. Given the mysteries of human nature, the pedagogical venture is fraught with risk: Heidegger (1971) writes:

> In the Middle Ages the word for balance, *die Wage,* still means …hazard or risk … this is the situation in which matters may turn out one way or the other … to weigh or throw in the balance … means to bring into the movement of the game, to throw into the scales, to release into risk. What is ventured is, of course, unprotected; but because it hangs in the balance, it is retained in the venture. It is upheld. Its ground keeps it safely within it. (p. 103)

The merging of balance with risk suggests a pedagogical venture that cannot be predicted or controlled; instead, equilibrium asserts itself within a realm of uncertainty.

In Chapter One, I introduce perfect buoyancy as a metaphor for the in-between of a pedagogy in the teaching of writing. My journey as a scuba diver resonates with my lived in-betweens as a bi-racial woman, a writer and a teacher of writers. Hovering within perfect buoyancy as a metaphoric site, I seek to "redeem, retrieve, regain, recapture in the sense of recalling" (van Manen, 2003, p. 149) the lived dimensions of in-between places. For example, when a novice diver, I struggled with scuba gear, and—more than that—with my own anxieties about getting things right. Ironically, it seemed that there was something between weight and breath, a place where I needed to be, but did not know how to reach. Similarly, the lived experience of in-between as a pedagogy in the teaching of writing—just as the lived experience of diving—turns on being situated between. For once I step away from the podium and dive in with my students, my eyes are peeled for the unexpected. I am mindful that—if and until they choose to share themselves in their writing—I remain a stranger to their inner worlds. As Ellsworth (1997) points out, teachers need to "respect … an absolutely different other, an unrecognizable other, another irreducibly different from myself" (p. 162). Just as in diving, I am always on the edge of encounter with new life forms, so it is with my students. In the writing classroom, the possibility to glimpse *their* possibilities engages me.

Looking back now on the fullness of this study, I turn to a consideration of the pedagogic implications for teachers of writing situated in the in-between. While

perfect buoyancy as a metaphor for the in-between launched my reflection, a pedagogy of in-between eludes definition. Indeed, as van Manen (2003) writes, "Pedagogy is not something that can be 'had,' 'possessed,' in the way that we can say that a person 'has' or 'possesses' a set of specific skills or performative competencies" (p. 149). No, instead, pedagogy is a way of being with students, a way calling for care, humor, patience, and courage. It is a way that embraces the venture of dwelling in imbalance that, ultimately, finds its ground in that tension. A pedagogical in-between embraces the equilibrium in imbalance. The notion then arises of being with students in eccentric ways, "outside" the circle.

Dwelling in Imbalance

Being comfortable with the person one is emerges as a topic in the final conversation with the teachers of writing in this study. As Palmer (1998) writes, "Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of this 'I' who teaches—without which I have no sense of the 'Thou' who learns" (p. 10). The teachers in this study face themselves with humor and humility, along with ease at being different. Their unconventionality makes possible a rich confluence of nutrients.

Celebrating Eccentricity

> Eccentricity: 4. The quality or habit of deviating from what is usual or regular; irregularity, oddity, whimsicality. (OED online)

"Sheer eccentricity is a useful thing … I wear that bow tie in part to create an atmosphere in which I'm sort of goofy and eccentric … I think every successful teacher is sort of eccentric," says David. On several occasions, David remarks that his willingness to play the eccentric makes his students "more comfortable" to take

risks in their writing. Judy reflects on the importance, and difficulty, of asserting: "'This is who I am, and I'm happy to be this way' …We're so used to worrying what other people think." Cheryl, who rides her Harley-Davidson to the university, admits to students that some of her best writing takes place while cleaning the bathroom. Disarming in her candor and wit, Cheryl confesses to a lifetime of struggling as a writer. "So the people who are good writers, I tell them how much I hate and envy them: 'You can write me under the table, you're so much better than I am!'" DaMaris tells students that, as a high school truant, she spent hours writing in her journal beside a stream. It is because she felt different as a woman of color growing up in a predominantly white, wealthy suburb that she turned to writing as her refuge. Thus, in his or her own way, each participant in this study strays from the notion of teacher as being situated in the center of the road. Instead, being off-center has its advantages. John Stuart Mill reflects on the merits of eccentricity:

> Eccentricity has always abounded when and where strength of character has abounded; and the amount of eccentricity in a society has generally been proportional to the amount of genius, mental vigor, and moral courage which it contained. That so few now dare to be eccentric, marks the chief danger of the time. (1895, n.p.)

As persons who readily admit to odd, or whimsical, behavior and beliefs, the teachers in this study display a "strength of character" and daring. They open themselves to the unique in their student writers. They are flexible in the way they coach students in their writing. Eschewing formulas, these writing teachers bask in the messiness that writing entails. They share their own rough drafts with students, and have the courage to admit that they do not know exactly where a piece of writing will go. For example, Rus speaks in bold terms about writing as an emptying out of

toxins. “Brain-drains” are short periods at the beginning of class when students free write in their daybooks on whatever is on their minds; brain-drains can be kept or tossed as the writer sees fit. Troubling the notion of writing as something special, Rus encourages his students to generate what he calls the “vomit draft” at one sitting. Brain-drains and vomit drafts spew those messy thoughts out on paper. Both suggest that what is inside is under pressure and needs to be released, sometimes forcibly. Indeed, letting it all out embodies the writer’s first step toward meaningful writing.

Writing teachers who themselves “go with their guts” have the guts to embrace their own eccentricity. They take chances that others may not, sensing that being genuinely different appeals to students who themselves are searching for their own distinctive identities. One teacher comments, “I’m lucky, too, that not everybody does this, because it’s part of ‘What’s this? It’s different from everything else …’ So right there, the curiosity—it’s like a good book; it hooks them … ‘I’ll stick around and see what it’s like.’” As teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between, perhaps the “it” that “hooks” is our unique being. We hope that our students will stick around—and stick to it—long enough to write their way toward their own uniqueness, as well.

As for myself, I am open with my students; when we are working on drafts and revisions, I often share past experiences that may upset their taken-for-granted notions of who I am. On the surface, I appear to be a dark-haired, Eurasian woman of indeterminate middle age, who dresses in subdued hues. They see a ready smile and perceive a sense of humor. But then my writing reveals another Professor De La Ysla: the nineteen-year old who accepted a ride from a Hell’s Angel; the college

student who hitchhiked from Northern California to Alaska; the one who lived for a while on a commune and got tear-gassed during an anti-war demonstration; and a few days before 9/11, the scuba diver who fought off a venomous sea snake in Papua, New Guinea. Eyes full of amusement or wonder, they listen as I read. "Professor D—you're a rebel!" one of them exclaimed recently, and we all laughed. As I tell them my stories, I wish to let them know that *who* we appear to be may be very different from the persons we *are* beneath the surface. I seek to reassure them that—despite her age and demeanor—their professor has had adventures, many of them unconventional. As a writing teacher, I see no merit in artifice, for how can I encourage students to show what lies within them if *I* am unwilling to do the same?

Such sharing is an opening up to others. As Heidegger (1993b) writes: "*The essence of truth is freedom*" … To free oneself … is possible only by *being free* for what is opened up in an open region" (p. 123). What is implied here for teachers of writing is that self-disclosure unleashes the floodgate of being, our own included. When that which "is opened up" stands before us, we are in the light—that is, enlightened—about others, and they about us. For truthful writing entrusts us, as teachers, with the essence of our students. "To let beings be—does not refer to neglect and indifference but rather the opposite. To let be is to engage oneself with beings" (Heidegger, 1993b, p. 125). Engagement with our writing students is based on acceptance, on letting them be whoever they are.

Being Friends with our Shadows

Palmer (1998) locates good teaching in the qualities embodied by the teachers of writing in this study: identity and integrity. He writes:

> In every class I teach, my ability to connect with my students, and to connect them with the subject, depends less on the methods I use than on the degree to which I know and trust my selfhood—and am willing to make it available and vulnerable in the service of learning. (p. 10)

When writing teachers share their own writing and process of composition with students, when they laugh at their foibles and errors (such as my own unexplained tendency to misspell words whenever I am writing on a vertical surface such as a blackboard), when they admit to truancy or other youthful rebellion, when they do not pretend to have all the answers or the "one way" to write well—in short, when authenticity takes priority over control, then what Palmer (1998, p. 11) calls "a capacity for connectedness" is made possible. Indeed, the unique relationship between teacher of writing and student of writing urges honesty because of the fact that—in writing—the writer is forever at risk of exposure. Where are we more vulnerable than when our ideas and feelings appear on the page, when what we want to say is uncertain, and our thoughts are strewn about like one discarded outfit after the other because we cannot decide what to wear for that important date? No one wants to "show up" on the page half-dressed. Not even writers as prolific as the late Donald Barthelme escape the dilemma inherent in writing: "The writer is one who, embarking upon a task, does not know what to do" (1997, p. 11).

Palmer suggests that our students may shy away from self-disclosure (and the messiness implied) because the academic culture stresses the superiority of objective, over subjective, ways of knowing. "In this culture," he writes, "the self is not a source to be tapped but a danger to be suppressed, not a potential to be fulfilled but an obstacle to be overcome" (1998, p. 18). In a movement that might be called countercultural, teacher-writers in this study are reflective persons. As they engage in

personal writing, they be-friend themselves in the sense that they become friends with their own truths, they reach a place of wholeness that acknowledges both the light and the shadow of their lives. For attention to—and gentleness toward—that which emerges in writing brings the writer into better view.

Might not the pedagogical in-between yield teachers in the original sense of the Gaelic term, *"anam cara,"* meaning "soul friend"? O'Donohue (1997) writes:

> In the early Celtic church, a person who acted as a teacher, companion, or spiritual guide was called an *anam cara.* It originally referred to someone to whom you confessed, revealing hidden intimacies of your life. With the *anam cara,* you could share your innermost self, your mind and your heart. (p. 13)

Teachers of writing who engage in a pedagogy of in-between bear witness to the revelation of their students' "hidden intimacies." Whether through journals, poetry, or reflective essays, students frequently share insights or wonderings that startle in their candor. All the persons in this study relate anecdotes about students who surprised—not only their writing teachers—but themselves, with revelations made possible through writing. David recalls one student who missed several classes in a row. When the student returned, he presented his professor with a journal showing that he had been keeping up with assignments. To David's alarm, the young man also wrote about being severely depressed and acquiring a handgun. Unless the student had felt that David could be trusted with his confession, he would never have disclosed his pain. Certainly, the student intuited that—as his *anam cara*—David would reach out a helping hand. Of course, David did just that.

As mentioned earlier in this study, Rus's student dared to write about the death of a close friend. The student described an epiphany: he realized that he could now write about "anything." DaMaris remembers a female student who, describing a

conversation overheard, wrote a powerful essay about her troubled relationship with her father. Cheryl also had a student whose mother died in an automobile accident during the semester. Coming to writing class "helped," the student said, because it was only there that she could write through her feelings of loss. For my own part I think of Laura, who wrote for the first time about her mother, who perished after being set aflame by a heroin addict boyfriend.

As writers teaching young writers in the composition of truth, we are grateful when they generate work that brings them—often unexpectedly—to a deeper level of release and understanding. Our students' surprise is an inescapable element of writing. As Barthelme (1997) points out: "The combinatorial agility of words, the exponential generation of meaning once they're allowed to go to bed together, allows the writer to surprise himself [sic], makes art possible, reveals how much of Being we haven't yet encountered" (p. 21).

The Beings we share with each other in a writing classroom are treasures. When Jon tells me that he had not realized there was so much emerging in his narrative about an uncaring girlfriend, I am pleased. For his revision and ongoing search for meaning brings him to a new level of powerful writing. Jon mentions the daybook he has been keeping since the beginning of the semester. He notes that it has provided him with a welcome outlet during his lengthy rehabilitation after a serious sports injury. Another student, Tony, has just written his first draft about being drunk and demolishing his mother's automobile during his senior year in high school. A slight young man from Puerto Rico, Tony taps his essay and says, "I'm so excited; this is *good*!" I smile at his enthusiasm, knowing that later when I sit down with the

essay, I will see Tony's sparkling eyes and hear his happy voice. This is the reward that the teaching of writing bestows on me, as it does on the other writing teachers in this study.

Fox (1993) reflects on what else motivates our writing students. They write for *us,* as much as they write for themselves, "for the purposes of getting a reaction and maintaining a relationship" (p. 11). She reminds us:

> We tend to forget about this element of relationships when we teach writing. Are we aware of how much our students dread having their writing knocked back? … It's hard to keep in mind the painful wounds of battle and the importance of friendship unless you've been wounded yourself. Teachers of writing who have been soldiers themselves, engaged in a writing battle, must be able to empathize more closely with the comrades in their classrooms than teachers who are merely war correspondents at the hotel bar. (Fox, 1993, p. 11)

As comrades who help each other through the minefields, we are situated with our students right in the middle of the muddle: the trek feels less perilous when we join hands. For example, "Striker," a tall young man from Jamaica, calls me his "favorite teacher"—he visits me once a week to talk about his essays, over which he struggles as a person whose native dialect is other than standard English. Together, we tackle the ins and outs of writing clearly. As the ancient orator and teacher, Quintilian[‡] says, "The student should love his master not less than his studies and should regard his master as he does his parents" (in Murphy, 1990, p. 37). Of course, the teachers of writing in this study do not regard themselves as "masters," but as comrades-in-arms with their students. Indeed, my own affection for my students is abiding and deep—certainly, it is love in the sense of wanting the best for them. And occasionally, their affection for me keeps them trying to write better.

[‡] Quintilian refers to persons in the male gender, according to the conventions of his time

Celebrating the Unexpected

Rus is an adjunct professor at a four-year public university. To me, he is a "teacher's teacher." He is generous with his wonderful ideas about the teaching of writing, and—what's more—he *emulates* what he preaches about writing. An inveterate daybook keeper, Rus also crafts creative non-fiction and fiction on a regular basis and pushes himself to submit for publication. He is, in short, a teacher of writing who actively writes, one who reassures his students that all writers struggle and—like him—often need the critique and support of a community of other writers. The following poem reminds me of Rus:

> One to one I could teach,
> I could learn, for every person
> I have touched has made me
> rich with pleasure and pain. (Piercy, 1992, p. 105)

Pulling Down the Tiles

At the high school where Rus works during the day, he hit upon an excellent solution for the quandary of learning 75 names: he assigns students to small groupings of four each, and allows them to remove the ceiling tile from the spot above their desks. Then, each "pod" comes up with a distinctive design, and decorates the tile with the names of each student. Thus, throughout the semester, Rus can refresh his memory of students' names by glancing up at the tiles, and the students develop a proprietary interest in the classroom they occupy for a short period of time each day.

I appreciate this anecdote for what it says about Rus's finesse at creating a writing community where student voice matters. Not only does he want to be able to call each student by name—an act that names the power of naming—but he

intuitively understands the importance of resisting the colorlessness of classrooms that discourage students from leaving their mark. Like any monument, the ceiling tiles announce, "I was here." In this classroom, writing literally marks out each writer. With a sigh, Rus reflects that he would not be allowed to do this at the university. "They would boot me out," he says.

In writing classrooms where everyone is named and honored, the potential is strengthened for genuine writing. Yet the institutional framework can either facilitate or hinder the creation of spaces where students and writing teachers feel comfortable. Large class size, or classrooms where students are crammed behind small desks placed in a row, legislate against the need for a relaxed atmosphere where actual writing for sustained periods of time can take place, along with one on one conferencing. In the university, for example, we are discouraged from personalizing the classroom by putting up posters or student work. There is the possibility that anything of symbolic or real value might be stolen or removed. Classrooms are kept neutral because different professors "use" them to teach different subjects. In this model, space becomes yet another commodity to be utilized. Professors even compete for certain classrooms because of physical layout.

It can be difficult to feel at home in physical spaces where we are reminded that we are only visitors. Classrooms become stops along a predetermined route, where students "get" biology, French, or writing. The problem is, however, that learning is not to be got as one might "get" something, and thus be done with; neither are teachers the dispensers of knowledge. Rather, both teacher and learner are

engaged together in a continual and often surprising unfolding. As Duckworth (1996) points out:

> The material world is too diverse and too complex for a child to become familiar with all of it … The best one can do is to make such knowledge, such familiarity, seem interesting and accessible … familiarize children with a few phenomena in such a way as to catch their interest, to let them raise and answer their own questions, to let them realize that their ideas are significant—so that they have the interest, the ability, and the self-confidence to go on by themselves. Such a program is a curriculum, so to speak, but a curriculum with a difference. The difference can best be characterized by saying that the unexpected is valued. (p. 8)

Writing is by its nature a celebration of the unexpected. As such, writing classrooms flourish where ample time for reflection is coupled with physical space that lends itself to comfort and intimacy. Writing calls for more than a 50-minute pause in barren classrooms three times a week.

One semester, Rus had a room "like a refrigerator box." He recalls: "These guys are staring at each other's backs of heads, and I can't even do a circle, because it's too long and thin." There is no doubt that a room like a refrigerator chills to the bone, both literally and emotionally. How can a writer warm up to his subject, or to other writers, when he is uncomfortably cold? By contrast, when Rus had a conference room with tables, "We had a little meeting place." Rus dismisses his uncomfortable room with, "It's not a big deal." However, I differ with him, agreeing with Casey (1993) on the priority of place. He writes:

> We can't do without time, and yet we can't live with the time we have devised for ourselves. Is there an exit or passage leading out of this impasse, this *aporia*? Place, that most innocuous and taken-for-granted item in our experience, offers a way out … We need to get back into place so as to get out of (the binding and rebinding of) space and time. (p. 11)

This is a comforting thought, that place offers the weary traveler "a way out" of the pressure cooker of time. For such a place is surely "home," and home is where others—our *anam cara*—love and care for us. As teachers of writing, we strive—against the odds of the cold, or overly-heated, or poorly designed classrooms we are assigned—to create a homey atmosphere for our students where they can be themselves. Casey goes deeper: "More than comfort is at issue … *our very identity is at stake*. For we tend to identify ourselves by—and with—the places in which we reside" (1993, p. 120).

The Sanctuary of Floating Mobility

Within the physical place where we meet our students, there is a pedagogical space that we, as writing teachers, wish to cultivate. Casey (1993) calls this "an entire middle realm," one where we—with our students—"are moving among places in an exploratory manner" (p. 121). Our movement is, paradoxically, in the in-between "between orientation and inhabitation. We wander, but we wander in the vicinity of built places we know or are coming to know. Not discovery but better acquaintance is our aim" (Casey, 1993, p. 121). As we coach our students through rough drafts, helping them to become better acquainted with what they "are coming to know," we are pedagogically situated within a transitional space full of possibility. For Casey (1993), "A truly transitional space is often a place for creative action, providing enough protection to encourage experimentation (if not outright exploration) without being overly confining" (p. 122). Interestingly, during one of our conversations, David alludes to transitional space. After we have climbed to his third floor study and settled into our chairs, he says:

> There's something about it being up here, both part of the house and yet … away from things … I frequently lose track of time … it's working in that space where it's away from things, and yet *not* away from things … It's a space where things can "float around" … We were talking about messiness, and that ability to let things float, not let things *too quickly* settle into place … I try to sustain that point where things are still floating and still flexible and still fluid.

Perhaps, in the same way that David welcomes the fluidity of an in-between space, we teachers of writing might revision the notion of place in our teaching. Instead of a brick edifice of learning objectives, we can raise a billowing tent. While it is anchored to the ground of our caring, the tent is made of a floating material that can be moved from one place to another, depending on the needs of those living inside. That is to say, the tent provides "enough protection" from the elements, at the same time that it allows us to wander.

"Wander" can be traced to "dwell," the Old English for going astray, erring, wandering (Casey, 1993, p. 114). Heidegger also recaptures the related notions of building and dwelling. "To build" derives from the Old High German, *"buan,"* meaning to dwell (1993d). Phenomenologically speaking, neither Casey nor Heidegger is interested in matters of architecture, so much as in thinking about what it is to be in the world:

> The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *buan,* dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell. The old word *bauen,* which says that man [sic] *is* insofar as he *dwells* …. *also* means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for, specifically to till the soil, to cultivate the vine. Such building only takes care—it tends the growth that ripens into fruit of its own accord. (1993d, p. 349)

I illustrate this sense of dwelling with the following anecdote:

It is two-thirty on a Thursday afternoon during the fifth week of the semester, and my students are dragging. They slouch down in their seats which, in upholstered blue leather, resemble space chairs at DisneyWorld. Each chair has—as an afterthought—a small swivel desk, good for leaning but not for writing. Fifteen such chairs are crammed into a room that would comfortably hold eight. Located in the dormitory, this classroom also doubles as a student lounge when class in not in session. Whereas I like students to be comfortable, I feel as if this room arrangement invites students to fall asleep. Or maybe it's just their low blood sugar, sleep deprivation in general, or—as Matt suggests—terminal boredom. "I hope class is better than last period," he announces as he drops into his chair. "The professor was so boring, I almost fell asleep." Thus challenged—*Not in this class, Buddy*—I consider the options: do I go ahead with the mini-lesson on comma splices? I do.

By 2:45 pm, it is time for a change of pace; despite my riveting overhead transparencies, some of my students have heavy eyes. I ask everyone to stand up and stretch, and then Luiana suggests, "Let's go outside!" We gaze at the courtyard outside the window, and decide to move class to the concrete benches arranged there. Once *al fresco*, we feel the pleasant Florida breeze. Now, we take turns reading out loud from the narrative essays that I have brought along as models. Even Adam, who never volunteers for anything, offers to take a section. At the end of class, we get up and tell each other goodbye. I am half-tempted to ask Matt if class was okay. But instead, he smiles and says, "'Bye, Professor; see you Tuesday." He couldn't have said anything better to me, for what he is saying without saying it is that he looks forward to our next meeting.

Teachers of writing would prefer to *meet* their students face to face, and teach in classrooms where all can sit around a circle rather than stare at each others' backs. However, the important dimension here is the *mutual creation* of place. While student writers need writer-teachers who embody a spirit of care, we—as teachers—need students even more: to remind us *why* we teach. Ours is a pedagogy of in-between that attends to persons in their sleepy and alert moments, in their pain and their pleasure, for such engagement lies at the heart of relationship. The teaching of writing needs a tribe of writers willing to pick up the tent from time to time to better accommodate those wandering dwellers inside.

"Mixing Things Up and Casting Spells"

When I first began to teach writing many years ago, I sought refuge behind the podium and the assigned textbook with its prescribed exercises. Perhaps out of insecurity, I was insulating myself *against* students—it seemed as if my authority as professor would be challenged if I let down my guard. Now, throughout the course of this study, and as I have reflected more on the teaching of writing, I have changed. While often unsure about myself, I believe that my uncertainty flows from my understanding of what there is yet to learn, more than from a fear that students will detect my lack of wisdom. The knowledge that there will always be more suspends and supports me at the same moment. I accept the beauty in my finite knowledge. As Ellsworth points out, "Teaching is a suspended performance in the sense that it is never completed or finished" (1997, p. 158). DaMaris mentions another performative dimension of teaching: "You're playing with things; you're mixing things up and casting spells … (to) see what comes back to you." Playfulness and the concoction of

potions are not the usual way to describe teaching pedagogy. And yet, do we not—as teachers of writing—play around with any number of possibilities, none of which is absolutely guaranteed to work magic? Of course, when you stir a bubbling cauldron, you can also get burned.

As teachers of writing, we recount innumerable moments when we did or said the wrong thing. However, if we can accept our stumbling and rename failure as an ally, then perhaps we will thrive pedagogically. This orientation reflects Paulo Freire's notion of "problem-posing education." He says:

> Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality. Indeed … people know themselves to be unfinished; they are aware of their incompletion. In this incompletion and this awareness lie the very roots of education as an exclusively human manifestation. The unfinished character of human beings and the transformational character of reality necessitate that education be an ongoing activity. (1970/2006, p. 85)

Failure as an Ally

> And do you talk about being wrong? Do you ever admit that you're wrong when you're saying something to students? (David)

There have been many times when, in the classroom, I have been confronted with my incompleteness. When a student questions me about something I've said, my first reaction is to pause and reflect. In fact, it seems as if I admit to more shortcomings now than I did when I first began teaching 20 years ago. Is that normal? The other teacher-writers in this study share their perspectives: "I feel like I'm learning right along with the students," muses Judy. "You try something and it falls flat, but then you try something else, and it seems to work … just that whole idea of discovery … I've always felt like I really don't know what the heck I'm doing … I'm trying, but I'm not really sure!" Although getting it wrong may plague Judy, her

solution is to "try something else." She expresses a fear that she alone does not know whether *what* she is doing *is* working. She adds that being in this study reassures her that others often feel the same way: unsure. David agrees readily: "I think the failing of teaching is when you think that you know what it is … As soon as you think, '*This* is the way to do it,' then you know you're wrong." Cheryl adds, "Good teaching …(is) knowing that you've failed and you have to make some changes, and you always have to change."

What these writing teachers and I have gained over the years is a respectful appreciation for failure, an appreciation that opens up the possibility for conversation with students. We know too well the signs of a learning activity gone flat: students stare out into space, or their foreheads crease in an effort to understand, or they grope valiantly for responses that might hit on the one they think will satisfy you: ("Is *this* what you want?"). Or, even more unnerving, when we hear *ourselves* talking without comprehending what we are actually saying. Essentially, we sense an absence of presence within ourselves and in our students. At those moments, we need to acknowledge the gap and try something else. The aim here is not to "achieve" success, but to question what is going on, and to accept the lesson in the lesson gone awry. We can accomplish this through asking our students and troubling our assumptions. Graves (2002) proposes: "What teacher hasn't been surprised when asking her students, *Okay, what's a better way to do this?* to find that they *do* come up with better ways (as long as they think we really want to know)" (p. 29).

Over and over, the teachers of writing in this study emphasize the necessity of sharing their writing with students. Through hearing the teacher's drafts, as well as

those of famous writers such as Kenneth Kesey, Stephen King, and William Zinsser, Rus finds: "They see it's okay to make those mistakes, it's okay to fail … I had to get it down on paper first; I had to experience that. I have to go through this stage to get to where I want to be." Claire declares: "In order to teach you have to be willing to admit that you don't know everything … Let students see the kind of (writing) mistakes *you* make, let them see the pieces that *you* thought were wonderful that were literally ripped to shreds." As Murray (1991) stresses, failure is instructive: it points the individual in a new direction. Furthermore, the teachers' willingness to share their mistakes with students sends a powerful message: I don't have all the answers; I, too, am learning.

During the second week of my composition course, I am talking to my freshmen about the need for revision, and the writer's resistance to change. To illustrate, I project a transparency showing two pages from my dissertation, where my adviser has written several comments in the margins. Her practice is similar to mine when I respond to student work: I write copious marginal comments which I hope will be helpful and bring forward meaning that is almost, but not quite, there. Today, however, I confess to my students that—when I recently received my adviser's comments—my heart sank and a small expletive escaped from my lips. "You see," I tell them, "it's never easy to be critiqued, even though I know as a writer that there is always room for improvement." Since I know that my adviser cares for me as a person, and because I respect her sense of what is needed, I pay close attention to her suggestions. To my students, I express the hope that they will see the validity in my comments and heed them once in awhile, as well. For after themselves, I am their

first reader. DaMaris, too, reads student work in a similar way: "I try to put myself and everybody else in it … If any reader cannot understand, then … they need to go back."

Perhaps the essential message to students is this: their writing professor makes a multitude of mistakes, too, and relies on others to give her feedback. When I am unclear, my adviser's comments urge me to try another approach. Nevertheless, I cannot avoid that clenching in my stomach, and a vague sense of inadequacy as a writer. Every time I put my writing out there, my anxiety is heightened. Writing is forever and always an act of self-exposure. This is why teachers of writing have a deep responsibility to respond carefully.

Listening: The Gift of Unfulfilled Capacity

> Will our hearing be developed so that it can respond appropriately, and thereby become what it properly and essentially is … an organ of Being? (Levin, 1989, p. 207)

It is cozy to sit around a table with students, or pull up chairs alongside them to read drafts, or—as Rus and others describe—join students' writing support groups from time to time. Writing teachers prefer those postures rather than sitting or standing at the front of the room to lecture, for we wish to position ourselves to listen to what students have to say. We find ourselves feeling uneasy when dominating conversation, even promising students that our writing mini-lessons *will* be short, as the name implies. We clear space for student voice in our writing classrooms. Listening is key. How many times do we *lean in* to listen to a student read from an early draft, attuned only to the sound of his or her voice? Graves (2002) describes a close friend who is a wonderful writing teacher: "Her physical and verbal stance is

born of a genuine desire to know what children know and to hear their stories …Her face was relaxed, suggesting that any moment someone would say something very important. I call it loving attentiveness. This selfless love poured into the space between Mary Ellen and the group" (p. 29).

At such moments, we recapture "a listening which listens with this bodily felt sense" (Levin, 1989, p. 219). Our proximity is necessary for embodied listening. Furthermore, we listen not only for what is there, but for what *might* be heard. This is a listening that Levin calls *hearkening*: "Hearkening is the condition of the possibility of hearing" (1989, p. 232). The teachers of writing in this study speak often of "possibility." Perhaps possibility is another way of expressing what Levin calls, "The gift of unfulfilled capacity, an *unrealized* potential, an *unfinished* task" (1989, p. 2). DaMaris refers to her deepest wish for her writing students, which is to realize: "I, too, am possibility." What an interesting word, "possibility." It derives from the Latin, *potis,* meaning "powerful, able" (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 2044). Thus, when DaMaris says, "I think people have to get to that point where they realize they *are* a possibility before they can even get to the point where (they) have a responsibility to give back," she is alluding to the power of self-transformation to fuel good works. Journaling is one gift that DaMaris shares with students; she hopes that in the journal pages, students can learn that "writing is a friend, an advocate." She says, "I want to give them everything I possibly can."

While David agrees with the spirit of DaMaris's statement, he reminds us of the reality that, as teachers, we are unable to control what students "do" with our gifts. "We can show students possibilities of expression … we can't tell them *what*

they can do, but we can show them." Rus also cautions against the tendency of some teachers to sacrifice all for one's students. He thinks there is a fine line between generosity and pride; that is, in giving away too much, we might then be poised in expectation of certain results that validate us as teachers. This orientation strikes Rus as being misguided: "It's not about us; it can't be about us. It's always about them."

Since teaching is "about them," pedagogic attunement to students is essential. Britton (1987) also highlights the importance of listening to improve pedagogy and create an environment in which the teacher is learner, too: "Notice that it is the teacher's initiative that establishes and sustains such a regime. This is achieved partly by reason of what the teacher says but becomes effective primarily by his or her example. Thus he/she is likely to try to cut down on teacher talk and make *listening* a major target" (1987, p. 28).

Sometimes, when describing unmotivated students, we call them "listless," a word that describes a lack of energy. According to OED online, the root of the word, "listen," is "list," referring to both hearing and the ear, itself. Perhaps "listless" captures a dual sense of one who is unable to hear, unable to tune in to his or her own energy, as well as someone who is unheard by others. For example, the student writer may have experienced well-meaning, but overpowering, voices of teachers who dictated what and how to write. Discouraged from listening in to what matters to her, the young writer's pen falls into disuse, and her energy dissipates. As Romano (2004) writes: "Voice is the writer's presence on the page, the writer's DNA" (p. 5). No wonder, then, that many writers have no energy for writing any more.

It seems to me that—when student voice is silenced—so is identity *and* the opportunity for discovering one's identity. Romano (2004) points out, "One of the great things about writing is that by doing it, we can construct a persona. We can craft authentic voice. There is so much in our lives we cannot control. We can, however, control our writing … In our writing, we can forge a personality" (p. 218). For Cheryl, the absence of voice gives her great concern as a writing teacher: "My biggest thing is getting *voice*, getting people to find their voice again (other) than that 'Therefore-Wherefore-Which Way-How?' kind of writing." Her message to students is that their lives matter, and that—through writing—they can recreate themselves, and create what they have not yet become.

Another teacher recounts her experience with young writers at an alternative high school:

> Students wrote about the forces that influence their daily lives. Francisco wrote about the pressures he felt as a newcomer to claim gang affiliation and about the social isolation he felt as a result of his choice to remain neutral … Mario set down how it felt to have doors closed to him at every turn because of his illegal status. Their motivation was always to be heard, be seen, be understood. "This is what I want you to know about me" was the unspoken and urgent demand in most writing and conversation. (Overley, 2001, p. 7)

Having reclaimed their voices, these youngsters then went on to articulate what they wanted to see changed in their communities through a youth social action project. Thus, as DaMaris previously commented, these writers needed to see their own possibilities before they could reach out.

Cacophonous Reverberations

During our exchange about student voice, David wonders out loud: "Do we ever *have* our voice? … I don't know that we necessarily 'lose' it … we're always

borrowing other people's words, so it's a constant process of 'How do we make out of all of that language … something that is ours, but also something that is communal?'" Perhaps what David alludes to here is the continual process of listening to the reverberations within ourselves, and learning a way to make the private audible to others. Where is the teacher of writing in all this cacophony? Palmer (1998) says: "A good teacher must stand where personal and public meet, dealing with the thundering flow of traffic at an intersection where 'weaving a web of connectedness' feels more like crossing a freeway on foot" (p. 17).

Although Palmer's comments relate to teachers in general, I think that the writing teacher faces unique challenges: he or she must remain with the student in the "thundering flow" of the draft, urging writers to keep the audience in mind. For mindfulness of the reader poses the writer with an ultimate dilemma: "How can I communicate my understanding of this subject to my reader?" (Lindemann, 2001, p. 6). Shaping discourse along rhetorical lines arises from the reality that "We write to be read, and what our readers expect influences our decisions about how to organize and present our ideas" (Lindemann, 2001, p. 131). Indeed, the famous teacher and orator Quintilian, who proposed the ideal education for the orator in 95 B.C., emphasized that Roman schools ought to "produce not merely knowledge but ability" (Murphy, 1990, p 44).

While rhetoric (the art of speaking) was of primary importance in Quintilian's educational program, "The oral-ness or written-ness of the language was regarded as less important than its wholeness in fitting the situation at hand" (Murphy, 1990, p. 33). It would seem, then, that both purpose and awareness of one's audience would

figure prominently in Quintilian's picture of the eloquent orator. Similarly, as teachers of writing, we urge students to write their own truths and—when the piece will be shared with others—do so with the reader forever in one's sights.

Jardine (2002) proposes that we broaden our notion of "the basics" in teaching and learning. He envisions classrooms where, "We treated as basic to teaching and learning listening openly and generously to each other, not just to a healthy and sane understanding of each other, but also of oneself" (p. xiii). Britton (1987) concurs, calling for a revisioning of teaching and learning:

> Rather than relying on the teacher as the middleman [sic] in all learning, group members expect to learn with each other and from each other. It is an important corollary here to recognise that the teacher is, first and foremost, a member of the group and is willing to that end to forego privileges that would promote him/her out of that status. (p. 28)

Britton proposes classrooms where teachers are "first and foremost," members of the group—not only do they step out from behind the podium, but they sit alongside their students. Jardine's image values listening as hearkening to what lies within our student writers—and reflecting that back to them through the way we respond.

The power of in-between resides in the dynamic play between what is known and what is needed. The teachers of writing in this study are dynamic persons who rarely stand still, except in the stillness of listening to what their students say. And, as Ellsworth (1997) suggests, there is an ethical obligation to listen "without knowing why, without understanding, and before I know what I hear" (p. 162). Such teachers are pedagogical beings who coach writers to pursue the truth, even when the way is unclear, even when communication between writer and reader seems to elude. They position themselves with students *in* the tension of seeking, not as the filter through

which knowledge is dispensed. What does this posture allow in a writing classroom? In listening for the unfulfilled capacity in students, writing teachers turn away from polarities of thinking. Rather, the promise of what is yet to be yields a pedagogy that finds its equilibrium *in* imbalance. In what ways might a pedagogy founded on imbalance enrich our thinking about a curriculum in the teaching of writing?

Venturing Out onto the High Wire

Funambulists are tightrope walkers. The word, "funambulism" comes from the Latin, *fūnis*, rope + *ambulāre*, to walk around (American Heritage Dictionary, 2000, p. 711). Being able to walk a tightrope takes strength, courage, focused thought, and years of apprenticeship followed by years of training. Yet, the night of the performance, the funambulist steps out onto a one-half inch metal wire suspended 60 or more feet into the air to "launch dizzying acrobatic tricks and phenomenal feats of balancing" (Newton's Apple, n.d.). The high-wire act astonishes because it seems contrary to reason—paradoxical—that a human being can balance on such a thin wire. The explanation lies primarily in the realm of physics, coupled with long practice: through the use of a long (39 foot or more) balancing pole, the performer regains control through a repositioning of the center of gravity and an increased ability to counteract rotation off the wire (Newton's Apple, n.d.). Thus balanced, he can do his death-defying routines to the delight of his audience.

This image is the embodiment of balance. For in order to engage in such a balancing act, the performer must have all her senses intact; she has "correct sensory input, integration of that sensory input, and motor output to the eyes and muscles" (n.d., Vestibular). She is fully receiving all the messages necessary to negotiate the

wire. One writer calls the sense of balance a "sixth sense" for its neglected importance in helping human beings make their way around the world (Vestibular, n.d.). Out of balance, we may feel dizzy, and even unable to cope.

Still, reflecting on the "and/or" of balance and imbalance, I lean to one side to better regard its dimensions, and to consider its importance to a pedagogy in the teaching of writing. Here is what I perceive: as our friend balances her way across the wire, we literally hold our breath, aware that she might fall any given moment. We gaze appreciatively at her muscular body that seems unaccountably relaxed high up on the wire. We admire her grace and beauty as reflected in the artistry of her movements. We want her to accomplish her maneuvers and know that she would not put herself in harm's way unless she were fully practiced and fit. She is courageous. Still, the *possibility* of her imbalance exhilarates us. For while we perceive her struggle and cheer her on, we also recognize the presence of a potential misstep. Indeed, we acknowledge that what claims us as an audience is the tension between balance and imbalance. Only through the artist's focused attention to her "six" senses can she maintain herself on the high-tension wire. It might well be said that her power and energy lie in the realm between balance and imbalance. Pedagogically speaking, I believe there is something to be learned here about the teaching of writing: as writing teachers, we can only be *in* equilibrium if there is always and forever the potential to fall out of it.

Aquatic Circus

The famous performers of Cirque Du Soleil© are known for their fantastic shows that blend circus and theatre, and yet transcend both. They are acrobats,

contortionists, dancers, and actors rolled into one. With their brightly-colored leotards, and headdresses bedecked with feathers and sequins, they resemble exotic creatures from another sphere. Watching a telecast of their performance, I was astounded at their litheness and ability to drape themselves around each other and various props. Unique in its staging and feats, Cirque Du Soleil© is beyond imagination—and yet evokes imagination. Recently, I became aware of their show, "O," performed "in, on, and above a 1.5 million gallon pool of water … (that) tells the tale of theater through the ages and frees us to embark on a … voyage where dreams are not only encouraged, they come true" (Cirque Du Soleil, n.d.). In this show, water becomes artistic medium. Because human bodies are more water than not, the performers become more themselves. The audience is also given a new perspective: balancing feats previously admired from high up find their way into the water where the choreography—now aquatic—unfolds. As the Cirque Du Soleil© website invites:

> Travel far enough away,
>
> My friend and you'll discover
>
> Something of Great Beauty:
>
> Your Self.

Aching with Caring

Beauty: during one of our conversations, Judy talks with great feeling about how beautiful her students are. Knowing her as a friend and a colleague for a number of years, I immediately think about her own beauty. She would be embarrassed to read this, but when in her company, I feel the loving warmth she exudes in word and

gesture. To say that she has an inner light is not overstatement. Judy is tuned in to other people, curious to know what makes them who they are—for hers are gifts of attention and care. Because beauty attracts, she is a favorite among students. If she also talks about the hard work involved in coaching writers, it is because, as Palmer (1998) reminds us, "Bad days bring the suffering that comes only from something one loves" (p. 1).

As teachers of writing, we need to keep our hearts open to our students as they experiment with telling the stories that matter to them. If we wall ourselves off, then our inaccessibility causes students to shrink away. It is a delicate matter to teach writing, for we are dealing with the lives of others as retold on the page. The student writer must feel that his teacher is completely trustworthy, approachable, discreet, and sensitive. In addition, the student relies on the teacher to be a perceptive reader and fellow writer. Teachers of writing who embody these attributes will be "blessed," as Rus remarks, with the heartfelt stories that students write.

Many writing students begin our courses with a long history of unpleasant writing experiences. They were severely critiqued, or summarily judged. They had letter grades assigned to the quality of their thoughts. They were told they were "awkward," or "unclear," without knowing what that meant. They learned to keep up their guard, write the minimum words, and always, write for the teacher's purposes, not their own. Risk-taking in writing is an alien concept for most student writers, since they have rarely had an opportunity to exercise it. Conversely, once student writers are given choices to select their own topics, time to revise, and sound response throughout the writing process, they become writers. Fox (1993) emphasizes the

essential dimension of caring about what you write: "Ask yourself (as a writer and then as a teacher of writing) when you or your students last ached with caring over what you were writing, or wrote because it mattered, or wrote because you had a huge investment in your writing" (p. 3). What does a pedagogy that revels in imbalance bring to teachers of writing? I believe that imbalance calls us to be attentive to the always mysterious "course" we traverse—"course" in the spirit of Pinar and Grumet (1976) who envision curriculum as the course to be run, and the experience of it.

Completing the Circles

> The one who dreamed the universe loved circles and created everything with such beautiful incompletion that we need the others to complete the circles of identity, belonging, and creativity. (O'Donohue, 1999, p. xxv)

In writing classrooms, we need our students in order to complete our own identities as writing teachers. As teachers, we are incomplete, only partially inscribed until we acknowledge our dependence on students to bring the circle, full circle. Reflecting on the ways that many writing teachers at the university level speak about their students, it would appear that a very different set of assumptions applies. I often hear the teachers in the English department lament over students' deficiencies, viewing the role of the writing teacher as to fix what's broke. When I first began teaching at the university here in Florida, one of my colleagues—a published poet and veteran writing teacher—commented: "They need everything!" Although I laughed nervously, her comment bothered me, for her language uncovers a dualistic orientation: either you have it, or you don't (and apparently, our students "don't"). While the focus of our teaching is purportedly on the students, it is a focus that seeks to repair, not address. Also, my colleague's remark implies that her job is to fill up

those sleepyheads with what they "need," which is limitless. In short, her job is to make them right.

I propose, instead, a pedagogic orientation that locates the authority and power for change in the writer him or herself. With Judy and the other teachers in this study, I have faith in the potential of my student writers, and I tell them so. As Bass (2000) reflects, "In spite of the erratic progress my students make, there is a sense of possibility in the classroom" (p. 271). Indeed, this is an understanding of education as bringing persons out of concealment (Heidegger, 1993f**).** In a writing classroom where students might initially lament that they have nothing about which to write, the writing teacher can confirm the value of life experience as a rich source of writing material. Such a pedagogy comes of the belief that students *are* potential—forever becoming, just as we are. We believe that they are moving in the direction of being "more" of whoever they are, and that writing is the vehicle that makes the movement possible. Although my colleague thinks that our students are needy, I would counter with "No, I think they already have everything they 'need'—*we* just need to draw them out." Pedagogical equilibrium settles into our bones with the acknowledgement that imbalance is deeply comforting, for being unsure of our footing keeps us alert and reaching, all at once.

Attending to Souls

Belief in the potential of student writing must spring (or be born) from the teacher's understanding of writing as thoughts being worked out on paper. As Murray reminds us, "Writing is thinking, and thought does not begin with a conclusion but an itch, a hint, a clue, a question, an image that refuses to be

forgotten" (2004, p. 30). A pedagogy of writing that looks toward process casts writing teachers in a supportive, rather than a starring, role in the classroom. Student writers are willing to engage in revision when they see a deepening of meaning from draft to draft; they need encouragement and practical support as they continue to bring out the potential in their work. As a supportive presence, writing teachers sit with students, perhaps mere feet apart as they turn their combined attention to the student's work. In early drafts—Lamott (1994) calls them "shitty first drafts," and Rus calls them "vomit drafts"—the ideas are just beginning to emerge. However, even in their most half-formed and awkward form, the writing teacher needs to believe in the student, in his or her *power* in the original sense of *potential*, from the Latin root, *potis*. It would be unrealistic for writing teachers to expect powerful writing from students when the latter are only given one shot at getting it right. Unfortunately, the single-draft assignment that is turned in on Friday still prevails in many English departments around the country, together with an inordinate zeal for marking up errors in grammar and punctuation. Without the benefit of *response over time* from the teacher (and other writing peers), the quality of the writing will suffer. More so, the student's sense of being a competent communicator will be impaired.

Students understand the importance of writing well, even if they dislike writing due to past experiences in English classes when their flaws, as opposed to their strengths, were the focus of teacher comments. When the emphasis is, instead, on that which "works" (Murray, 2004), then students feel more heartened—indeed, they *take heart in* the thin streaks of gold that the writing teacher has glimpsed in their raw draft. Those precious streaks are what our students ought to mine. But to

encourage them to dig in, the writing classroom must create the time, ownership, and response essential to strong writing.

The writing teachers in this study have no proven "strategies," or recipes for success. Occasionally, they may have ideas that play out well in the classroom; yet, as most would admit those brainchilds just as often "flop." When lessons do not go as planned, David—who is noteworthy for his lack of pretense—may admit to his students that he was wrong. Whether 30-year vet or third year lecturer, these writing teachers are candid about being nervous when taking risks: sharing their own writing or trying out something new in class. The fear is, as David puts it, that one might appear "idiotic." Nevertheless, these teachers wear their hearts on their sleeves, and their foolishness as well. Such candor is endearing, and students find them to be more human, and—crucial in a writing classroom—more accessible. They may be coaches, cheerleaders, and guides at any point, yet fundamentally, they embody what O'Donohue (1997) calls, *anam cara*: soul friend.

The teachers of writing in this study continually pick themselves up and try something else, because they believe that the responsibility rests with themselves (what might *I* have done differently, or better?), rather than, "These students are impossible!" Unfortunately, however, theirs is an orientation all too rare. Palmer (1998) recounts interactions with faculty who offer these characterizations of students:

> When I ask teachers to name the biggest obstacle to good teaching, the answer I most often hear is, "my students." When I ask why this is so, I hear a litany of complaints: my students are silent, sullen, withdrawn; they have little capacity for conversation; they have short attention spans; they do not engage well with ideas; they cling to narrow notions of "relevance" and "usefulness" and dismiss the world of ideas. (p. 40)

For Palmer, these conversations yield the insight that "the way we diagnose our students' condition will determine the kind of remedy we offer" (1998, p. 41). That is, once we have labeled our students as lazy or unmotivated, we quickly come to the conclusion that what they need is "everything." A remedial pedagogy would seek to pump life into lifeless students "by dripping information into their passive forms" (1998, p. 42). Hopefully, if we're diligent enough in covering everything within the 15-week semester, our writing students will emerge filled up with knowledge. There is a deep conceit about such an attitude, for it is based on the assumption that *we* are the miracle workers who will make all the difference in the world to our student writers. In what seems a conundrum, Rus cautions against wanting our students to do well for the wrong reasons: "It's not about you," he says, "it's always about them."

It is pedagogically essential that we maintain a belief in our students' possibilities, together with a reverence for their inner worlds. Palmer (1998) suggests that we need to attend to the state of our students' souls, to that which concerns them. Noddings (1992) urges us to consider those questions that engross all human beings: "Who am I? What kind of person will I be? Who will love me? How do others see me?" (p. 20). Those are the disorienting, hard questions that ought to drive a pedagogy in the teaching of writing. When we allow writing students to engage with the dizzying array of life options, they may write their way through to valuable insights about their place in the world. Our pedagogy as teachers of writing approaches equilibrium when we dwell off kilter with students. Teachers of writing need to believe in the value of story to disclose human life; they recognize that every story is in the process of being rewritten even as we tell it. Stories are contextual and

provisional, like our lives: works in progress, becoming what they not yet are. Writing teachers also need to respect the slow revelations that come about through revision, and not intrude or otherwise impose on our students' sense of what and when they are willing and able to relate.

Where in our preparation of writing teachers do we make space for the deep reflection necessary to understand themselves—and their students—on a soulful level? Perhaps we have been asking the wrong kinds of questions. Because we have already come to the conclusion that we know what writing students "need," we conceive of curriculum in a narrow, goal-oriented sense. We have focused on skill acquisition because it is measurable, whereas voice, growth and depth in writing are far more difficult to "measure," and take far more time to assess. If we believe that the authority for student writing ought to reside in topics that matter to the writer—(as real writers choose topics that engage them)—then the writing teacher is cast into a new role. No longer is he or she the sole arbiter of topics, or the one who dictates a single form (essay) in writing classes. Instead, this writing teacher will exercise the wisdom and judgment of *phronesis* (the ethical value most lauded by Aristotle), by encouraging writers to explore their inner worlds so that the larger world seems less lonely and confusing. Writing teachers and pre service teachers need to embrace the multitude of paradoxes inherent in being both writers and pedagogues. Stepping into the tension, they sharpen their senses. Just as an aquatic realm holds the body in-between the pressures of ascent and descent, so does the promise of imbalance keep writing teachers at the center of possibility—both their students' and their own.

Encountering Beliefs in My Own Backyard

Today I teach composition and introductory literature at a small, private liberal arts college in Boca Raton, Florida. We have 2,600 students, mostly undergraduates, and about 150 full time faculty with at least twice as many adjunct professors. Lynn University is a beautifully landscaped campus dotted with lakes where heron and other wading birds strut along the shore. A broad walkway paved with white bricks is the main campus thoroughfare, alongside of which are strung simple, low-rise buildings. Because of its small size and emphasis on teaching and individual attention to the large population of international students and students with learning disabilities, Lynn has a distinct sense of community. On this small campus, we run into our students at every turn, greeting them with genuine recognition.

Our English Department in the College of Arts and Sciences has five full time English faculty who, together with a score of adjuncts, teach English 101. This semester, class size was capped at 15—a boon to us writing teachers. The atmosphere in the department is collegial and—as to be expected—cyclically harried, for all of us have a 4/4 teaching load. When I was hired, I got two different impressions about what and how I would be allowed to teach writing. Both the chair of the English Department, and the interim dean of the college, viewed me as a writing "expert," and someone who would assume a position of leadership in shaping the curriculum. They seemed to fully trust me, and appeared greatly relieved that "help was on the way." At the same time, the vice president in charge of academic affairs, who also interviewed me, made a point of asking me: "How do you measure success in student writing?" Her question gave me pause, since the quantitative

language she employed, along with the value-laden notion of "success," suggested her curricular assumptions. Nevertheless, I responded well enough about my emphasis on revision, and my use of portfolios to give a picture of student growth over time.

Once I began teaching at Lynn, it was clear that—in order to carve out a competitive market niche, the institution's newly-minted "2020 Plan" would stress the measurement of student progress toward well-defined learning objectives. Assessment committees were formed throughout the fall, and of course, the English faculty formed its own. Because of my reduced teaching load and doctoral work, I was not expected to participate at that time. I was both concerned and relieved—wanting to voice my views, yet having my hands full with teaching and writing. In addition, I believed it would be wise to sit back, get a good sense of my students and of the people with whom I worked. The question that occupies my thinking is the way in which my colleagues view their role as teachers of writing. It appears to me that two of them have a corrective orientation, pointing out errors and teaching students how to fix them. Furthermore, those two prefer to lean heavily on the rhetorically oriented textbook to teach the essay—essentially, the only genre that receives attention in their courses. One of them commented, "I do not believe in portfolios." I am reminded of Ellsworth (1997), who writes about the assumptions that drive curriculum; every curriculum has an unarticulated mode of address: who does this curriculum think the students are? I reflect on Applebee (1996), who emphasizes the importance of curriculum as conversation and who criticizes traditional education as privileging knowledge-about rather than knowledge-in-action.

In many ways, I do not lay blame at the feet of my colleagues—they may never have had a course that introduced them to the teaching of writing. Instead, theirs may have been content-area specific: English literature, rhetoric—in one case, the study of law. Although they are university faculty, I think it is fair to say that their exposure to writing pedagogy has been as slim as what public school teachers now receive: "Composition pedagogy remains a neglected area of study at most of the nation's thirteen hundred schools of education, where future public school teachers are trained. Nor is it a specific requirement in most state teacher certification programs" (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2003, p. 5). In one conversation with David, he reflects on his English department's preparation for a site visit by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). He says: "It's surprising how little pedagogy is spent on English teachers in terms of writing, learning to teach writing." Graves (2002) reports: "Writing has become a pseudo subject. This is best proved in the way we prepare teachers. Most states do not require a course in the teaching of writing, and twenty-four of the fifty state teacher education institutions do not even offer such a course. The cycle repeats itself again and again, with both teachers and students failing to engage with writing and avoiding it as much as possible" (p. 11).

I am fully aware of the institutional framework in which I am now situated. What remains to be seen is the way in which my teaching will be affected; for now, I am respected, and left alone to do my work. Indeed, there is *much* work to do here in my new backyard. But I do not wish to do it alone: I crave a community of others

who will join with me in ongoing reflection about who we are and what we do. O'Donohue (1999) reflects on the need for community:

> Each one of us wants to belong. No one wants to live a life that is cut off or isolated. The absence of contact with others hurts us. When we belong, we feel part of things …It seems that in a soul-sense we cannot be fully ourselves without others. In order to *be*, we need to *be with*. (pp. 257-258)

As someone who had the opportunity to learn from fine writing teacher colleagues, I value the power of conversation. I would like to know what makes the writing teachers in my department tick—in what ways do they view themselves as pedagogues? Where are their hearts? Do they wrestle with uncertainty, vulnerability, and the tensions inherent in working with writers? Are they also writers? If they don't "believe" in portfolios, what *do* they believe in? What values shape them? A lack of faith in portfolios suggests a philosophical orientation about which I would like to hear more. Can we share our thoughts in friendly conversation? I hope so. Because pedagogical change begins, as Palmer (1998) reminds us, in the heart of the teacher. I have few answers, and no quick fixes, but—together with my writing teacher colleagues—let us try to pose some questions that bring forward the essence of our writing teacher selves, and ultimately, why we do this work.

Equilibrium in Motion

> The end of human science research for educators is a critical pedagogical competence: knowing how to act tactfully in pedagogic situations on the basis of a carefully edified thoughtfulness. (van Manen, 2003, p. 8)

Since this study of a pedagogy in the teaching of writing began, I have traveled through both time and geography. Now I find myself in a place both familiar and strange. One year ago, I moved here to South Florida after having lived in Maryland for nearly 20 years. Situated in a new place and a new teaching job, I felt

the shock of being a stranger, where once I had many friends. The land here seemed totally flat after the rolling hills of Maryland horse country, and the mountains near Cumberland. I felt like a transplanted maple whose roots might not take in the sandy soil of Florida. But after a time, I looked up, and saw the sky with its immense, ever-shifting cloud formations, and the grey, rose, and violet shades of late afternoon. I came to love the trees—banyan, palm, and ficus—and how they send out roots that may be shallow, but that sustain lush foliage. While the flowers are not daffodils or tulips, we have profuse hibiscus, orchids, air plants, and impatiens that like full sun.

What remains familiar is the teaching of writing, as well as the *writing about* the teaching. The intertwined work of teaching and writing are a source of comfort and meaning to me, and have helped "balance" me during periods of turmoil. Indeed, as I reflect on the nature of my own teaching and writing, the word that surfaces is "gift." I feel deeply humbled by the gift of being able to teach students. It is they who bestow on me the opportunity to work with them in search of meaning. As a person who has always loved to write, it is a pleasure to share my passion for the gift of writing.

Teaching is itself a narrative about many narratives, my own included. Now, I can give credit to my students who—in all their endearing and exasperating beings (keeping in mind that they are 18 and 19-year-old freshmen)—make possible my life as a teacher of writing. By contrast, when I first began teaching in the 1970's, my own sense of who I was supposed to be in the classroom in relation to my students was just beginning to take shape. An idealistic perfectionist, I was very fond of my 35 seven- and eight-year-olds. At the same time, I felt completely unequal to the task of

"managing" them. What captured me were youngsters like Mitchell, chubby and perennially teased, who hid meat sandwiches in his desk until the other children complained that he was attracting ants. There was Fern, a tall, doe-eyed girl of Portuguese descent, whose quiet adoration touched me deeply. There was smiling, red-haired Bart, who conned me into letting him bring his Saint Bernard puppy for show and tell; it wasn't such a bad idea until the pup defecated all over the classroom floor, sending my entire class screaming into the hallway and out into the playground, while my principal, startled from his office, looked on. I loved those children, but didn't know how to "handle" them. What I *could* do—which in some ways seemed as much a priority as teaching them to read and do math—was make them graham cracker and peanut butter sandwiches for snack at 10:00 am because half of my students had not eaten breakfast before coming to school. Nevertheless, that first year, my students often felt like the enemy: their needs so far outstripped my ability—which I translated as the ability to control them at all times—that I went around feeling terribly incompetent. After a short-lived stint with third graders, I moved on to other endeavors, both teaching and not, until two marriages and two children later, I started working at community colleges as an adjunct instructor of writing in the early 1990's.

Up until my professional life began within the Maryland Writing Project in 1994, I had had only occasional encounters with exemplary teachers of writing. As the decade unfolded, along with my professional and personal relationships with writing teachers, I began to wonder: What was it about these writing teachers that made them rare gems? Upon what sources did they draw to energize their writing

classrooms? It seemed to me that many of them were individuals of great integrity, courage, and humor—people with the humility to laugh at themselves and admit when they were wrong. Furthermore, these were writing teachers who *wrote*, and for whom writing played a central role in their personal and teaching lives. They also believed, passionately, in their students.

Throughout this study, I have traced the paradoxical threads that are woven into a pedagogy where equilibrium comes about through dwelling in imbalance. As I have done so, I find myself emerging from this study a less self-assured teacher of writing, but one who finds reassurance in my limitations. For one, I feel as if the perfectionism that once drove me to distraction rears its head somewhat less in my teaching life. I no longer have to pretend that I have everything under control. Most of the time, I come well prepared to class; however, there are other days when it feels as if I've been taking charge too much. Having said that, I invite discussion for the good of the order. They are never at a loss for words. Sometimes those talks have to do with what is on their minds as freshmen living far away from home, perhaps for the first time. Because they understand that their thoughts and feelings are valued, they are willing to open up in ways beautiful to witness.

The Monday after Daylight Savings Time went into effect this spring, one of my composition classes had its regularly scheduled 11:00 am writing lab. Of the eight students, only two showed up—one of them was Erika, a slender, blond girl from Virginia, who arrived 10 minutes late. After the other student left, Erika and I were alone together. This felt like a good opportunity to find out what was going on with her, since—despite her perceptive comments in class—she rarely attended. I

had noticed her reading *Alice in Wonderland* before class, and the writing I had seen showed her promise. This morning, she did not need graham crackers and peanut butter—she needed to talk, so I listened. She hated Florida and she hated school in general. She was flunking all of her classes for the second semester in a row because she wasn't attending or turning in assignments (which I well knew). She had just broken up with her boyfriend. She had no idea why she was in college, but she didn't know what else to do with her life. "I'm a mess," she concluded. Intuitively, I felt that it might be helpful to share the struggles of my own daughter, age 20. "It's hard," I agreed. My daughter had recently dropped out of school to work full time because she, too, hated college. We had realized that—although she could certainly do the work—she simply did not feel motivated to do so. Thus, she would work for a while and reevaluate school next fall.

Erika nodded and listened. "In the end, it's up to you—no one else can make you do it," I said. "Yes," she said, "I know." Silence fell between us. I recalled the poem by Pablo Neruda that I had shared with my literature class earlier that morning. A hopeful poem, the speaker tells us to take each day as we would pluck an apple from high on a tree. I went to my briefcase, extracted a copy of the poem, and handed it to Erika; I so wanted to give her words of comfort by someone more eloquent than myself. I read it out loud to her, and in the silence that followed the reading, a slow smile spread over her face. "Wow," she said, quietly, "he was having a good day." Then we read, "Wild Geese" by Mary Oliver. "Oh," she whispered. "That is so deep." As Erika rose to gather up her things a few moments later, her face seemed

visibly less distressed than when she came in. “Thank you,” she said with a smile, and left.

My heart felt buoyant, as if a great surge had welled up inside me. What in this encounter allowed me to emerge as teacher? In the full light of this study, I believe that listening, tact, improvisation, and taking the risk of sharing my own story with her—which were founded on a deep faith that she would eventually find her way—forged a strong bond between Erika and me. Having made this connection, we were both enriched and changed. Perhaps she would decide to return to class, perhaps not. Perhaps her personal and writing breakthroughs would not take place in the remaining seven weeks of class. Maybe she would remember Neruda or Oliver or her writing professor, Ms. De La Ysla, as having been there for her at a certain moment. I hope so. I hope so with all my heart. As O’Donohue (1999) puts it so beautifully: “No where do we feel so deeply encountered as we do in the presence of another human being. There is something in another human presence that is equal to our longing and soul. The human heart is a theater of longing” (p. xxv). There in that writing lab, a day after we had officially “sprung forward” in time, Erika and I found belonging.

The work of phenomenology inquires into the nature of things, rather than in their appearance (van Manen, 2003). As researchers, we seek to go beneath the surface by dwelling in the lived dimensions of phenomena. This study has brought me closer to the essence of a pedagogy in the teaching of writing that values what is yet to come. Through this phenomenological journey, I have become more the writer, and

more the teacher, who will continue to become with my students in a complicated and dizzying realm. There, we will find our balance—together.

APPENDIX A

AN INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Linda S. De La Ysla
delaysla@towson.edu

December, 2005

Dear Teacher of Writing,

I am writing to invite you to engage in a study that explores the lived experience of teachers of writing at the university level. I am conducting the study as a doctoral student in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland, College Park, under the direction of Dr. Francine Hultgren.

Although there has been a great deal written on the "how-tos" of the teaching of writing, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the experiences of teachers of writing as they encounter students. As I seek to understand this experience, I will tape-record and transcribe approximately two individual conversations, two group conversations, and will ask participants to engage in selected written reflections beginning in the Fall, 2005 and extending into the Spring, 2006 semester. You will not be identified by name in the published findings or in oral presentations, unless you choose to have your name revealed. You will, however, be invited to adopt an alias for the purposes of my writing. After the research is complete, you are more than welcome to review the results.

This study will make an important contribution to understanding the lived experiences of teachers of writing at the university level. The research will be considered successful if someone who knows nothing about the teaching of writing reads the narratives you provide and understands the challenges and insights, the victories and defeats, and the special connections that come with the teaching of writing.

I will be contacting you to set up our first individual meetings and find a time to schedule our first group meeting. If you have any questions, please contact me. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this experience with me.

Sincerely,

Linda S. De La Ysla
Doctoral Candidate
Education Policy and Leadership
University of Maryland, College Park

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Project Title:	Dwelling in a Pedagogy of In-Between: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers of Writing
Why is this research being done?	This is a research project being conducted by Linda S. De La Ysla at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are currently employed as a teacher of writing serving university students. The purpose of this research project is to explore the experiences of teachers of writing at a large public university. We hope to understand the nature of the relationships that teachers of writing establish with their students.
What will I be asked to do?	The procedures involve two individual conversations for 45-60 minutes, two group conversations for 60-90 minutes, and writing several (4-5) reflective journals. This study will begin during Fall, 2005, and continue into the Spring, 2006 semester. All conversations will be taped and transcribed. We will meet in mutually convenient locations on or near campus. Participants will be asked to reflect on their teaching of writing experiences, the expectations they have for the students with whom they work, and the choices and decisions they make when teaching students. Example questions include the following: - What brought you to the teaching of writing? - Write about an experience teaching writing when a student was afraid to take risks. - Describe in what ways your own experience as a writer supports and complicates the teaching of writing. - Write about a time when you had to balance your high expectations with the place where students were "at" in their writing.

Project Title:	Dwelling in a Pedagogy of In-Between: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers of Writing
What about confidentiality?	This research project involves making audiotapes of you during our conversations. Transcriptions of the audiotapes will then be made of all taped conversations. The tapes are being made to help explore the themes of the conversations we will engage in throughout the research process. We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, all tapes and transcriptions will be kept in a locked file and coded, and no actual names will be utilized when we write this research project. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. All tapes will be destroyed following the completion of this project. ____I agree to be audio taped during my participation in this study ____I do not agree to be audio taped during my participation in this study
What are the risks of this research?	There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project.
What are the benefits of this research?	This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about the experiences that teachers of writing have through the course of their interactions with students. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the importance of the teaching of writing.

Project Title: Dwelling in a Pedagogy of In-Between: A Phenomenological Study of Teachers of Writing

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May I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. You may also refuse to answer any questions at any time during the interviews.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Linda S. De La Ysla at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Dr. Francine Hultgren at: 3112A Benjamin Building, 301-405-4562, or **fh@umd.edu**. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:
Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu; (telephone) 301-405-0678
This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Statement of Age of Subject and Consent

Your signature indicates that: you are at least 18 years of age; the research has been explained to you; your questions have been fully answered; and you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

Signature and Date

NAME OF SUBJECT:_____

SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT:
_____

DATE:
_____

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