PERSONAL JOURNAL WRITING: AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF THE WRITER-TEXT RELATIONSHIP

by

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ABSTRACT

With the increasing numbers of teachers implementing journal writing programs in their classrooms, studies are needed which explore the process of personal writing from the perspectives of the students involved. An interpretive study is described in which a phenomenological approach is adopted for the study of the writer-text relationships of three secondary students and their journals. Over a period of several weeks the researcher engaged in reflective, hermeneutic conversations with two grade 11 boys and one grade 11 girl. During these meetings, the researcher and students wrote in their journals, and shared their experiences of the composing process. Three separate interpretations of the students' journal writing experiences were written in the form of descriptive, narrative accounts. From this exploration of expressive writing as an important sense-making process, the researcher outlined implications for teachers wishing to establish a classroom environment most conducive to rewarding journal writing experiences for their students.

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DEDICATION

To Medi, and to my family, for their unfailing love, support, and encouragement.

CHAPTER I

Exploring Journal Writing

Selecting the Personal Writing Episode for Enquiry

Three summers ago, while travelling through the Orient and Europe for four months, I began to keep a daily journal, in the form of an ongoing series of extended letters home to my girlfriend in Canada. I soon realized how valuable this personal writing was becoming for me, providing a daily opportunity to reflect on my thoughts and experiences. Indeed, I became compelled to spend hours each night, writing to make sense of my novel and often challenging environment.

The present study addresses the special relationship between a writer and a personal text. My intention is to better understand the writing process in order to improve the learning situation in the secondary English classroom. In recent years, teachers have become increasingly aware of the potential that journal writing can have as a meaningful writing activity for their students (Butler, 1981; Craig, 1983; Myers, 1980; Roberts, 1980; Staton, 1980). As Stotsky (1984) has suggested, additional research is necessary to further our understanding of the writing process, particularly in the school setting. Through an investigation of the nature of journal writing as it is experienced by students, this research will culminate in a

discussion of implications for the classroom teacher who wishes to implement such a program.

The Research Question

This enquiry into the journal writing experience of students is focussed upon the meaning-making functions of writing. While the interpretive approach does not entail formulating a specific question or set of questions to answer, this study is broadly framed within the context of the phenomenological question: "What is it like to write in a journal?" Other important questions inevitably arose during this research, as the participants sought to discover the best means of engaging students in effective and rewarding self-expression through writing.

The selection of an appropriate methodology for this particular research interest was of great importance. This thesis documents the selection and undertaking of a qualitative, interpretive study of student writing; the basis for this choice is outlined in a review of the diverse literature in this area. Throughout, I have attempted to remain true to the tenets of interpretive research by writing in the first person, basing my enquiry on personal knowledge, and relating the findings to actual teaching situations.

This enquiry begins with teachers' accounts of successful applications of journal writing to classroom situations. The exploration continues in Chapter II, with a

critical review of various qualitative and quantitative studies of student writing, and of present conceptualizations of the writing process. In this review my own experiences with writing are included, with a rationale for adopting a phenomenological approach in this study. The history and methodological implications of the approach for this enquiry, which involves engaging participants in hermeneutic conversations, are further described and justified in Chapter III. In Chapter IV, the narrative interpretations of the students' writing experiences are presented. Finally, a discussion of this study, including implications for the classroom, limitations, and directions for further research, appears in Chapter V.

The introduction to the documented accounts of teachers' uses of journal writing in their classrooms is preceded by the following brief statement of my own personal assumptions regarding keeping a journal.

Personal Assumptions Regarding Journal Writing

The following tenets were formulated through my own experiences with the journal form of self-expression, and each has been confirmed in the talk and writings of numerous other keepers of journals. They point to the importance of allowing students the opportunity to engage in this type of writing in any classroom where the personal experiences and

language of the learners are placed in the forefront.

1. Journal writing involves the use of one's personal written language as a means of becoming a "spectator" on the events of one's own life.

2. The journal is an effective tool for imposing an order on experiences and aiding in the formation of a world representation.

3. Journal writing allows for the focussing, editing, and revising of one's inner stream of consciousness.

4. Journal writing involves the deep and honest communication with oneself, and should therefore be respected with absolute privacy.

5. Reflective journal writing can lead to a realization of the importance of writing and language to all forms of understanding; this could, in turn, lead to a synthesis of teacher and student intentions.

6. By exposing an individual to his or her own underlying meanings, journal writing may lead to a greater self-awareness and self-understanding.

7. Because journal writing encourages an individual to reflect, write, react, and interact, it is effective in broadening the total writing experience.

Each of these assumptions is substantiated and expanded upon in both theoretical and practical terms through the development of this thesis. While these are not an exhaustive reflection of my beliefs and values on this

topic, they indicate the perspective from which I view personal writing. Discussion of the literature on writing research begins with a rationale for implementing journal writing in the classroom.

Journals in the Classroom

Throughout our lives, each of us is surrounded by what Moffett (1968) has described as a "universe of discourse." One important way of interpreting, defining, and sharing this ever-increasing range of daily experiences is through our use of language. As educators, and especially Language Arts teachers, we are in the unique position of acting as intermediaries between our students and this communicative and generative link with their world of experiences.

Adopting A Student-Centered Approach

As responsible educators, we are obligated to base all of our pedagogical decisions upon the realization that each student comes to school equipped with a wealth of experiences, language, expectations, and intentions, acquired from a lifetime of being a responsive learner. As Moffett and Wagner (1983) insist, the most effective way to accommodate this understanding is to establish student-centered classrooms, and engage students in meaningful activities within this setting.

The development of students' communicative abilities within the classroom seems inexorably tied to the

implementation of practices which have direct, significant, and personal meanings for the individual students involved. When students' schoolwork is marked primarily for the correctness of the surface, mechanical features, the result may be that these individuals come to view their education as a series of narrow, teacher-directed activities. This focus on the "product" within the educational setting can have a stultifying effect on any student, and especially on an already apprehensive learner. We must strive to avoid this inadvertent separation of students from the expressive powers of their own personal language.

Although teachers may recognize the need for relating their classroom instruction to their students' personal interests and experiences, they should not feel the need to adopt an unstructured or undisciplined approach to teaching. Rather, as Squire (1984) argues, a student-centered approach should entail the establishment of creative and interactive experiences with language within a highly disciplined program, as teachers lead their students toward the most functional "literacy" in the world. The journal can be one important means toward this end.

Matching Teacher and Student Intentions--and Language

If teachers can formulate intentions for the classroom learning situations which take into account those of the students, then an important synthesizing process can take

place. As Chorny (1980) suggests, the language that students use to discover and understand themselves and their world can become the same language which is directed toward accomplishing the tasks required by the educational setting.

For some unfortunate students, however, the school classroom can be an environment in which the language of the school is presented as an elusive and foreign ideal; divorced from their outside life, it can become a virtually unmasterable code. These students may be confronted with often meaningless school assignments whose only audience will be the evaluative eye of the teacher.

By providing their students with nonthreatening and relatively unrestrictive opportunities to engage in creative self-expression in a well-planned journal writing program, several teachers have enabled students to view their own writing as a valuable means of self-expression and of self-discovery (Butler, 1981; Craig, 1983; Myers, 1980; Roberts, 1980; Staton, 1980). As a secondary teacher, Staton (1980) made this observation about her own students: "It is no wonder that their willingness to express their own ideas, feelings and experiences in written language improves and creates in them a confidence about writing in general" (p.518).

During the personal writing episode students' perceptions of reality can fuse with their personal linguistic capacity, as they produce written accounts of

their inner streams of consciousness. While expressing, recording, and reacting to their own ideas, experiences, feelings, and beliefs in the classroom, the students can become better able to examine and appreciate the products of their own thought through language.

Baldwin (1977) and Progoff (1975) each offer detailed guidance and advice for individuals who wish to keep a journal as a tool for achieving this creative self-awareness through language. Baldwin provides a personal account of the values she has discovered while recording her thoughts in writing. Progoff adopts an integrative approach to writing which incorporates an individual's whole psyche. His popular "Intensive Journal" workshops have been highly praised for their transferability into the classroom.

Describing her success with journals in her classroom, Craig (1983) mentions Progoff's method as effective in allowing students to find their own "voices," and to react to the events of their own lives in emotional and meaningful ways. She concludes that "each of us has a tale, a beautiful tale, an exciting tale to tell. We learn more about ourselves by sharing that tale on paper. If we offer that to children as one way of getting to know themselves better, we've given them a valuable tool for life" (p. 379).

Moving Beyond Self-Knowledge

Journal writing in the classroom need not remain an

inwardly directed process. As they come to value such writing for its own sake, students may become more receptive to the various other uses of their personal communicative abilities. As Roberts (1980) explains, "because journal writing encourages the students to think, perceive, write, react, and interact, it is an effective instrument leading to self-awareness and thereby broadening the total writing experience" (p. 19). Allowing students the opportunity to engage in this valuable written dialogue with themselves seems an essential first step in leading them toward a mastery of more and more of the communicative function of language, and of the total writing process.

Through the journal and other such forms of expression, students are enabled to broaden their self-knowledge while increasing their fluency with language. Fulwiler (1982) contends that this "value of coupling personal with academic learning should not be overlooked; self-knowledge provides the motivation for whatever other knowledge an individual seeks... [since] all knowledge is related; the journal helps clarify the relationship" (p. 30).

As teachers we are responsible for providing students with the best possible opportunities to engage in relevant and valuable learning activities; the establishment of a journal writing program can become a most vital step toward accomplishing this goal. As the extensive research of Goodman and Goodman (1984) suggests, a successful Language

Arts curriculum is one that builds on students' personal uses of language, and helps pupils to find the real purpose for such communication with real audiences (p. 157).

We must further assist students to move beyond their personal knowledge by providing a broad range of meaningful activities which build on this base of individual experience. This conclusion is substantiated by Scardamalia and Bereiter (1982), who recommend "engaging students in highly motivating activities in the course of which they will develop strategies for achieving purposes implicit in the activities" (p. 170). In doing so, we may move the students' language transactions in school from the personal to the more public, enabling them to become more effective communicators with themselves, and with their world.

The present study is an account of research which seeks to better understand journal writing and the personal meanings which students use to construct and define their reality. The goal of these efforts is to provide a sound basis for the establishment of more effective programs and conditions in which to allow for the personal and linguistic development we would like every student to experience. The selection of an interpretive methodology for this study is outlined in the chapters which follow, in a review of a broad range of research conducted in this area. What follows in Chapter II is a critical review of various

qualitative and quantitative studies of student writing, and an argument for reconceptualizing the writing process.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Writing Research

This exploration of the writing process has followed several paths of enquiry in the realm of Language Arts research. What follows are studies of student writing, grouped into the two broad categories of "qualitative" and "experimental" research. Though there are often no clear boundaries between the myriad of various approaches taken by researchers, it is useful to categorize some examples.

This overview of recent research into the writing processes of students, presented according to the broad methodological paradigms they represent, is intended to provide a rationale and justification for my selection of phenomenology as the most appropriate approach for my research interest. The second section of this chapter documents my exploration of the writing process from a phenomenological perspective, beginning from a base of personal experience. Discussion of various models of composing culminates in a rationale for reconceptualizing the writing process as a recursive, sense-making activity.

Qualitative Research

Introduction and Assumptions

The term "qualitative" applies to a wide body of research methodologies, into which several types of enquiry

may be classified. "Naturalistic" studies involve the natural setting as the direct source of data, with the researcher as the key instrument, assuming that human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs. Qualitative research is descriptive, involving the detailed recording of a situation or event, with the expectation that everything which occurs has the potential of being a significant clue to unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied.

Ethnographic researchers focus on the "human" aspects of each situation, entering familiar situations almost as an anthropologist would study another culture. As data are collected, abstractions are formed only once the specific features of the situation are revealed and examined. Rather than testing hypotheses, an ethnographic researcher employs an inductive approach to emerge with what Glaser and Strauss have termed a grounded theory (cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 29).

One area of qualitative research which is especially concerned with the study of experiences from the perspective of the individuals involved is phenomenology. As Bogdan and Biklen explain, this approach requires that researchers investigate the events and interactions of individuals with an intent "to gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives" (pp. 31-32).

In summary, then, qualitative research represents a fundamental rejection of quantification as the most appropriate way to represent all aspects of human belief and experience. Instead, it seeks to describe the complex social reality as a mosaic, reflecting the world in its natural form.

Qualitative Studies of Writing

Researchers who adopt the ethnographic research paradigm assume that, in any exploration of a language-using situation, all aspects of the context of a situation, including the researcher's presence, are an integral part of the process and should be described and studied. The pioneering work of Emig (1971) introduced the potential benefits of such a descriptive method of reporting on the composing processes of 12th-grade students. By observing students in the context of their school classrooms, she sought to discover the important aspects of the nature of their composing strategies and their attitudes toward writing.

Rather than setting an artificial writing task in which to observe certain pre-established variables, Emig entered the world of the students, and through careful interviewing and naturalistic observation, created "writing biographies" for a relatively small number of students, including one in-depth case study. Her technique was replicated, in part, by

Mischel (1974), who also closely examined one student writer using a qualitative case study approach.

In this way, these two researchers were not limited to the study of only one or two variables, but were able to develop a more comprehensive idea of what was important to these individuals in this setting. As a result, their examinations of the composing process describe a multitude of the interactive components of writing situations, including the context for writing, the nature of the stimuli, prewriting and planning strategies, composing aloud, reformulations, and teacher influence.

Central to the discussion of the findings of these two studies was the distinction between "reflexive" and "extensive" writing; students were typically engaged in far more extensive, or school-sponsored, report writing, than in the more expressive, self-directed, reflexive modes of composition. A major outcome of this research was a plea for more composing experiences for students requiring the reflexive mode, involving a shift from the teacher-centered classroom to a writing environment which would be more conducive to creative self-expression in language.

In their studies of the composing processes of college writers, Pianko (1979) and Perl (1979) both incorporated qualitative plans of research. They combined recorded behaviors of the students while they were writing with in-depth interviews about the strategies students employed, and

about general attitudes, feelings, and past experiences with writing.

In Pianko's attempt to characterize the composing processes of several college freshmen writers, she incorporated a method which could accommodate descriptive data on each student writer. Taking into consideration the multidimensional nature of writing, she examined all of the variables she could identify in light of what she learned from personal interviews.

Adopting qualitative approaches enabled both Perl and Pianko to identify the need for more emphasis on student interests in the writing programs offered in schools, and to outline some specific motivational strategies for teachers to employ. Pianko concluded that "teachers must include writing experiences which evolve from within students, from their needs to communicate through writing to themselves and to others" (p. 18). While providing directions for teachers to foster more effective written expression in their students, these researchers offer substantiation for a number of potentially valuable classroom practices, including personal journal writing.

In his phenomenological study of personal journal writing as an instrument for exploring self-definition, Myers (1980) identified several important dimensions of this type of self-expression. He related his review of the

literature on journal writing in psychology, literature, and religion, to the actual written accounts of 23 student teachers who had kept journals during their practicum experience. Synthesizing these views and reflections on this process into a dynamic thematic model, Myers was able to explore the phenomenon of personal writing from the perspective of those actually involved in the writing. With his subjects as informants, and himself as the only instrument with which to gather and interpret data, Myers succeeded in applying a qualitative approach to learn more about a highly personal event.

Flower and Hayes (1981) conducted a study of the composition behavior of novice and expert college writers during a freshman essay assignment, using "protocol analysis" to explore the writing process. Their method involved analyzing the location and duration of pauses in the transcribed protocols of comments made aloud by students during composition. Their results indicated that while the more skilled writers tended to set problem-solving goals during their pauses, such as deciding how best to engage their audience, the less skilled writers paused to focus on the more mechanical aspects of their writing.

The timing and study of pauses was also central to the research by Matsuhashi (1981), who employed dual-camera videotaping and protocol analysis to study high school writers composing. The researcher found that pause time

increased according to the type of discourse that the students were engaged in while writing, in the following order: reporting, persuading, and generalizing.

The approaches involving protocol analysis could be considered quasi-experimental, in that the researchers attempted to isolate and examine only the pausing behavior of students. This suggests an assumption that the whole process of writing may be better understood by studying one of the countless components involved.

Limitations of Qualitative Approaches

One major criticism of the type of qualitative research described above is that it lacks generalizability, due, in part, to the lack of controllable variables, and to the relatively small, nonrepresentative samples employed. To a large extent, this is a valid assertion, since researchers utilizing a qualitative methodology do not purport to apply their findings directly to any other situations. Rather, by describing fully the many aspects of the situation in which they conduct their research, they seek to make explicit all of the significant factors affecting the process they are interpreting.

Qualitative researchers may argue that the more experimental approaches to the study of language-using situations produce data which are not generalizable because they deal with a distorted linguistic event. Where key

aspects of the composing process are not allowed to transact, it appears tenuous to expect a clearer understanding of actual situations of language use.

By seeking patterns within and across language events, qualitative researchers attempt to incorporate all instances of language use into their ever-evolving theories. As Harste, Woodward, and Burke (1984) assert, "being able to explain all observed behaviors of language users during a language event provides a sounder basis on which to generate theory--to generalize--than does explaining a subset of behaviors one finds convenient" (p. 90). Their contention provides a perspective for a review of some recent experimental studies into the composing process.

Experimental Research

Experimental Studies of Writing

Experimentally oriented studies into the writing process have not focused specifically on personal writing, so the discussion here is restricted to research related to other types of student writing. In order to narrow this review and reflect the degree of specificity in this realm of research, each of the following studies is included to represent the range of exploration in just one aspect of the writing process; here, the pausing behavior of student writers is addressed.

In order to examine the cognitive processing taking

place while subjects compose their thoughts into words, some recent researchers have adopted highly technological data-gathering strategies. For instance, Schumacher, Klare, Cronin, and Moses (1984) constructed a special platform which allowed writers to compose in a laboratory setting while being recorded by two video cameras. Whenever the subjects paused during writing, the experimenter would turn on a red light to alert them to pay close attention to their thoughts at that time. Immediately after the writing sessions, writers were asked to review the videotapes and recall their specific cognitive strategies at each pause. These prompting techniques, originally developed by memory researchers, were purported to be less obtrusive than investigations which involved subjects' verbalization during writing. Nonetheless, the artifical setting, the distractive signalling light and cameras, and the postwriting tasks may have prevented natural writing behaviors.

In his study of cognitive processing during composition, Williams (1983) measured five volunteer subjects' "subvocal" activity while writing and pausing, as recorded on an electromyograph (EMG) machine. Each subject in this experiment had 13 electrodes attached to locations on the face and throat, measuring the electrical impulses of the articulatory musculature. Videotapes and subject interviews were also used to interpret the readings obtained on the EMG equipment. Williams found greater EMG levels of

activity during pauses in the writing of skilled subjects when performing more abstract writing tasks, indicating increased subvocalization. This behavior was assumed to be associated with increased cognitive processing at these instances of the composing process.

Attempting to probe directly into the cognitive processing of writers, Glassner (1980) used an electroencephalograph (EEG) to measure the electrochemical activity in the left and right hemispheres of writers' brains as they composed. With electrodes attached to their right and left temporal lobes, 30 college subjects wrote on rehearsed and unrehearsed topics. As hypothesized by the researcher, heavier left-brain activity was recorded during the "automatic" writing of memorized languge, while more right brain activity, pauses and in-processs planning accompanied the unplanned writing.

Limitations of Experimental Approaches

Each of these studies was an attempt to isolate and examine a limited number of "variables" of the complex writing process in order to find reliable relationships between two or more factors. The researchers may have overlooked potentially significant factors not accounted for within the methodological design of the experiments. By relying on observable, measurable manifestations to speculate on the underlying cognitive processes, these

researchers have adopted a reductionistic perspective to their data gathering and analysis. Implicitly, they have equated performance on any given task with "comprehension," and viewed writing as a quantifiable phenomenon, better understood through external measures of distinct components.

In the case of the present investigation, such an approach could result in simplifying or distorting the natural language processing of the individuals involved. All human language situations, especially journal writing episodes, occur in the context of an important affective dimension. The intentions and motivations of individuals cannot be ignored in composition research which aims to explore writing experiences from the perspective of the language users.

The extent to which these experimental researchers can apply their findings to people involved in "real" language-using situations is greatly limited by the lack of ecological validity of the research designs employed. It would be tenuous to assume that subjects in a laboratory setting, performing an artificial and prescribed task, would behave exactly as they would in a natural setting, especially when subjected to obtrusive monitoring techniques. The effect of the measuring devices, the research settings, and the researchers cannot be ignored or eliminated in these studies of writing processes. For a researcher who wishes to examine the writing behaviors of

students in a school setting, a naturalistic, qualitative approach appears to be more appropriate. This argument is carried further in the next section.

Choosing An Interpretive Approach

Because of the personal nature of writing down thoughts in a journal, it seems reasonable that an investigation of this process should account for the underlying subjective dimensions of such an experience. This was indicated by Butler (1981), who discovered in his work with student teachers that "journal writing achieves a depth and importance to the extent that it portrays emotions, and it is through the expression of feelings that the writing becomes fluent, or even impelled" (p. 79).

By accounting for the multiplicity of underlying assumptions, values, and intentions that an individual brings to a situation, interpretive research provides the means of obtaining descriptive data from which the personal meanings of that person may be illuminated. With this enquiry, the appropriate questions to pose will only arise once the personal writing situation is entered and interpreted. Any resulting understandings about self-expression through writing will emerge from the research itself, and not be imposed from without.

I have chosen to adopt an interpretive approach to exploring the relationship between individuals and their

self-created literature, and between their thought and language processes during composition. This is based on my earlier stated personal assumptions regarding journal writing, on the experiences of those who have effectively used and studied journal writing, and on the methodological considerations discussed above.

Journal writing can be a highly personal experience of communication with the self. For this reason, a phenomenological perspective to this research seems especially appropriate. The section which follows includes a critical review of the literature on conceptualizations of writing as a process. A phenomenological approach is adopted in this reconceptualizing of the personal writing process, starting from a base of my own experiences with writing. Chapter III outlines this approach in further detail, and includes a rationale for its application to this study of journal writing.

Reconceptualizing the Writing Process

Carr and Kemmis (1983) contend that in explorations of any human actions, the phenomena can only be understood and interpreted "by reference to the meaning that the individual actor attaches to them" (p. 88). For Language Arts researchers, especially those interested in how people communicate through written language, this attending to the personal meanings of the participants is a crucial starting

point for any enquiry.

Writing is a phenomenon which I believe may be better understood by consulting those who write. My adoption of a phenomenological approach to exploring the journal writing episode necessitates that I begin this exploration with deliberate self-reflection on my own experiences with written language. Only from this base of personal experience may I seek external sources to extend and deepen my understanding of the process of reflection through writing.

Heeding the explanations provided by Gadamer (1975), I view my task in this interpretive process to be directed more toward explicating the "common meanings" of this use of language--the shared understanding between people of what it means to record thoughts in writing--rather than toward seeking insights into the idiosyncracies of my own writing experiences. I hope to portray the act of self-expression through written language as the human sense-making experience which I believe it to be.

Reflections on Reflective Writing

Reflecting upon my own experiences with the act of reflective writing presents an intriguing paradox with which I hope to increase my self-knowledge while renewing my sense of the significance of the writing act. Embedded in this introspection may lie the raw material for initiating my greatest potential growth as a Language Arts teacher and as

a learner interested in language use.

In a typical day this year, I may write a thousand words. Using my word processor, I will formulate various forms of professional correspondence, revise my resume, or draft letters of request or application. I am now using it to write the text which eventually is to become part of this thesis. Much of my writing, usually in the form of very roughly drafted ideas for papers, poems, or fiction, remains in electronic limbo, encoded interminably on floppy disks.

It is the writing I do with pen and paper, however, that holds the greatest fascination for me, and toward which this enquiry is addressed. In my nearly illegible left-handed scrawl, usually composed in haste with a medium-point blue BIC pen, my handwriting stares back at me from my desk. There are many examples including the following list: long, reflective letters to my parents, my sister, and my close friends; personal notes to my girlfriend; notes taken during my research group meetings at university; field notes recorded following school visits; and brief, often cryptic notes to myself.

As I write in this personal mode, I am releasing a flow of more than just intentionally selected words and phrases. In my choice of vocabulary and syntax, and in the emerging organization of the text--my piece of self-created literature--I am engaging in a process of cognition. By

drawing the language of my underlying "inner stream" to surface awareness, and recording on paper the coded representations of my reflection, I am able to express and affect the elusive thoughts which make up my evolving self.

Left unwritten, these ephemeral mental images dissolve or remain obscured from my conscious awareness. While they are being represented on paper, however, they can react recursively with other thoughts which emerge during writing, shaping the ongoing development of the text. My personal writing seems to involve a continuous cycle of discovery and communication with inner processes of my cognition, a cycle which continues even after I stop writing.

The events of my life take on new dimensions for me as they become transmuted into words during the writing episode. During the evening following my miraculous survival of a serious train wreck in Germany in August, 1982, I struggled to describe the traumatic event in a letter to my girlfriend.

As I wrote, a flood of images surged through my mind and tears welled in my eyes. Once again, I could feel the terrible impact, as my backpack fell on me from the overhead rack in the cabin. I could almost hear the din of steel on rock as the derailed train ground to a precarious halt on the loose gravel of an embankment. I could feel myself scrambling from the shattered window, and helping others collect their strewn belongings. The writing also brought

back my horrendous experience of walking along the tracks to seek help, only to discover a gruesome mass of human remains on the twisted rails. Forced to slow down and organize the processing of my recollections as I selected the words for this written account, I seemed to relive every moment of the experience. In some ways, though, it was different than when it actually had been happening. Now it felt almost unreal, more like a vivid, sensory cinematic experience. Once recounted in my journal, however, the reality of my incredible deliverance from a violent death, and my first encounter with a corpse, somehow became more emotionally manageable to me as they appeared in the text of my own writing.

Putting my thoughts into words also enables me to make sense of the experiences which make up my everyday existence, perhaps by allowing me to step out of the role of "actor" and into the role of "interpreter" of the drama unfolding continuously around me. Recently, I was writing a letter to my sister in which I was enthusiastically telling her of an interview I had just been granted for a teaching position in another country. As I reflected on how well this opportunity matched my career goals and expectations for my future, my writing revealed to me a surprisingly strong inner conflict of which I had not been consciously aware. Through the medium of the written word, my dissonant

feelings toward the actuality of moving so far from my friends, family, and long-time girlfriend suddenly became clear to me. While writing, I seem able to record fleeting instances in the evolution of my ever-changing view of myself and the world, in language which speaks in my own voice about my own life story.

Rather than allowing my reflection to remain inwardly directed, I wish to investigate what others have discovered in their work with writers and writing. My intention is to consult various sources which document attempts to describe the writing experience, in order to enrich my understanding of the phenomenon as it has been experienced by others.

What follows is a brief and critical overview of a few of the various conceptualizations of writing, developed over the past few decades. It is intended to trace the evolution of the popular conceptual frameworks applied to writing within this realm of educational research, and to act as a sort of lens through which to view my more subjective attempts at understanding the process of creating written language.

Understanding Writing as a Process

Until fairly recently, researchers and practitioners of composition had assumed writing to be a relatively linear transcription of thoughts into written words, with an

emphasis placed on the analysis and evaluation of the final product. In recent years, theoreticians have begun to recognize the limitations of this conceptualization, and have tended to favour increasingly more process-oriented approaches in the teaching and researching of writing. Rohman (1965) is generally recognized as the original source of the three-stage model of composition involving prewriting, writing, and rewriting.

Others have made similar efforts in developing models to describe writing as a series of distinct stages. Elbow (1973), for instance, characterized writing as "a two-step process. First you figure out your meaning, then you put it into language" (p. 14). Even while emphasizing the process of discovery through writing, Murray (1978) also suggested that writing involves three separate stages, which he labelled as "prevision," "vision," and "revision" (p. 86). In an attempt to synthesize these somewhat disparate theories into a model which could encompass the similarities in each, King (1978) proposed a view of the composing process which included the three stages of prewriting, articulation, and postwriting.

All of the aforementioned models seem to be necessarily limited, since each represents yet another attempt to describe composing as a virtually linear activity. These researchers have assumed writing to be a step-by-step growth of a written product, rather than acknowledging the crucial

inner processing of the individuals producing the text.

Writing as a Recursive Process

More promising conceptualizations of the writing process have emerged from the early research and theorizing of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. He characterized human language as a reflexive process, a generative interaction between cognitive processes and linguistic expression. Vygotsky (1934/1962) described the nature of the process of self-expression through language as "a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. Thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them" (p. 125).

From their extensive research of the writing behaviors of students, Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (1975) found evidence that supported viewing writing as a more recursive process. The researchers discovered that preventing individuals from seeing what they had just written presented a serious obstacle to further composition (p. 35). This suggested to them that the movements of the pen--the formation of words on the page--acted primarily as a stimulus for individuals to continue writing, by capturing and affecting the "movements" of the writers' thoughts.

Based on their research with student writers, Perl and Egendorf (1979) described the composition process as "retrospective structuring," noting that "students appear to

write by shuttling back and forth from their sense of what they wanted to say to the words on the page and back to address what is available to them inwardly" (p. 125). This was shown to be accompanied by "projective structuring," when the writers would shape their writing to convey their meanings to the intended readers.

This research suggests that the process involved in writing does not move in a straight line from planning to writing to revising. Rather, writing seems to entail movements back and forth among several subprocesses, often after the text has been composed on paper and as newly conceived ideas emerge from the written formulation. A writer's continual search for a satisfactory expression of meaning while composing reminds me of a comparison made by Britton (1980, p. 64) between writing and sculpting; indeed, a sculptor must both cut and observe the effect of his cut before continuing.

Writing as Cognitive Discovery

Writing involves a creative shaping of our thoughts into a new form which can be a revealing source of self-knowledge. As we look at our own writing, we may see in our words a further structuring of the sense we began with, and discover something new about ourselves and our topic. Perl (1983) wrote that when we are successful at this process, we will end up with a piece of writing "that teaches us something, that clarifies what we know... that lifts out or

explicates or enlarges our experience" (p. 49).

As what I think becomes translated into what I am writing, I may discover important insights into my own internal processes of interpreting my surroundings. Flower (1979) described the expression and transformation of our thoughts through writing as "exploring our own saturated language," a rich source in which to discover potential meanings (p. 32). While writing, we order our thoughts from their often imagistic existence in the mind into the organized patterns of written language. This act of transcribing thoughts onto paper requires that we objectify concepts into words, thereby making their meanings available for a much more prolonged and intensive scrutiny and manipulation than is possible orally.

In drawing my subconscious thoughts into conscious awareness by "tying" them to my personal language, I am able to relate them to a much broader system of my beliefs, values, and attitudes. Moffett (1984) has stated that "the deliberate selecting of images and ideas, and of words themselves, not only breaks up routine and random inner streaming but sustains the development of a subject beyond what we have thought or imagined about it before" (p. 62).

Writing as a Spectator-Role Activity

As we go about our daily interactions with our environment, we must necessarily act as "participants" in

our own lives, using our language primarily as a tool to communicate our immediate needs and responses to events as they happen. My experiences with reliving experiences while writing have often made me feel like an omniscient observer on the events of my own life. Only when we are given an opportunity to "step back" from our participation in the world and reflect upon the events of our lives, are we able to engage in what Britton (1970) termed "spectator-role" language.

In this mode of personal expression, we become freed from the demands of interacting with our environment, able to use our language to interpret our reality, and to seek or impose meaning on our experiences. By writing in the role of spectator we are, as Britton said, deliberately using our language "as a mode of representing experience... turning confusion into order, in enabling us to construct for ourselves an increasingly faithful, objective and coherent picture of the world" (p. 105).

Writing as a Transactive Process

My composing process seems to me to involve a complex, ongoing transaction between the acts of writing, reflecting, and reading--and between myself and my environment. While this transactional view of language use has been applied mainly to the reading of literature, its application here to the piece of self-created literature seems especially robust in exploring the relationship between writers, their

personal language, and the world.

During writing I must bring to the evolving text my past experiences and my present personality, to draw into language an original formulation of thought that then can become a part of myself. In this sense, my experience while writing closely reflects Rosenblatt's (1978) descriptions of a reader involved in a similarly transactive language process. She describes this individual as someone who "crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which... becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience" (p. 12).

As I write, I am continually thinking--about what I have already written, about what I am presently composing, and about what I am likely about to write. Therefore, I must be continually engaged in monitoring and rereading my own writing as I shape my text, and as the text shapes me. From this perspective, the clear distinction between the writing, reading, and reflection processes becomes blurred; each is an essential element of the composing process, significantly affecting the shaping and ultimate expression of my cognition.

Creating a Personal Text: Capturing Moments of Self-Growth

Each writing episode entails the creation of a personal text which acts less as an "object," and more as an active "process" engaged in at the time of composition. As time

passes, each encounter with my own writing may facilitate a different transaction, enabling me to experience a new view of my own perceptions of the world at any time. Writers have discovered that the resulting written product need not even be shared with an external audience in order for this process of personal growth to occur. Smith (1982) asserted that "even when we keep our language to ourselves... in writing which is not shown to anyone else, the language affects how we think" (p. 65).

This is especially evident to me when I read my daily accounts of my experiences while travelling four years ago. My relationship with this particular personal text changes profoundly each time I undertake to read it, to savour the emotion-laden flavour of the language, and to relive the processes of reflection through which it was created. Each rereading of the journal provides me with much more than a vivid description of my daily itinerary; I am able to gain valuable insights into my own personal writing as a sense-making process.

I stop for a moment to contemplate the writing itself, the tangible residue of my journey; four eventful months of my life have been transformed into a collection of worn pieces of paper, creases pressed flat between the transparent sheets of protective plastic. (I wonder if my careful efforts to protect and preserve my document might

mask a deeper wish to clothe this naked and now vulnerable part of myself.)

It affects me deeply even now, this roughly etched narrative documenting a brief period from my past, not only in the honesty and spontaneity of expression, but in its often eerie depiction of an earlier self displaced in both space and time. This writing now exists for me as an invaluable personal text, a richly textured portrait of one brief instance of my own life, of what was happening to me as it shaped the person I was becoming.

As we live each day, it is difficult to be cognizant of the myriad of personal changes which occur continually within each of us. These subtle shifts in our perceptions, deeper insights into our own intentions, elaborations and modifications of our systems of beliefs all reflect the evolution of our personal world representations. By engaging in the transactive process of reflection afforded by personal writing, we can each become better able to capture an essence of our own ongoing self-evolution. If we provide our students with opportunities to engage in this form of self-expression, we will be allowing them to experience a most essential process of creation and discovery. Using the expressive powers of their own written language to shape their own personal texts, these individuals may discover a greater capacity for self-reflection, and a greater awareness of themselves.

By studying this process from a phenomenological perspective, I am striving to gain an increased understanding of the phenomenon of journal writing from the perspectives of those students actually involved in the writing experience. In Chapter III, which follows, I present a rationale for choosing an interpretive method for this enquiry. The backgrounds of phenomenological enquiry and the hermeneutic tradition are outlined, with justification for their use in this study of writing as a sense-making activity. Also described are the specific methods I employed in the gathering and interpretation of interview data.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Personal Writing Research and Phenomenology

Phenomenological Research

A phenomenologist views the shared world of language experiences as a personal construction of each individual situated within a particular social context. For the educational researcher applying a phenomenological approach to an enquiry, the primary aim of the research is to illuminate the personal understandings of experiences as they are lived and felt by individual students and teachers.

Journal writing can be a highly personal experience of communication with the self. I believe that a phenomenological approach to an exploration of the journal writing of students enables me to capture and elucidate the complexity and fullness of the affective dimensions of their experiences. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), phenomenology emphasizes the more subjective aspects of an individual's experiences. In my enquiry, therefore, I must attend carefully to the words of the participants in order to acquire insight into their experiences with making meaning through writing.

For this interpretive study, I am not seeking causal explanations of language experiences; rather, as Carr and Kemmis (1983) suggest, the explanations sought by a

phenomenological enquiry should "deepen and extend our knowledge of why everyday reality... is perceived and experienced in the way that it is" (p. 90). Adopting a phenomenological point of view in this discipline reminds teachers, as van Manen (1982) expresses it, "that the question of knowledge always refers us back to our world, to our lives, to who we are, and to what makes us write, read, and talk together as educators" (p. 298).

Hermeneutic Enquiry

Closely associated with the phenomenological perspective is the hermeneutic activity of interpreting texts. Hermeneutics is defined by van Manen (1979) as "the interpretive understanding of any text, human actions and human experiences" (p. 15). In applying this approach to an exploration of personal writing, I engage in reflective conversation with a writer, and together, we seek disclosure of the shared meanings that characterize writing as an understandable human experience. A brief history of hermeneutic enquiry will provide a context for a discussion of the methodological considerations for this study.

The term "hermeneutics" as it appears in philosophical literature refers to principles of text interpretation. Originally, the term was applied specifically to the interpretation of the Bible. New and broader applications of the term are now emerging which take into account the

interpretation of all words used in any human situations.

The thinker who is credited with first introducing the concept of hermeneutics into phenomenological philosophy is Heidegger. In his seminal work Being and Time (1927/1962), he places hermeneutic enquiry in the center of his analysis of existence, as the means to an ontological disclosure of what it means to be human. It is his assertion that only by projecting oneself onto the "otherness" of surrounding humanity, can a researcher seek to make explicit the shared meanings of human experiences.

Over the past several decades, hermeneutics has been more broadly applied, and redefined by scholars across various disciplines in the social sciences. Recently, Ricoeur (1981) referred to hermeneutics as "the theory of the operations of understanding in their relation to the interpretation of texts" (p. 43), where "texts" are any discourse fixed by writing. Further, contemporary scholars are adopting a hermeneutic stance in interpreting spoken discourse as well.

Conceiving of hermeneutics as a readily applicable "methodology" for the educational researcher is problematic, since it is not generally conceived as a rigorous philosophical method. Shapiro and Sica (1984) explain hermeneutics as follows:

> It is more a philosophical movement or tendency--though not a school--not unlike existentialism, in that it designates a set of general concerns rather than a body

> of doctrine.... We view hermeneutics as a type of philosophical activity or praxis, the effort to understand what is distant in time and culture, or obscured by ideology or false consciousness. The broad hermeneutical aim is to make such understanding meaningful for life and thought. (pp. 3-4)

The task of hermeneutics is not accomplished through a specific set of prescribed activities, but through means which enable a way of experiencing and understanding events. This particular hermeneutic enquiry is focussed on the personal sense-making experience of making meaning through written language.

Hermeneutic Enquiry into Writing

Adopting a hermeneutic approach to this study of journal writing constitutes a redirection of the current orientations in Language Arts research. I can make no claims of context-free manipulations of discrete variables, objective observations, or experimental testing of hypotheses. By engaging with my participants in hermeneutic conversations, I am not conducting "interviews" in the commonly accepted sense of the term as described by ethnographers such as Dobbert (1982) and Spradley (1979). Rather than distancing myself from the event in the manner of an anthropologist studying another culture, I completely submerge myself in the phenomenon, and engage myself entirely with the participant during our conversations.

I have employed a hermeneutic approach in order to include my own experiences with personal writing, as I

explore the phenomenon together with the participants in my research. Based on his own experiences with this mode of enquiry, Smith (1983) suggests that "hermeneutic research involves a form of reconciliation in which researcher and subject are bound together in a common search for common understanding" (p. 75). Any understanding of the journal writing experience comes from sharing similar experiences with others who write for themselves; in this approach, the key method for discovering the shared meanings is conversation.

Hermeneutic Conversation

The aim of hermeneutic conversation is to achieve a common understanding of the topic toward which the talk is directed. This does not mean using questioning skills to verify the existence of some objective knowledge. Instead, language becomes the common bond which fuses participants together in a mutual sharing of understandings of a particular phenomenon. In Philosophical Apprenticeships, Gadamer (1977/1985) posits that "the communality that we call human rests on the linguistic constitution of our life-world.... Here the hermeneutic task poses itself in its full seriousness, namely as the task of finding a common language" (p. 180).

For Gadamer, the interpretation of our experiences through language is a continual process which we use to make sense of the world and our place in it. He writes: "All

experience realizes itself in ongoing communicative improvement of our knowledge of the world.... It is the world itself that is communicatively experienced and constantly given over to us as an infinitely open task" (p. 181). Writing in a journal can reveal this interpretive process, as we translate our experiences into our conscious awareness through the words of our personal language.

I engaged with student writers in hermeneutic conversations in order to facilitate the sharing of our personal experiences with the interpretive process of journal writing. Gadamer asserts that "every dialogue with the thinking of a thinker--which we seek to conduct because we strive to understand--is in itself an unending conversation" (p. 188). For opening up a conversation to new understanding between two participants, effective questioning can be a crucial catalyst.

Hermeneutic Questioning

During these conversations, I cannot adhere to a rigid set of research questions which have been prepared carefully beforehand. I must leave myself "open" to the other, and allow our language to find its own questions, as they emerge from our mutual search for understanding. The questions I pose during the course of our conversation are not designed to gather specific information, but are formulated as a way of opening up the topic under our mutual consideration, and

clarifying it as it unfolds between us.

Hermeneutic questioning may be better understood, says Smith (1983, p. 77), by understanding how it differs from both pedagogical and rhetorical questions. Pedagogical questions are usually posed within the context of a relationship in which a profound discrepancy exists in the balance of power; the teacher always knows the correct answer beforehand. Rhetorical questions have no object and no true questioner; they exist primarily as an exercise of their own function. Hermeneutic questioning, on the other hand, reflects the genuine desire of a person to know, to better understand, to bring something into the open. Effective questioning in this sense is not a science; it is more an art, and a sincere expression of an interest in the surrounding human world.

Dialogue and Interpretation

The act of entering into a communion with the life and language of another through hermeneutic conversation and questioning is not intended to enable me to define any verifiable, objective "truth" about language or about learners. Instead, as Gadamer (1975) insists, the "conversation has a spirit of its own, and the language used in it bears its own truth within it, i.e. it reveals something which henceforth exists" (p. 345). This new understanding emerges as an authentic recognition of the essential human unity, the common ground, which exists

between us, within each of us, and across humanity.

Engaging in this interpretive dialogue involves using the oral language of a conversation to discover common understandings in other uses of our language. In "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion," Gadamer (1984) characterizes this recursive nature of interpretive conversation as an interactive process:

> In dialogue we are really interpreting. Speaking then is interpreting itself. It is the function of the dialogue that in saying or stating something a challenging relation with the other evolves, a response is provoked, and the response provides the interpretation of the other's interpretation. (p. 63)

In any form of dialogue, the participants in the research are building up a common language, so that by the end of the interaction we will share some common ground. In doing so, we may gradually move toward a hermeneutic understanding of our experiences with journal writing. Through this mutual sharing, this participation in the explication of a common understanding, we are able to enrich our existence in the world. The fundamental importance of this melding of lives is expressed poignantly by Gadamer in the following observation: "The whole life of tradition consists exactly in this enrichment so that life is our culture and our past: the whole inner store of our lives is always extending by participating" (p. 64).

It is my belief that the phenomenological perspective has an important place in Language Arts research, especially

in my research related to personal writing situations, because it focusses on human experience in all its complexity. Seen from a hermeneutic perspective, the human complexity becomes the primary interest and, indeed, the very reason for conducting the research. Also, this approach entails my formulating descriptive written accounts of each of the students' experiences with personal writing, that I am able to understand by virtue of my own experiences with journal writing. Therefore, I trust that my research findings may be understood, appreciated, and utilized by a broad range of educational practitioners. The section which follows documents the specific methods of data gathering and interpretation employed in this study.

Gathering Data: Entering the Students' Worlds

This section of the chapter documents my application of a phenomenological approach to exploring the writer-text relationship. Using hermeneutic conversation as the primary method of data gathering, I engaged with three senior high school students in an interpretive enquiry into the experience of journal writing as a sense-making use of written language. Below are descriptions of the setting, my selection of participants, and the procedure, followed in Chapter IV by the narrative interpretations of the writing experiences of each student.

The Classroom Setting and Selection of Participants

My research was conducted with three Grade 11 students in a secondary high school on the southern end of Vancouver Island. Located relatively close to an urban area, the school serves a varied population in an affluent and predominantly professional community. A relatively new building provides a bright and modern setting for the diverse group of about 30 staff members and 400 students.

The young Grade 11 intern teacher had taught this group of 22 honours English students for only a few days when he agreed to participate in my research. The students had begun a journal writing program just two weeks earlier with their regular English teacher. In keeping with the newly established routine, the intern teacher had set aside 10 minutes at the beginning of each class period during which time students were to write in their journals.

Both teachers had explained fully to the class the nature of personal, expressive writing, and insisted that students were free to write on any topic and in any format they wished. To one side of the teacher's desk at the front of the class stood a moveable blackboard, inscribed daily with a "thought for the day," usually in the form of a provocative quote from the lyrics of a contemporary song. This was intended to provide a stimulus for any students who wished to offer their personal responses to it in their journals.

The intern's intent was to collect the students' journals once a week to read their entries, including his personal, supportive comments where appropriate, responding only to the content of their writing. He ignored any errors in the mechanics of the writing, since an important purpose of this task was to have students feel more comfortable with their own written expression. Noting only whether or not they had written consistently in their journal, he did not plan to assign any number or letter grades to this writing. Also, believing that the privacy of the students' journals must be respected, he allowed students to retain the ultimate control over any piece they did not feel comfortable sharing.

Before I first met the class, the teacher had obtained the students' permission to allow me to peruse all of their journals on two different occasions. This initial reading oriented me toward the various writing styles of the students and the topics they selected. I was impressed by the range and diversity of the journal entries, and made a preliminary selection of the students I believed would be the best for my own research.

I eventually visited the class to meet the students in person. The classroom itself was small and comfortable, and the teacher's manner with the students was relaxed and congenial. I introduced myself to the class and described

my research, and my need for the kind cooperation of a few of them. I spoke of how I became interested in journal writing while travelling, and how this led to my Master's thesis research. During the few weeks before I started asking for volunteers, I sat in on the class and spoke to the students as a group on three occasions. My intention was to share a bit more about myself and my research, and to begin to "break the ice" between us. I also distributed a list of quotations on the values of journal writing (See Appendix A) to help students better understand some of the possible benefits I and others have experienced using this form of self-expression.

After a few weeks of periodic observations, I approached the class directly for volunteers for my study. I described as fully as possible all that would be involved, and had all of the students hand in a "secret ballot;" on pieces of paper, students wrote their name if they wished to be considered for participation, or left a blank if they did not. Students were assured that their participation in my research would have no bearing whatsoever on the grades for their regular school work. In addition, at every stage of my research, the students were reminded that their participation was strictly voluntary, performed only as a favour to me, and that they were free to end their participation at any time. Strict confidentiality was maintained with all of my records throughout my data

gathering and interpretation.

Exactly half of the students initially volunteered to participate. From these 11, I selected the three whom I believed would be the best possible partners for me in this enquiry into journal writing. Contacting these three discreetly through their teacher, I was able to obtain written parental consent (see Appendices B and C), and arrange mutually convenient appointments for our conversations. I spoke privately with the students three times each over a two-week period.

The Conversations

Before the first private meetings with each of the three student volunteers whom I selected to participate, I had made detailed notes on the content of their classroom journals. These served as valuable starting points to our sharing of experiences with journal writing. Moreover, entering these conversations well-prepared served to reinforce for the students the importance of journal writing, and my credibility as an interested person.

The interviews took place in an empty science classroom in their school. We always sat at a small laboratory table across from one another, on stools of the same height. On the table between us was a portable tape recorder and our notebooks. During the three scheduled interviews with each student, my intent was to have us become engaged in a

sharing dialogue, as described in the previous chapter, on the nature of journal writing. I also asked each student to compose two or three separate journal entries during our interviews, in order to provide a fresh example of the writing process to discuss and explore. While they wrote, I took notes on our conversations.

It seemed reasonable to expect that these adolescents might be somewhat reluctant to converse with me in the private and honest manner on which much of the success of my research approach depended. After all, they were all 16 years old and in the often awkward and painful time of transition from the teenage years to adulthood. Also, we had not really had much time or opportunity to get to know one another very well.

My fears of uncomfortable meetings with unresponsive teens were allayed within seconds of meeting each of the students for the first time in the "interview" setting. I was relieved and then excited to discover that our conversations were characterized by an overwhelming feeling of rapport and trust shared between myself and each of my student participants. Most important to the students seemed to be the fact that my role in these conversations was not that of a teacher or authoritarian figure; rather, I represented simply an interested and non-evaluative adult listener. For individuals of their age group, it seems an infrequent, yet important occurrence to meet an older person

who will listen to their thoughts and opinions on issues without making judgements.

At first the immediate rapport surprised me, but when I reflect on the context in which this friendly, honest dialogue developed, I realize that there are similar aspects of our personalities and backgrounds which may help to account for this mutually rewarding symbiosis. Some of our common experiences and characteristics were unstated while others emerged in our talk as we discussed how remarkable it seemed that we could "hit it off" like this.

Shared Experiences

In discussing our lifestyles and interests, it became apparent that I shared several common experiences with each of the students. Both Tom and I have grown up under the strict guidance of authoritarian fathers employed in law enforcement. His disclosure of a personal family tragedy struck a familiar chord in me, evoking strong memories of my own mother's recent battle with a serious illness. Cindy and I share musical tastes, and could sympathize with one another in our ongoing inner conflicts over religious issues, and in our struggle to deal with having an older, higher achieving sibling. Dan also feels these sibling tensions, but toward a younger sister. His concerns with peer acceptance brought back vivid memories of my own high school social insecurities.

In so many ways, we seemed to be almost unnaturally alike in our viewpoints and attitudes. This makes more sense to me when I admit that I am also still experiencing my own adolescence. Of course, my age and life circumstances indicate that I must be in the final stages of my transition into adulthood, while these students are now very much in the midst of theirs. Still, it is no wonder I could relate so strongly to their comments regarding the tensions of establishing greater independence from parents, of dealing with sibling and self-competition, and of questioning parental values and goals.

Strangers in a Life-Boat

As an outsider, I seemed to hold a peculiar advantage in our talks. Since I did not know any of their family, friends, or other teachers, I could be trusted not to disclose any of the confidential information which appeared in their writing or arose in our conversations. Thus, the students frequently sought my opinion as a safe way of obtaining another perspective from which to view the matters of their personal lives.

A friend and fellow researcher has spoken to me about the "life-boat" phenomenon, and for the first time, I believe I experienced it myself. Drawn together in the peculiar circumstances of this research situation, as enthusiastic participants in an open-ended conversation, we achieved an unexpected sense of openness and trust. We

were, after all, two virtual strangers exploring together the phenomenon of writing as it facilitates self-reflection and sense-making. Submerged totally in our own "deep" conversations, each student and I felt we were two people alone, sheltered from the real world for a brief time.

Throughout our conversations, there grew intangible but undeniable feelings of trust and honesty. In the context of my research interest, this was of great importance to the quality and scope of my data gathering; on a more personal level, it provided a basis for the warm and reflective dialogue from which we each gained our own intrinsic rewards.

Preserving the Talk

Caught up in the conversations, we soon became oblivious to the whirring of the tape recorder. Fascinated with the students' eager sharing of their thoughts and feelings, my mind was flooded with images and ideas. I would think about what was being said, ask questions to help clarify or confirm my understanding, and offer my own thoughts as they emerged from the dialogues. The planned one-hour interviews invariably turned into 80 or 90 minute sessions, filling up both sides of a cassette tape.

These conversations recreated themselves in my mind long after I departed the research situation. Walking from the school to my car, driving back to my apartment, or while

taking a morning run, I would find myself reliving the day's interview, thinking about what was said, what questions I should have asked, and what new understanding I was gaining. The voices of the students echoed distinctly and continuously in my mind; my union with their personality, their being, seemed vivid and ongoing.

Now I had our talks on cassette tapes. Brief moments of our genuine sharing were captured somehow within the alignment of the magnetic particles. I replayed the tapes at least three or four times each to take comprehensive notes for our next interview. But as I listened to our conversations emanating from the speaker of the tape player, it seemed that something was missing. The microphone had not been able to record much of what was vital in our talks: the gestures--smiles, smirks, hand movements; the nodding of heads; the widening and winking of the eyes; and the body posturing. All of this remained only in recalled mental images of the talk, and I attempted to savour and preserve mine in writing after each interview.

My struggle to ensure the authenticity of the data was just beginning. As I further transformed our recorded dialogues into the more sterile form of transcribed text, I reminded myself of the necessity of this stage. Writing out every spoken word was necessary, in that it allowed me a much greater ease of access to the actual "words" used by the students. However, the hermeneutic understanding sought

in this enquiry required moving beyond the verbatim utterances, to a deeper, interpretive understanding of the students' writing experiences. In the chapter which follows are three descriptive accounts, my interpretations of the journal writing experiences of each of the students.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Expressing the Writer-Text Relationship

In this chapter I describe the writing experiences of the three student participants. Rather than continually reiterate my own rewarding experiences with the journal as I shared them with the students during our conversations, the interpretations which follow relate primarily to their relationships with their journals. They are firmly grounded in what the students told me during our conversations and what I saw for myself in their writing. My intention is to present in the most easily understandable form the personal meanings which were revealed in this hermeneutic exploration of the writer-text relationship.

Therefore, my interpretations of their journal writing experiences are expressed in separate written, descriptive pieces for each student. Each narrative account has been read and validated by the particular student whose writing it concerns. The students were encouraged to identify any possible misunderstandings, and to elaborate or clarify any aspect of the account. Further to my goal of clarity and accuracy in presentation, I have chosen to describe the journal writing experiences of each of the students using a central image or metaphor which emerged in the interpretation of the conversations. Also, the following

accounts are written in the first person and present tense in order to best capture the immediacy and vitality of their spoken and written language.

Tom's Journal: Writing as Inspiration

Introductions

Wearing a conservative sweater and dress pants, and sporting wire-rimmed glasses and neatly cropped blond hair, Tom projects the stereotypic image of the well-mannered, model high school student. For the first few moments after we meet, he responds somewhat self-consciously to my informal small talk, but as our conversation progresses to more substantive issues, his reservation gives way to a surprisingly enthusiastic willingness to self-disclose. Soon we are sharing something of ourselves, and of our life experiences, particularly related to school and writing.

In soft-spoken tones which contrast sharply to my own louder, extroverted way of conversing, Tom speaks with a calm certitude, crafting and uttering sentences surely and deftly. Though his manner is quiet, his ideas speak with a voice as sharp as it is ironic. His writing and our dialogues convince me that these still waters run deep indeed.

Reading Tom's journal takes me on a textual odyssey through a self-created world of his recalled memories, imagination, and beyond. My initial response to his writing

is that some of the pieces seem almost to float above the page, suspended somewhere in that ephemeral space between fantasy and reality. He confides to me that the entries in his journal are sometimes completed outside of the 10 minutes provided in class; while ideas may come to him then, they are just as likely to appear later in the day during another class or when he is at home.

Tom's respectable grades in English do not reveal the scope or diversity of his talents as a prolific young writer. Each day he may devote hours of his spare time to reworking pieces from his own private "workshop" for his journal, a varied collection of his seminal writings he keeps at home in a large, tattered manila envelope. At any time, he may be found recording his thoughts in his journal, rewriting a poem to give to his girlfriend, writing short stories or long letters to a few of his closest friends who have moved away, or completing other written assignments for school.

As our conversation turns toward the writing we do strictly for ourselves, our recalled episodes of personal writing become richly descriptive, evoking various images which I use to help facilitate an understanding of what writing is like for him. As his compelling accounts of what composing "feels like" vividly depict, his writing takes place as a sort of "inspiration."

Inspired Composition

As many writers complain, it is difficult to predict or to explain why, when, or where the situation will be optimal for writing to happen. So it is with Tom, who complains that ideas for the journal occur to him not only in the time designated in English class, but as he is walking to school, lying in bed at night trying to sleep, or even while he is in another class concentrating on another subject. At these unexpected moments, he feels a strong and immediate need to record the impinging thoughts as they "automatically spring into" his mind.

The word "inspire" originates from the Latin in spirare, which literally means "to breathe in." In the context of Tom's journal writing, I chose this metaphor to best describe how he views his experiences with self-expression. Much of Tom's writing seems to take place as an infusion of creative breath from the airy realm of his memory and imagination.

Entering the Semi-Conscious State

Tom tells me that if he wishes to begin writing in his journal without choosing a specific topic, all he must do is sit at his desk with pen in hand, concentrate quietly, and await the inevitable arrival of ideas. He finds it difficult to articulate exactly how this works, for as he describes the first moments of writing, "mostly [ideas] just come to me. I just sit there with my pencil on the paper

and all of a sudden I'll go °Hey!' and start writing." It is as if his writing is being inspired by some benevolent external power, yet it is clear to me from having read his journals that many of the topics for his writing are rooted firmly in his own experiences.

To engage him in a journal writing experience which may be more accessible to us in this conversation, I ask him to write in his journal now. I tell him to take as long as he needs to write a piece on any topic, in any format. He chooses to write about himself, he tells me, opening his journal and positioning his pen over the paper. The determined look on his face and his stiff posture while preparing to write reveal nothing of the internal processes taking place.

He stares at the blank page in front of him. Deliberately, he forms the first word: "Me." Now what? He selects and spells out the next word, and the next, consciously trying to avoid "seeing" his writing being formed in a word-by-word transcription of his inner speech. Instead, he relaxes and concentrates, allowing his cognitive-linguistic forces to take over the control of the composing process. Slowly he senses that the writing must now be happening. As he describes these moments, "ideas pop in and the desk blurs and forms an image of my thought. After a while it just sort of glazes over and it happens

without me noticing. That's what I like about the writing. I don't really think about it; I'm sort of semi-conscious and then it's done."

Tom and I discuss this experience in an attempt to describe and understand the elusive form taken by the movements of the preverbal images which occur in our minds in the moments we begin to write. We start to talk about the "little voices" in our heads, but this seems inadequate, and we hesitate for a moment. Then he offers this description, hesitantly selecting the appropriate words to express a more accurate image:

> It's more like those things you see up on some restaurant walls and in a lot of shopping centers. They've got a little thing that always has the news whipping on by. I've got those. It's not really voices; it's just something like that--a register. But instead of streaming around and around in my brain, it just sort of comes out through the little hole in my pen. I don't really think about it that much.

His attempt has a certain ring of truth for my own experiences too. The form taken by these streaming thoughts is transitory and defies easy labelling. To both of us, they seem like snippets of a dense, internal poetry. Conceptually and emotionally condensed "phrases" of thinking, when captured in writing, materialize on paper in what Tom describes as a "mental shorthand," a series of "rambling thoughts, like little poems." As we both have discovered, the journal can become an ideal repository for such inspired personal literature. Turning now to the

content his writing, we look to the piece he has just written to seek what this process has revealed to him today.

Increasing Self-Awareness: Taking off the Mask

According to Tom's own assessment, the process of self-reflecting during today's writing episode has been particularly enlightening. Indeed, for me the journal entry reads like an insightful and somewhat self-conscious confession. The bitter poignancy of his observations of himself are evident in the following excerpt from the opening lines:

> Me, I am a lot of faces. I'm the Tom at dances and parties, the guy who sings and wears his funny pants. I am the kid in a ditch puking on a suede coat while his friends drink his rum. I am the quiet, well-mannered, easy-to-get-along-with boy at school who opens doors and picks up pens for girls and gets laughed at in return.

At first, Tom tries in vain to verbalize how his self-awareness seems to unfold while writing. Suddenly, his understanding crystallizes into words, and he muses lucidly: "Writing in the journal is sort of like taking off my mask. Like, I've got a whole bunch of different people that I am... everywhere I go I'm different.... I can see 'em all real clearly after I look at the journal." Just as with my journal writing about my experiences while travelling, Tom's writing allows him to gain a new perspective of the everyday events of his life. There is a duality to this process of self-reflecting in our journals; moments of greater self-awareness occur during the writing episode and upon

subsequent rereadings.

Describing this particular piece as much more than simply a written record of past events, Tom contends that it is "more like a diary, but of what's really deep inside, not just stuff that's happened." It is this function of the journal as a forum for self-revelation that holds particular importance for Tom and me. By expressing the thoughts which reveal something more of ourselves than we knew before writing, we can engage in a fruitful dialogue with ourselves in the journal. In this opportunity to write about how he may appear to others, Tom was able to distance himself from the events and see his own role in them clearly. As he reread the account later, he discovered that it "helped to look back, to try and figure as if someone else wrote that."

He tells me that on other occasions the self-help function of the journal has been accomplished more intentionally. Tom recounts a recent example of this use of his writing: "I wrote two pages. I just wrote a letter to really nobody. Then I read it over and tried to help myself figure it out." Often, after reading over one of his journal entries he will offer advice to himself, responding to his own character directly in his writing as if speaking to a close friend he is trying "to straighten out."

Because the journal can be so effective in allowing a better self-understanding, both Tom and I hope to continue

to find the time for personal writing for the rest of our lives. He lightheartedly explains his reasoning for wishing to maintain this written record of his thoughts: "It's a family tree of my progression as a person. When I finally consider myself human, I'll see how I got there."

Sorting out Thoughts: Imagination and Life

Tom enjoys sitting down with his pen and paper as a chance to relax, and to reflect silently on any of the events or people in his life. As I have found on numerous occasions, problematic issues will gradually take on a different light once they become transformed into the words which will comprise the text of a journal entry. Having experienced the familiar inspirational process of letting recalled memories and concerns be brought into written language, Tom recognizes the ability of his journal writing to perform for him important sense-making functions.

While writing about actual past occurrences in his life, Tom invariably undergoes a dramatic re-experiencing of the events. This reliving involves a peculiar shifting in his point of view while composing, as in the case of a recurrent disturbing dream he has recently written about. He allows me to read the actual journal entry in which he vividly reenacts in writing his waking from the nightmare. In his written account, his awakening forces his consciousness to reluctantly cross the boundary between the dream-world and reality. His presence as the author

undergoes a corresponding shift in narration. Toward the end of the entry, he describes his vacillating perspective while writing: "For a while... I saw it through my own eyes, but the rest of the time I was just sort of above me, observing from somewhere, you know, like a movie." Afterwards, he recounts to me the eerie sensation of watching this incident from his own life take place while composing: "When I was writing about it, I sort of saw myself doing it. Like I was sort of off floating in the corner of the room, looking."

But more than just recording and reacting to the everyday occurrences of his life, Tom also projects in some of his journal writing wildly creative reformulations of actual people, places, and situations. Moulding and stretching the emerging written text as if it were "silly putty," Tom enjoys recreating events in his writing which resemble his own reality "all pulled out of shape."

Tom explains his need to write, to be inspired by his own thoughts to create a written form of the language of his imagination. Both the process and the product of the journal are, at least for Tom and myself, as enjoyable as they are revealing. Only by freeing our imagination in this way, argues Tom, are we able to write and thereby "dream ourselves into another situation, body, place, or whatever. And for a while, the unreal becomes real."

Cindy's Journal: Intimate Confidantes

Introductions

Meeting privately with Cindy for the first time, I first notice that her outward manner is robust and lively, reflecting a youthful vitality and a generally positive attitude toward life. Her fair hair is cut short and casual, and her apparel is appropriately "trendy" for high school without appearing too faddish or radical. But beneath the bubbly, almost hyperactive self she projects lies a core of maturity and sensibility well beyond her 16 years.

While not appearing to be naive, she expresses in her writing an innocent curiosity about the world around her, and a healthy skepticism of the conventions and expectations of society. Cindy's frequent insightful musings offer evidence of a level of introspection and reflection which seems far too advanced for her age. When considered in the light of her refreshingly honest idealism and natural inquisitiveness, these qualities characterize Cindy as an ideal participant for this enquiry into the personal writing episode.

It is apparent that Cindy enjoys English class; by her own admission, her grades are always higher in the semesters in which she has English as one of her classes. Her journal offers written testimony of her desire to express herself. It is filled with a rich variety of topics ranging from

personal to world issues, with commentary on friends and family, travel, life and death, school and appearances. Whether it is her stream-of-consciousness-style phrases scrawled across a page, a concisely worded essay on hypocrisy, or a simple list of likes and dislikes, Cindy's writing always reflects the creativity and complexity of the person who wrote it.

Her versatility and range of expression are also manifested in her wildly variable handwriting styles. She suggests that looking at the shape and size of the script offers her immediate insight into the mood of a piece of her own writing, and into her self-esteem at the time. She explains: "Some days I'm just feeling so horrible, and it's like I'm a little tiny person on the earth, and some days I'm on top of the world, and it's big huge writing."

Writing as a Sharing Between Friends

As our conversation turns to speaking directly about our writing, I notice an almost imperceptible blush in her cheeks. Even though our meeting been comfortable up to this point, it is as if we are now talking about something too personal to express aloud without feelings of self-consciousness. Only as I disclose more of my own past experiences with keeping a journal does she seem to feel more at ease to talk about her own writing.

The intimacy, the privacy, and the intensity of Cindy's

writing experiences indicate a unique and personal relationship between her and her journal which far transcends the simple, surface appearance of a person making marks with a pen on paper. My task in this research is to understand and express this seemingly ineffable bond between her journal and her self.

Our mutual sharing involves my ongoing interpreting of the personal meanings of Cindy's expressive writing, and suddenly I am captivated by an interesting image--the metaphor of "journal as confidante"--which I immediately share with her. We believe this figurative representation embodies the essential elements of her experience. I employ it here to make my description of her writing more accessible to others, for who among us has never felt the need for a close friend? Whenever we have an important idea to share, it is imperative to find another person who will listen and respond. But for such a mature and perceptive adolescent as Cindy, such an audience is not always readily available.

She tells me that her friends at school are usually reluctant to venture beyond the safety of the typical, superficial topics of conversation, such as who is having a party this weekend. Also, some have proven themselves untrustworthy with secrets, or simply too immature, unable to engage in reflective discourse. Admitting that her friends are becoming less important to her, Cindy explains

how she now uses her writing to "talk" about things: "I don't really have anybody I can talk to. So I just write it down, and then, it helps a lot, because I need to tell somebody; somebody's gotta know, so it's gotta be my journal." And so, for Cindy, the journal becomes a peculiar sort of best friend, mute and malleable, with a unique capability to perform critical functions in this role.

Achieving the Intimacy of Self-Communication

Cindy and I admit to each other that when meeting people for the first time, we are often reluctant to offer too much of ourselves, for fear of being evaluated or making an unfavourable impression. With many of her school writing assignments, a similar fear exists for Cindy. Too aware of the expectations for the final product, she finds starting the writing a difficult task. For this reason, Cindy appreciates the easy starts with her journal writing. "With essays," she says, "the first line is so crucial, but [with] the journal you just start writing, and you don't even care because the first line doesn't matter." And when the situation feels right for her writing, Cindy can engage in the kind of dialogue with herself that is usually reserved for intimate friends or lovers.

In the non-threatening, non-evaluative atmosphere of our meetings, Cindy says she feels comfortable to write in her journal. As we first begin to write in our journals, I

notice her position across the the table from me; she seems to be unconsciously guarding the page as she writes. Clearly, this union with her journal is a private matter. "If others get curious, it ruins everything," she later explains. With deliberate strokes, she has soon composed two pages of short paragraphs. After about 15 minutes of steady writing, we talk about our immediate recollections of this remarkable process of self-communication.

Her journal writing during this meeting has given her a chance to express her reactions to a recent family crisis, in which she feels she must soon make some important choices. Her responsibilities and feelings of guilt have been weighing heavily upon Cindy in the past few weeks. Attending only to her private thoughts as she begins writing, she feels herself entering the familiar world of her journal. Now, as the text takes shape before her eyes, she draws comfort once again from the reciprocal relationship she has achieved with herself through her journal. Today Cindy has been feeling a great deal of pressure, and she uses this opportunity for self-reflection to "get it all out somehow" and to "just sort things out that are jumbled up in [her] mind."

She shares with me the journal entry, which reveals remarkably few details regarding the nature of the personal problems within her family. The writing appears to me as vague and disjointed, almost cryptic, as in the following

excerpt:

> It should have shocked me, but it didn't. All along she had been defending him. Then she was beginning to doubt. I kept quiet. She didn't want to hear my opinion, or maybe... I don't know. Maybe she knew, but didn't want to be slapped in the face with the truth.

Nonetheless, Cindy insists that this process of writing out these thoughts has been tremendously valuable, leading her to a deeper insight into the motivations and behavior of each of the unidentified individuals in the above account.

In another journal entry, Cindy provides her rationale for this style of disguising specific facts in her journal: "My true feelings can be written in point form, naming no one. This is so no one will get hurt, but as I write this I realize that I want them to know--to know that they and the things they do are hurting me, but I'm afraid of being a burden." Exploring her actions and reactions in her writing like this facilitates such instances of honest self-evaluation and revealing self-discovery.

I notice that her dialogue with herself through the medium of her journal writing takes another tone in some entries, as she critically evaluates her own behavior in certain situations. Rather than adopting a lecturing or didactic stance in her journal entries, she often leaves questions to herself "just kind of hanging" at the end of some statements. She knows that this rhetorical device, just as in effective literature, will leave her "thinking

about it for days."

Free from the demands of her interactions with others, in the writing episode Cindy directs her efforts inward to seek resolutions to her own problems and concerns. She admits that she writes about these internal conflicts because others do not seem to understand her point of view. It is her belief that such personal problems are best resolved by herself, through this dialogue with her journal. "I find that once I write it out I get my own view on what the solution should be," she posits, adding "most of the time it comes from within yourself; you know what you should do."

Capturing the Moment

In a contemporary song, John Cougar Mellencamp issues advice to teens which deeply disturbs Cindy, and echoes her own uncertainty about the fleeting years of her adolescence: "Hold on to 16 for as long as you can/ Changes come around real soon... Oh yeah, life goes on/ Long after the thrill of living is gone." Frustrated, she retorts: "It's like after 16, nothing's going to happen! People always say in high school these are the best years of your life. My god, then give me the freedom now to live it up!" Life will go on for Cindy, and changes will come around, but by recording her impressions of life during this period of her most dramatic social and personal metamorphosis, she can, in a sense, hold on and cheat time.

Cindy views her daily interchanges with her journal as holding a lasting value which can reach beyond the momentary benefits of the act of writing. Her intent is indeed to use her writing to somehow capture and preserve as much as possible of this fleeting phase of her life. Memory fades, and we are likely to forget the nuances of situations, the motivations for our behavior, and the words we use to make sense of our world. For Cindy, this is a constant concern. She admits: "Even when I'm talking to you, I feel like I should write it down so I won't forget. And sometimes I'll wake up and need to write something down."

Cindy and I share our feelings toward the descriptive, emotion-laden writing of our journals, in which are documented instances of the anguish and elation which comprise our daily existence. We know that this personal writing enables us to experience and preserve valuable moments in our lives. By saving these personal texts, we leave open the possibility of bestowing upon them a more lasting value, as I have discovered in my cherished volumes from my travels. Cindy hopes that her journal will be preserved for a long time to come; she fantasizes that an anonymous future teenager will transcend the bounds of her own place in time by reading this "valid report of what it's like to be a 16-year-old girl in 1986."

Dan's Journal: Writing as Self-Definition

Introductions

From reading his journal, I somehow suspected Dan would look and act very much as he does. His rich sense of humour seems well suited to his physical appearance; his unpretentious looks are capped by the crop of thick, almost messy, dark hair which seems to have a life of its own atop his tall and lanky frame. Dark, deep eyes view the world from behind the clear lenses of his glasses. Attired in casual denim he comes across as a typical, conforming secondary student. His demeanor is refreshingly polite, and he approaches me with immediate openness, expressing a genuine interest in my research.

The congenial tone for our conversation is set from the first few words. Our continual use of humour seems to establish an immediate rapport between us. Dan's perceptive wit permeates all of his observations of the people and things around him, belying a deeper sensibility and sensitivity toward the important matters of his life. Looking more closely at his personal writing reveals a great deal more about the depth and complexity of this funny guy.

At first glance, the writing in Dan's journal reflects an obvious enjoyment of word play for its own sake. He will often interrupt the narrative stream of his composition to toy with the look and sound of particular words, delightfully exposing the unique phonology and semantic

nuances of our language. Words such as "cacophony" and "phlegm" are torn mercilessly from a context, left exposed, dissected, and analyzed. No academic philologist, Dan prefers to express the commonsense observations of a layman. But his use of written language goes far deeper than this apparently frivolous toying suggests; his writing also performs for him some very serious and ultimately important sense-making functions.

Engaging in the act of writing can be, for Dan and myself, a most comfortable exercise in introspection. Our journals contain observations of ourselves on a level of honesty unattainable in most other modes of communication. "I can write things down better than I can tell them to other people," he explains, adding that "maybe it's because there's something blocking me, and I'm not letting it come out freely, like I do with my writing." He suspects that what often blocks his speech may be the feelings of vulnerability which accompany verbal self-disclosure, insecurities which contrast with the complete privacy and security of the written disclosures in the journal.

Navigating the Narrative Flow

We talk about our writing, and we engage in writing together. Discussing the process immediately following a particular journal writing episode, we begin to formulate a meaningful description of this act of composition. Our

conversation is animated and filled with figurative language, as we create descriptive images to try to capture in words the sensations we feel while writing. As he sits down to write in his journal, he describes his initial cognition as behaving like a liquid force: "I reopen the floodgates of my mind. Sometimes I get a rush, others just a trickle, but I always get something." Then the writing begins, and his thoughts are released like a mental "flow." As he explains the movement of his thoughts in these moments, "it just goes from the head to the pen, sort of the uncut version of my thoughts."

But this seemingly fluid outpouring of thoughts while composing does not occur for Dan without the frequent swirling and meanderings that are part of its natural flow. Though he begins with a general notion of what the piece of writing will be about, he soon relinquishes the ultimate creative control to his writing mind and opts to "let the pen go." Drifting through the eddying streams of his consciousness, he acts as a navigator without a compass; he holds the moving pen but cannot see far enough ahead to guide it along.

Unwilling to forcibly direct the unpredictable course of his writing, he finds it undergoing sudden transformations before his eyes. "Sometimes I remember something that I haven't planned for, and the thing just radically changes!" he exclaims. "It's weird how something

that you meant to finish like that sort of finishes almost in a 180 degree turn." As with my own experiences of "cognitive discovery" while writing, unexpected ideas will "pop into" his mind as the text develops. Often, he momentarily interrupts his own writing to begin transcribing the imposing thoughts before they are lost. As a result, much of the writing in his journal resembles the stream-of-consciousness style, the body of the text interspersed with saturated "droplets" of his thought.

Looking Inward Through the Journal

The topics for his journal entries vary, but he prefers to write about things which are happening now, or have happened recently to him or his friends, and which have a direct impact on his life. His tone in these pieces fluctuates widely between the lightheärted musings in which he tries to incorporate "a bit of humour and a bit of insight," and the very sombre, "heavy" writing about his serious thoughts on life, death, and religion. When he finds he is "really good on a topic" in his journal, he can "go on writing for an entire class." What emerges from this natural flow of language are personal literary portraits, his own subjective accounts and impressions of the issues most important to him. Just as with my own experiences with the journal I kept, this process and the written products provide Dan with a revealing glimpse inward, to the elusive,

ever-evolving view of himself.

Experiencing this unedited version of his views on the world as it happens around him, Dan comes to view the events of his own life from a new perspective, often with beneficial results. In a lengthy writing episode during one of our meetings, he recounts in detail an important personal event which took place at a school dance a year ago. His fear of being laughed at by girls is real, and strikes a familiar chord with my own memories of high school dances. Then comes the moment of truth; he writes:

> Swallowing my pride I went over to where a group of girls were talking, tapped one on the shoulder and said °Um-uh, you wanna dance?' Wonder of wonders, she said yes!.... She boosted my confidence and made me feel like a normal guy instead of some brain. I wonder if that girl realizes how much she's changed my life."

Though previously he had never thought of this incident as having a significant impact on his life, Dan recalls how his memories of the feeling of acceptance suddenly appear in a new light while writing: "This immediately flashed up, and all of a sudden before I knew it I had written a page. Wow, it hit something in me. Must have been fairly big." As we discuss the piece, and the process of reflection it triggered, he is surprised to discover that "it really was a turning point... now it seems to loom large." Seeing it emerge in his writing, he recognizes that this small event marked the beginning of some very significant personal changes--in his attire, in the way he sees himself in his

social world, and in his relationships with others--which have had a dramatic impact on the course of his life ever since.

Writing to Make Sense

His journal also serves Dan in an important capacity as a forum for "just sorting things out." Writing allows him to better understand his problems, and to work toward their satisfactory resolution. He believes that it is most fruitful to first seek solutions from within. Justifying his preference of writing to himself over talking to someone else about a particular problem, Dan provides this rationale:

> I find writing it down easier. Writing it down, I can look back on it and I can make more sense of it than telling it or thinking about it.... If you tell it to someone else you get their opinion, but if you write it down, you can get your own opinion on it.

Dan also believes that journal writing is an ideal opportunity for him to identify and release repressed tensions. Often, when he feels himself becoming upset at something or someone, he will engage in a frantic scribbling of thoughts on a page to provide a safe outlet for his inner frustrations. In this way, his writing enables him to identify and express his various moods and work toward bringing about subtle, positive changes in his attitude.

Whether we write for the sheer pleasure of word play, to sort out our feelings about particular events or people in our lives, or simply to try to make sense of important

issues or concepts, Dan and I believe that our journals are vital sources of self-knowledge. Charting the precarious flow of inner thoughts while composing, he enjoys and values "getting lost" in his writing and emerging with a clearer definition of who he is. Turning to the written entries as captured reflections of himself at any instance in time, Dan recognizes that, like everyone, he is undergoing a continual process of personal change. The journal allows him to gain some degree of control and a better understanding of this complex process, defining the person he now is and the person he is becoming.

A discussion of this interpretive research of the journal writing experiences of three students follows in Chapter V. Also included are sections on implications for the classroom setting, limitations of this study, and directions for further research in this area.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The potential values of establishing a journal writing program in the English classroom as a means of engaging students in a meaningful writing activity are well-documented in educational literature; these practical accounts are reviewed in Chapter I. The primary task in the present study has been to better understand how this process of reflective writing is experienced by individual students. As the written accounts of the writer-text relationship in the previous chapter suggest, explaining and understanding meaning-making through language is not a simple or straightforward endeavor. For each student, finding the words to describe the writing process is as difficult as my exploring their language for a deeper meaning of the experience as a shared, self-interpretive phenomenon.

My phenomenological stance in this endeavor guided me to discovering in their experiences something of myself, and possibly, of everyone who writes. For Cindy, the writing episode takes on the qualities of a human relationship, as her journal becomes an intimate confidante with whom she can share her secret thoughts and capture instances of this important stage in her life. Tom's writing comes to him as a dramatic inspiration of thoughts which he transcribes into the imaginative and revealing personal text of his journal.

In Dan's journal, the writing is a process of active introspection, self-exploration, and sense-making, as he navigates the narrative flow on his journey inward. Clearly, each student has developed a unique and rewarding relationship with journal writing.

The interpretations of the students' descriptions of their own experiences with journal writing, together with my own experiences, provide evidence of the benefits to be gained from engaging in this form of self-expression. The descriptive accounts of writing experiences indicate the importance of the meaning-making functions of writing. They are presented with the hope that other teachers may recognize in these experiences something of value for their own students and classroom teaching situations.

Implications for the Classroom

One of the overall goals of this study has been to justify incorporating an effective journal writing program into the Language Arts classroom. I have argued that all students should be provided with the valuable opportunity to write in a journal, thereby becoming engaged in this fundamental act of defining and expressing their humanity through the medium of their written language. Toward this end, each of these students has offered crucial commentary on how teachers might effectively develop a classroom situation most conducive to rewarding journal writing experiences.

Establishing the Writing Environment

Whenever we meet with a close friend, our enjoyment of the company will be significantly dependent upon our appreciation of the setting of the meeting; certainly, the locale should be warm and comfortable, the atmosphere friendly and supportive. So it is with students' relationships with their journal.

Each student clearly outlines personal preferences for the physical writing environment of the classroom. All stress the importance of a warm, carpeted room brightened with natural light from abundant windows and ever-changing, relevant decorations on the walls. According to two of the students, their new English classroom, a recently converted science laboratory, feels too "cold and sterile" and now the relationships with their journals at school do not feel quite as comfortable.

The students suggest that teachers can allow students to have an active part in creating the right situation for writing. They could be encouraged to participate in the selection and placement of posters, the arrangement of desks, and the suggesting of guidelines for the handling of their journals at all stages. From time to time, teachers may wish to consult students regarding special activities or conditions to encourage their writing. For instance, carefully selected music may enhance the journal writing

experience for some students; Cindy speaks excitedly about the time her English teacher allowed the students to write to the driving beat of the rock group U2.

The students with whom I spoke all appreciate the "quote for the day" which the teacher wrote on the blackboard each morning. Though they often write on unrelated topics, the quotes serve to challenge their beliefs and stimulate their minds to "get the creative juices flowing." It is stressed that these quotations must be topical and relevant to the issues affecting the lives of young people. Suggestions for good sources include using the dialogue from popular "youth movies" such as "16 Candles," "The Breakfast Club," and "Pretty in Pink." Also, the lyrics of certain contemporary songs are also cited as providing an effective stimulus to writing. In this situation, it is essential for the teacher to identify and utilize the students' ever-changing tastes in audio and video entertainment as they struggle with the vicissitudes of adolescence.

Students might also be encouraged to preserve their writing in a bound book with blank or lined pages. As one student remarked on the attractive appearance of a classmate's journal, "it looks so much more official, more important." This presentation of journal writing in an aesthetically appealing and durable format will help reinforce the idea that all of their writing can be

important literature, if only for an audience of one. Instilling in students a sense of pride toward their own writing can be an essential first step in the lessening of apprehension toward written self-expression.

Maintaining an Atmosphere of Trust

With the proper writing environment established, there remains the essential requirement of the knowledge of complete trust and security in the writing relationship. As in an intensely personal conversation with a trusted friend, the deep introspection which is a part of journal writing can bring some sensitive issues and feelings to the surface of a person's awareness. Students strongly believe that their increased vulnerability in this situation should be respected by the teacher and by those around them. Any betrayal of privacy by people who may "overhear" this personal conversation may seriously damage the trust inherent in this communication. One of the students explains that "if you know that it's going to be looked at, like even by your friend, you couldn't even °get into' anything." Therefore, any sharing of journal entries with teachers or peers should be strictly voluntary.

The attitude of the teacher toward journal writing is shown to play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining an atmosphere most conducive to this form of written self-reflection. Students must perceive that their teachers

place a high value on this opportunity to write; there is no better way for teachers to show this than to use the time set aside in class to write in their own journal. Samples of their journal entries may be shared periodically with the students to provide them with an idea of how one person approaches the personal writing episode. Setting an example in this way will speak louder than any enthusiastic rhetoric on the values of keeping a journal.

It is especially important that this work not be graded in the same way as are typical writing assignments. How can another person purport to place an external evaluation on the quality of the sharing between a person and a journal? Each student's own perceptions of the progression of his or her relationship with the emerging text of the journal will offer the most relevant indication of value in this situation.

Students express the need for maintaining consistency and regularity in their journal writing episodes. They all appreciate the allotment of regular daily classroom time expressly for this purpose, usually no more than 10 minutes. This constancy prepares them, they say, to shift their minds "into the journal mode" for a certain time each day. This does not exclude the possibility of allowing students additional time to self-reflect in writing following important local or international events which may arise. Teachers must always remain sensitive to the emotional

trauma caused by such personal incidents as the deaths of classmates, or by more global tragedies like the explosion of the space shuttle "Challenger" or the numerous murders by international terrorists. The timely opportunity for the silent, private reflection afforded by journal writing may be a welcome source of comfort for teacher and students alike.

As a matter of personal consideration to the students, the time they are allowed to spend with their journals should not be interrupted. Confident there will be no unexpected intrusions, students report achieving a relaxed ease while writing, so important to the success of such private interchanges with the journal. It seems impolite of others to wish to intrude on such a personal sharing experience, either by attempting to read what is being composed or by bringing an abrupt end to the writing episode.

Learner-Teacher Dialogue

The journal can perform a function beyond its potential as an opportunity for self-expression by becoming a dialogue between student and teacher. Students say that when they have special problems or questions, they are more willing to express themselves in their personal writing than by speaking aloud. Sharing particular issues with the teacher through their journal writing in this way will provide

students with an important outlet and an external audience for their inner conflicts and concerns. Likewise, brave teachers may wish to use a journal dialogue to seek from students honest, constructive feedback on specific aspects of their teaching methods and materials.

As Language Arts teachers, we must continue to explore further possibilities for this mode of self-expression as one vital aspect of a total writing curriculum. The personal writing which makes up the journal may be used as a rich source of raw material for other writing assignments. Students should be encouraged to vary their writing formats in the journal to best reflect their responses to the events of their own lives. The diversity of writing evident in the students' journals indicates the unlimited possibilities for teachers wishing to engage students in the writing of poetry, letters, or essays. More formal composition assignments may be formulated to build from this base of personal knowledge. In this way, teachers will be able to apply students' highly motivated personal powers of expression to the specific requirements of more public forms of written communication.

The journals reveal a wealth of information about the individual interests and needs of students, and about their personal experiencing of the writing relationship. By attending to the voices of their students as they sound from the pages of their journals, teachers can be attuned to the

situational drama unfolding in their students' lives. As they use their role in the journal relationship to develop an awareness of student experiences, expectations, and intentions, teachers will be ensuring that their classroom instruction remains meaningful and relevant to the students they teach.

Humanistic Approach to Teaching

All of these suggestions for implementing a journal writing program in the Language Arts classroom reflect a humanistic orientation toward personal development, espoused by such psychologists as Maslow and Rogers. By recognizing the nature of individual learners as adaptable, growing, changing human beings, a teacher can use opportunities for journal writing to address each student's need to impose a structure on experience. As the extensive research of Rogers (1962) indicates, individuals who are provided with such opportunities to reflect on their experiences are more likely to become persons who "have developed more trust of the processes going on within themselves, and have dared to feel their own feelings, live by values which they discover within, and express themselves in their own unique ways" (p. 30).

Teachers adopting a humanistic approach to education place an emphasis on allowing learners to become more self-directing and independent, in a nonthreatening and

meaningful learning situation. In this view, the cognitive and affective domains of knowledge are meshed; as Gage and Berliner (1984) observe: "From the standpoint of the humanist educator, learning is acquiring new information or experience and personally discovering its meanings" (p. 566).

An early example of humanistic principles applied to teaching appears in a yearbook published by the National Education Association (1962), in which teachers are encouraged to deal primarily with the needs of their students as "becoming" individuals. The authors suggest less teacher domination and talk, less didactic and more exploratory questioning, and less emphasis on student failure or mistakes. These should be accompanied by sincere praise, clearly defined expectations, more freedom and responsibility for students to work and express themselves, and an emphasis placed on inner-directed, self-learning opportunities.

Over the past few decades, numerous researchers and educators have based their work on humanistic beliefs about learners and learning. Patterson and deCharms (cited in Good & Brophy, 1980) espouse the value of teachers adopting humanistic attitudes and techniques in order to enhance students' self-insight and personal development. They recommend that teachers place more emphasis on active learning, independence, creativity, cooperative learning

activities, and flexible scheduling. More recently, Moffett and Wagner (1983), in outlining specific strategies for establishing a student-centered Language Arts classroom, offer further support of a humanistic approach to teaching.

For the teacher wishing to adopt a more humanistic approach to teaching, each of these sources offers an excellent source of information and useful suggestions for classroom activities. Clearly, the use of personal journal writing relfects a pedagogic stance which places the experiences of learners in the forefront, and allows for the creative expression of thoughts which can lead individuals to greater self-understanding and personal growth.

Limitations of This Study

Perhaps the greatest difficulties with the present study were related to the time constraints. In arranging and conducting the classroom observations and student interviews I was bound by the schedules of the students and the school system. Also, the interpretive nature of this research approach entailed an arduous process of data analysis. The sheer volume of raw data, in the form of detailed field notes, numerous examples of student writing, and over 10 hours of tape-recorded interviews, presented a formidable clerical and interpretive task for such a neophyte qualitative researcher as myself.

Admittedly, these time constraints limited the number

of students I could select for this study. Moreover, my chosen methodology required that I select participants who would likely be able to engage in the written self-reflection so important to effective journal writing. The homogeneity of the class of academically oriented students from which volunteers were sought was by no means unintentional. This study makes no claims for "generalizability" in the experimental sense; rather, the biased selection of participants was carefully planned to ensure the generation of the richest possible data to interpret.

It is realistic to assume that in any given classroom situation, teachers will be faced with a broad range of students of varying abilities and attitudes toward writing. My intention here is not to claim random or even representation of all possible students, but to focus my enquiry on three particular high-achieving students. In doing so, I am seeking to illuminate an important dimension of what makes them good students--their fluency and aptitude for written self-expression--in order to shed light on the writing process as it is experienced by actual learners. The experiences of the students in this study indicate to teachers the possibilities of a journal writing program, an idea of what may be achieved with all students. Teachers are encouraged to use journals to enable their less

enthusiastic or less able students to develop and use their own powers of communication.

The use of hermeneutic conversation as a method entailed certain hazards for the participants. While this joint reflection on personal writing held tremendous potential for trust and new understanding, it also involved a risk of inadvertent embarrassing or emotionally painful self-disclosure. Our sharing of personal experiences with journal writing inevitably entailed accepting a certain level of vulnerability, as we laid bare some of our innermost thoughts and feelings. This was an important concern which I had anticipated, and addressed directly and continually with each participant. I assured the students of the complete privacy of all conversations and writing. The valuable insight which was gained from this sharing and learning experience made the fear of unwanted disclosure a risk we all felt was well worth taking.

Questions of "validity" inevitably arise in discussions of any qualitative study. Unlike experimentally oriented research which requires that findings be verifiable to all competent observers, interpretive research such as this accepts that there exists no externalized way of arbitrating the validity of an ultimately subjective agreement. The research findings, shown here as the shared meanings of the participants as co-inquirers into the journal writing experience, have a certain self-implicated validity as the

representations of meaning for these individuals in this situation.

As Carson (1984) insists, the ultimate test of validity of these research findings remains validity in terms of the participants. The methodological strategies for this phenomenological enquiry into journal writing entailed my consulting students directly for their perceptions, through their own written and spoken accounts. In addition, I provided the students with frequent opportunities for their responses, clarifications, and elaborations to my recording, transcriptions, and interpretations of the data at all stages of the research. Through hermeneutics I have come to understand that, as researchers and educators interested in improving learning situations, we are all participants. It is validity in this sense which I have attempted to follow as an overall guiding research principle.

More traditional researchers may argue that this study involved too great a degree of researcher bias. Throughout the hermeneutic dialogue and interpretation, I have continually reflected on my own personal experiences with this form of language use. Indeed, I have interpreted all discoveries and insights in light of my own past and present understandings of writing experiences. However, when viewed from a phenomenological perspective, this deliberate self-reflection on my part did not distort my perceptions of the

phenomenon being explored; rather, it forms the very basis for a hermeneutic enquiry which addresses the deeper concern of this research--to discover how writing is a shared human experience, with important sense-making qualities.

Directions for Further Enquiry

As outlined in Chapter I, teachers are beginning to discover the potential that journal writing holds as a means of enabling students to deal more effectively with their experiences. However, providing the optimal environment for such writing in the classroom in order to best realize this potential for each student is a challenge which must be faced by educational researchers and teachers alike.

In order to arrive at a clearer understanding of how we, as teachers, can best facilitate this mode of expression, it is imperative that research is conducted to study the nature of personal writing as it is seen through the eyes of the student. More descriptive studies of individual writers of diverse abilities and backgrounds would provide a wealth of data to be interpreted in light of the research already conducted in this area.

Additionally, more research is required to explore the interrelationship between the Language Arts, especially the link between reading and writing skills. As Stotsky (1984) found in her review of the research in this area, little is known about this aspect of our language processing. She

stresses the need for more studies which examine the reflexive relationship between individuals' abilities and interests in their composing and comprehending of text. Such research could provide valuable insight into all aspects of language use within the classroom, and beyond. Eventually we will be able to develop the strategies and programs most conducive to the improvement and transfer of language learning across modes of expression and across the curriculum.

Conclusions

The ultimate goal of any educational research endeavor, particularly in the Language Arts, is to reach a deeper understanding of learning situations; I believe that the adoption of a phenomenological approach to this study of the writer-text relationship during journal writing has enabled me to achieve that goal. As Barritt (1981) convincingly explains, "in advocating a descriptive phenomenological approach, I am arguing, quite simply, for relevance and meaning in educational research" (p. 133). Likewise, it is the ongoing pursuit of engaging students in meaningful and relevant activities in the school classroom to which this enquiry is more broadly directed.

In the narrative descriptions of "what journal writing is like" for each of the participants in this study, I have sought to discover, interpret, and express the personal meanings of the students as they emerged through the course

of our reflective conversations. Consulting the learners directly, I have attended carefully to their own compelling accounts of the writing process as they understand it, and shared with them my own writing experiences. Together we nurtured a growing hermeneutic understanding of ourselves as learners and writers, of the expressive powers of our language, and of journal writing as a valuable sense-making activity.

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APPENDIX A

SOME THOUGHTS ON WRITING IN A JOURNAL

"The journal is a connection of the self with the self... the journal is a river--is a mirror--is an anchor--is myself."

Christina Baldwin

"I observe myself and so I come to know others."

Lao-tze

"By gradually building up this shelter of the diary, I built a place where I could always tell the truth, where I could paint my friends truthfully. The diary obliged me to stay there, to stay whole, and to continue to feel."

Anais Nin

"The journal becomes the outer embodiment of our inner life. It thus serves for many of us as the **laboratory** in which we explore experimentally the possibilities of our life. It also serves as the **sanctuary** to which we go for our most intimate and private, our most profound and universal experiences. But most fundamentally, the journal is our **inner workshop**, the place where we do the creative shaping of the artwork of our life."

Ira Progoff

"There is something about writing it down that is different from talking it out.... In the journal we come to understand our personal story."

Christina Baldwin

"Each of us has a tale, a beautiful tale, an exciting tale to tell. We learn more about ourselves by sharing that tale on paper.

Sister Therese Craig

"The journal is a place to tremble and experiment, to build confidence in your individuality without having to seek constant approval from others."

Christina Baldwin

"There is no more sense in having experiences you don't intend to write about than there is in planting a crop you don't intend to harvest."

Anonymous

"Using the medium of the personal journal, I am somehow able to record fleeting instances in the evolution of my ever-changing world representation, in words which speak in my own voice about my own life story."

Darren Lund

APPENDIX B

LETTER TO PARENTS

12 January 1986

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s):

I am an English teacher presently completing my master's degree in English Education at the University of Victoria. My area of interest is in students' school writing, and especially in writing that they do for themselves in the form of journals. I am interested in studying the processes involved when students put their thoughts into written words.

As part of the requirement of my graduate degree, I will be conducting research in your child's school. My role will involve the regular observation of Language Arts classes, and I shall have no influence on the grading or evaluation of the students.

I will be needing student volunteers to share their journal writing with me, and to talk with me about writing in school. Students who volunteer, and are selected to participate in my research, will be asked to participate in three one-hour tape-recorded interviews with me outside of their regular class time. These audio-tapes will not be heard by anyone but myself, and once I transcribe them into a written form, they will be erased. Any identifying features of the interviews will be eliminated to ensure your child's anonymity at all stages.

Please be assured that all information gathered during my research will be held in the strictest confidence, and that all participants will be completely free to withdraw from the project any time they wish.

I would greatly appreciate your suppport in this project, the results of which will form the basis for my final written master's thesis. If you have any questions at all, or would like further information from me, please do not hesitate to contact me through the university, or at home (Tel.# 555-1234).

If you are willing to have your child participate in my research, please indicate by signing the enclosed permission slip and returning it to me. Thank you very much for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Darren Lund, B.Ed., Dip.Ed.,
Department of Communication
and Social Foundations

Encl.

APPENDIX C

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

I will allow my child to participate in the research being conducted by Darren Lund through the University of Victoria, as outlined in the attached letter. I realize that participation in this project is strictly voluntary.

_____
Student's name

_____ _____
Date Signature

VITA

Surname: LUND Given Names: DARREN ERNIE

Place and Date of Birth: Calgary, Alberta, 08/31/61

Educational Institutions Attended, with Dates of Entering and Leaving:

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY, ALBERTA	1979 to 1983
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY, ALBERTA	1983 to 1984
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, B.C.	1984 to 1986

Degrees, Diplomas, Awarded, with Dates and Names of Institutions:

B.Ed. (with Distinction)	1983	University of Calgary
Dip.Ed.	1984	University of Calgary

Honors and Awards:

University of Victoria Graduate Fellowships, 1984/85 and 1985/86

Province of Alberta Scholarships, 1982/83 and 1983/84

Province of Alberta Certificate of Merit, 1983

Burns Memorial Bequest Fund Bursaries, 1979/80, 1980/81, 1981/82, 1982/83, and 1983/84

Publications:

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Title of Thesis:

PERSONAL JOURNAL WRITING: AN INTERPRETIVE EXPLORATION OF THE WRITER-TEXT RELATIONSHIP

Author:

DARREN ERNIE LUND

May 20, 1986

Date