

A Study of Recognizing and Developing Voice in Writing

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to better understand and recognize voice in writing, the development or discovery of voice in writers, and the English teacher's role in that development or discovery.

A qualitative research methodology was conducted which provided for the interviewing of three groups of participants: published student writers, teachers of writing in the public school system, and adult writers who had received literary awards for their writing. Interview questions were designed to address the three driving research questions around voice.

Findings suggest that voice in writing is linked to the person of the writer, technique, and perhaps content. The majority of the participants argued that voice could not be taught, but that technique, which is a large part of voice, could be taught. Most felt that voice in writing was recognized through technique. For the student writers the role of the Writing teacher and the writing class was significant.

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Chapter One

Overview of the Study

Sometimes when we read we can be haunted by the writer's words for days. There are words that force our emotions and raise questions that send our minds questing. Some writing stays like a vision in the mind, some like the sound of language that twists your tongue around the thinking. Good writing can swallow a reader whole, resulting in a metamorphosis and a challenged perspective. Why can some writing consume readers, while other writing cannot? What is the essence of the best of writing?

Research suggests that voice is the essential quality of the best writing. Murray (1982) wrote that "The writer's voice may be the most significant element in distinguishing memorable writing from good writing" (p.66). Rico (1983) defined voice as "the essence of your writing" and rated voice as clearly significant when she wrote "Any first-rate writer is almost by definition one whose voice is distinctive" (p.136). In Voicelust, Wier and Hendrie (1985) described voice as one of the "crucial elements of contemporary fiction" (p. 3). Graves (1994) in A Fresh Look at Writing called voice the "driving force" of writing. Graves added, "It is a writer's voice that gives me the best sense of his or her potential" (p. 81-82). Murray wrote that a writer's voice will hold the reader, and he listed voice as one of the reasons why readers read. Murray concurred with Rico when he wrote "The writer's voice may be the most significant element in distinguishing memorable writing from good writing" (p. 66). Hodgins (1993) wrote "The voice you adopt informs every line you write, establishes and maintains whatever relationship there is between story and reader. What can be more important?" (p. 194-195).

If teachers accept the argument that voice in writing is a significant element in the best of writing, then further understanding of voice is crucial to the English Language

Arts teacher. We need to be able to challenge our students to be their best, and be able to teach them to identify the best in their own writing and the writing of others. A deeper understanding of voice, how we can identify it, and its development in writing is necessary.

A review of the English 12 and Writing 12 Curriculum Guides (or Integrated Resource Packages) was done to assess how "voice" might be addressed in curriculum. The English Literature 12 course lists "voice" as one of the Key Literary Terms to be understood. No definitions are provided for any of the terms listed. Under Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Reading and Thinking the guide states: "It is expected that students will identify elements of rhetorical situation: voice, implied audience, setting, and time" (English Literature 12: Integrated Resource Package, 1996, p. A-5). In the Writing 12 Curriculum Guide I looked at, "voice" was not mentioned. So, although voice is referred to in the Literature guide as a key term, no definition or suggested approach to teaching recognition of voice is suggested.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative research study is driven by three central questions:

- What is voice in writing?
- How is voice in text recognized?
- Is voice in writing developed, or is it discovered, and what is the role of the Writing/English teacher in this development/discovery?

This study addresses questions around voice by working directly with writers, and teachers of writing. Six published student writers, seven award-winning adult writers, and four teachers of writing were interviewed. A semi-structured interview format was employed in an attempt to better understand and identify voice in writing, and to elucidate the development or discovery of voice in writing. As well, this study attempted

to understand the role an English teacher may play in the development or discovery of voice in students' writing.

There is a paucity of research on voice in writing. I have not been able to find any research of a definitive nature, nor any research that accesses the views of writers on this topic. This research study addresses this omission by searching for a clearer understanding of what voice in writing means, and does this by directing questions about voice to writers and teachers of writing. The results of this study, therefore, may be of interest to writers, and those involved in the teaching of writing.

Definitions

Writer, in this study, refers to someone whose name would generally be thought of in connection with the creative or non-fiction writing they have had published. Thus, when we would hear the names of these people our first connection with them would probably be as a reader of their work.

Student writer refers to published writers who are still currently students in formal educational settings, and who might be considered to be at the beginning of their writing career. The designation student does not suggest that these individuals are not adults, nor does it suggest a lack of maturity.

Adult writer refers to writers who have received a literary award for their writing, and whose names would most often be associated with their writing. Adult does not confer an age association, but rather that these people would be acknowledged as already having achieved success in their writing careers.

Scholar, in this study, refers to those whose names would generally be thought of in connection with their scholarly work. These people are also educators. It is noted that these people are writers as well, but that the writing they are more commonly associated with would be of a different, more academic sort than that of the writers. For this study

the term scholar will also include teachers who have published articles on writing, but who may not be considered scholars in the academic sense of that word.

Teacher is used to refer to someone who is employed as a teacher in the public school system. These people may also be writers, but they would be seen by most people as teachers first.

Writing is used to refer both to writing as experience, and writing as text. I have attempted to delineate which is being referred to at all times in this research.

A further definition is offered here that was not used as a functional definition in the course of this study, but is added here to support the reading of this thesis. The whole thesis focused on developing a clearer understanding of this concept. **Voice**, as it was used in the preparation of this study, refers to the writer's voice as it is perceived, or not perceived, through the reading of their texts.

The student writers who participated in this study were enthusiastic individuals who energetically talked about, and shared, their writing and their experiences as writers. However, their work to date is relatively unknown. The students and I agreed to publish some of their writing in this study, and consequently, some of the student participants' poems grace these pages. Students chose the poem they wanted included from their own work. Poems are not presented in any particular order.

Daisy

Oh, Daisy, tell me what you think
as you dance in the fields all day,
do you laugh, or do you cry'
when the Old Wind makes you sway?

Are you jealous of the poppies
so red and very proud?
Or what about the Camus in its gorgeous purple shroud?

Oh, how can you not envy tulip,
with her confident face and bright colors?
an "imported plant" "She came from Holland!"
that puts her above all the others.

But surely the daffodil had made you cry,
as someone bent down to exclaim,
its bright yellow apron faced up to the sky,
until its wilting day came.

But, what's that you say? Daisy, how do you feel
when the children make chains from your bloom?
Or to find out if "He loves me" or "not"
you match up the bride with the groom.

But you, Daisy, you, do the fairies love,
they dance and twirl you around,
you should be proud to be one of those flowers
that happily graces the ground.

by Deanna Woods

Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Available literature on voice seemed to emanate from two main sources: scholars, who in writing about the craft of writing touch on voice, and from writers themselves who had also written about writing as craft and included voice as part of that, or had been quoted when commenting on voice in an interview. I was unable to locate any research that looked at voice from the perspective of the young published writer. The vast majority of information available on voice came from the group of people described as scholars in this study.

For this study the review of the literature focuses on the significance of voice in writing, on understanding what voice in writing is from the perspective of scholars and from the perspective of writers, and on implications for teaching voice in writing. The review of literature also includes an examination of research studies on voice and a call for subsequent research. This research study does not include literature on other characteristics of writing such as style, or the use of particular techniques or writing skills. As well, this research study does not address in depth the use of voice as a metaphor for issues around the political aspects of empowerment, but does look at empowerment if it means identity, or recognition of individual identity. This study looks at areas where voice is used as a metaphor to refer to attributes in writing. Although this study strives to better understand the role of educators in the development/discovery of voice in writing, this study is not designed to offer specific teaching methods for teachers.

Significance of Voice in Writing

Voice is often cited as the most important attribute of exceptional writing. Scholars offer much support for the significance of voice in writing. There is an argument present in the writing of Hodgins (1993) and Bakhtin (1984) that voice in writing is important in part because it is always there. Regardless of how much the writers concern themselves with voice, voice is there. The voice may be disguised, it may not be the voice most appropriate to the writing, but voice is there. To better understand this significant element of the best of writing, a definition is needed. However, here the journey seems to break into many paths offering different understandings for direction.

Understanding Voice from the Scholars/Educators' Perspective

Voice in writing seems difficult to define. Elbow (1981) wrote that sometimes he can identify voice and sometimes not. Sometimes he found voice in good writing, sometimes not (p.283). He wrote "Sometimes I fear I will never be clear about what I mean by voice" (p. 286). Elbow (1981) concluded that real voice exists in everyone but "there are no outward linguistic characteristics to point to in writing with real voice" (p. 312). Wier and Hendrie, editors of Voicelust (1985) wrote that voice was "at once clearly understood and difficult to define adequately" (p. 2)

Fletcher (1993) described voice as having "energy: juice" (p. 68). Elbow (1981) said voice in writing has life (p. 288), and also linked voice with power (p.286). Frank and Wall (1994) wrote "Training your ear to hear the difference between writing that is alive and writing that isn't is one of your greatest challenges in working with voice" (p. 51).

Fletcher (1993) compared voice in writing to human speech: "written words that carry with them the sense that someone has actually written them" and "writing with voice has the same quirky cadence that makes human speech so impossible to resist

listening to" (p.68). Elbow (1981) wrote "voice, in writing, implies words that capture the sound of an individual on the page", but then he adds that this definition doesn't seem quite right (p. 287). Elbow also said of voice that "it has fluency, rhythm, and liveliness that exist naturally in the speech of most people when they are enjoying a conversation"(p.67). Frank and Wall (1994) also argued for the connection between voice in writing and sound: "first and foremost voice deals with sound, quite apart from meaning" (p. 15). Graves (1990) also equated voice in writing with "the sound of the person in the words" (p. 47). In A Fresh Look at Writing (1994) Graves wrote that "voice is the imprint of ourselves on our writing" (p. 81-82). Graves argued that voice was not a step in the process of writing, but rather was a piece of every step in the process of writing. Rico (1983) described voice as "that manner of expression unique to you" (p. 15). Rico related voice in writing more clearly with human speech when later she equated it with expression, and with the "authentic sound, rhythm, texture of a unique consciousness on the page" (p. 136). Voice in writing was described as the expression of our natural selves freed from the restrictions writing can impose. Voice in writing then can be our spoken words put down on paper, complete with the unique expression we give them. Readers will hear us in our words, so voice becomes aural.

Fletcher (1993) also compared voice in writing to personality: "Voice in writing has to do with a unique personality-on-paper" (p. 77). Elbow (1981) seemed to disagree: "Real voice is not the sound of an individual personality redolent with vibes, it is the sound of a meaning resonating" (p. 311). The connection between voice and personality was also made by members of the Voice Project (Baumbach, (Ed.), 1970, p. 95). The distinction between voice as human speech and voice as personality is not a clear one.

Voice in writing is discussed as the distance between writers and their subjects. Writing with voice shows the author is close to what is being written about (Fletcher, 1993). This writing is compared to voiceless writing which is described as having a lot of distance between writer and subject. Graves (1994) also connects voice with subject:

"our data show that when a writer makes a good choice of subject, voice booms through" (p. 81-82). Baumbach (1970) linked depersonalization and voiceless writing:

A writing teacher has to fight against years and years of systematic depersonalization to get to what's unique and alive in each of his students—the real voice as opposed to what John Hawkes calls the 'voiceless' written language of our schools (p. 9).

Beck, McKeown, and Worthy (1995) in their research on voice developed a definition that "comprised three themes: activity, orality, and connectivity" (p. 225). Activity referred to the use of action verbs and the avoidance of the passive tense. Orality included the use of a conversational tone, colloquiums, and dialogue. Connectivity referred to highlighting certain relationships, including that between reader and the text which could be done by addressing the reader directly. Within their research they developed voiced versions of text by adding these three components to already existing text, deemed voiceless, for purposes of comparison. Their hypothesis was that voiced versions of text would increase retention of material in student learning. Groups of fourth graders were given either "voiced" or "voiceless" text to read and then comprehension was assessed using recall and open-ended questions. Beck, McKeown, and Worthy (1995) concluded that "voiced coherent passage had significant advantage over all other text conditions" (p. 230). Perhaps their definition of voice suggests the linguistic characteristics that evaded Elbow in 1981. Their research offers support for the significance of voice to writing.

Wertsch (1991) in Voices of the Mind discussed the work of the Soviet philosopher and scholar Mikhail Bakhtin. Wertsch argued that the term "voice" is derived from the work of Bakhtin and "it applies to written as well as spoken communication, and it is concerned with the broader issues of a speaking subject's perspective, conceptual horizon, intention, and world view" (Wertsch, 1991, p.51). Kamberelis and McGinley (1992) also rely on Bakhtin's understanding of voice within which to ground their own research.

They described Britton's perspective of voice as the "product of the intentional activity of an individual consciousness" (Kamberelis & McGinley, 1992, p. 200). Kamberelis and McGinley (1992) assert that Britton's argument leaves voice devoid of social, cultural and political influences, and thus provides too limited an understanding of voice. They were equally dismissive of Donald Graves' view of voice as being the imprint of the writers on their writing; this view was perhaps too subjective, and again too individual. Kamberelis and McGinley reject voice as being tied to the individual alone, excluding the context of that individual, and accept the idea of multiplicity in voice as discussed in Bakhtin's work.

Kamberelis and McGinley accept Bakhtin's view of voice being the "speaking consciousness", which belongs to the individual author as well as to the social, speech, historical and political community of the author. For Bakhtin a writer's voice is "never created solely out of the depths of his or her individuality" (Kamberelis & McGinley, 1992, p. 213). Voice in writing becomes best understood by studying the author, and the author's sociohistorical/linguistic context. Voice becomes intertextual. In the research conducted by Kamberelis and McGinley (1992) they report that after a detailed study of the writings of one fourth grade student, and after inquiring into his background, they could identify the social and cultural influences that had helped shape the voice in his writing. Voice, then, is not singularly constructed or tied to the individual alone, but rather arises out of all the communities that touch, or have touched, the writer.

Albers (1989) seemed to concur with the idea of voice being intertextual when he wrote: "Simply put, voice is presence, the felt physical presence as well as those aspects usually associated with the term character or ethos, but as that character has been formed in the interaction with social forces (including those of language)" (p. 9).

In The Literacy Dictionary: The Vocabulary of Reading and Writing (1995) we read under 'voice' five definitions that mention sound or speech, two definitions that discuss syntactic patterns, and the eighth reads "see personal voice" (p. 275). Under 'personal

voice' we read: "in writing, the distinctive way in which the writer expresses ideas with respect to style, form, content, purpose, etc.; author's voice" (p. 183). Is voice in writing, then, simply the way in which a writer handles the various techniques of writing?

Voice in writing has been linked to energy, life or power, to human speech, to the distance between the authors and their subjects, to the author's personality, to linguistic themes centered around activity, orality, and connectivity, and to something as broad as the sociohistorical/linguistic context of the writer. The definitions from those that write about writing suggest that voice in writing is hard to define, and means different things to different people.

Voice as Metaphor

Voice has been, and perhaps still could be, used as a metaphor for something else. Beck, McKeown, and Worthy (1995) suggested that the term voice has been used to mean many things. In particular they mentioned voice used as a term referring to style, the individual characteristics that mark a writer's style. They also noted that voice has been used when referring to particular rhetorical purposes used intentionally by the writer (Beck, McKeown et al, 1995, p.224). Albers (1989) argued that using voice as a metaphor may not be a bad thing as it counters the "reductionist tendency to define it neatly as style or tone or whatever" (p. 8).

In Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind the authors discussed how voice was a metaphor fitting, and often used by, women. They wrote that "'voice' was more than an academic shorthand for a person's point of view ... it is a metaphor that can apply to many aspects of women's experience and development" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 18). In their interviews with women these researchers found women often using the term voice as a metaphor "to depict their intellectual and ethical development" (Belenky, Clinchy et al, 1986, p. 18). There seems

to be a strong connection between self and voice, and it is relevant to note as well the use of the term in connection with point of view. Here, voice is used as a metaphor to describe the empowering experience of being able to develop self.

Voice and Self

Voice is often linked with self. Without a sense of self, can one have voice? Belenky, Clinchy, et al (1986) wrote "the development of a sense of voice, mind, and self were intricately intertwined" (p. 18). In Developing Verbal Talent: Ideas and Strategies for Teachers of Elementary and Middle School Students VanTassel-Baska, Johnson, and Boyce (1996) wrote "One student's paper was a particularly telling example of the critical role of self, or voice, in a student's ability to replace mechanical performance with authentic understanding" and "His understanding ... [is] inextricably linked to self-understanding and to voice" (p. 85-87). Here the text uses 'self' as a synonym for 'voice' suggesting to me that without the self being made known and manifest, voice cannot exist. In "Writing and Suppression of Self: A Case Study" McAlexander and Marston (1994) undertook an in-depth study of one student in an attempt to understand how they could better help other struggling academic students. In part they concluded that their student was a "striking example of how lack of self-confidence can undermine a writer's voice and text" (McAlexander & Marston, 1994, p. 76). Again a strong connection is made between a sense of self and one's voice.

Frank and Wall (1994) wrote:

Voice is nothing fancy. It's simply the way you, the writer, project yourself artistically. It's the way you draw on yourself as you write - your sense of humor, irony, the way you see people and events, use language, and entertain. And it's the way you use these parts of yourself to tell a story... (p. xv).

Frank and Wall (1994) described tone, point-of-view, narration, dialogue and character development as being different elements of the term voice. Later they wrote: "... to move your voice into a story, you have to make a commitment to working with certain found elements" (Frank and Wall, 1994, p. 65). For these women voice is an inclusive thing. Voice is each writer's unique way of crafting a story which encompasses how that writer deals with all the literary elements that make up that story.

We look next to writers to see if a more commonality of understanding exists.

Understanding Voice from the Writers' Perspective

The Voice Project was hosted by Stanford University between 1966-1967 and was a group of writers who came together whose common goal was to continue to teach writing to college students but in a way that would make it more meaningful to the young writers. Hawkes, referring to his involvement in The Voice Project, wrote:

To us, then 'voice' meant: (1) personality as heard in speech, (2) the kind of understanding we are able to 'hear' in the voice of someone reading aloud, (3) the authors' presence that we 'hear' when we read silently, and (4) the various roles we sometimes assume in writing (Baumbach (Ed.), 1970, p. 96)

Hawkes added "... we have not documented psychologically the existence of what we call the 'writing voice'" (Baumbach, (Ed.), 1970, p. 102).

Voicelust grew out of the 10th Alabama Symposium on English and American Literature, which was a three day gathering in 1983. American writers and scholars gathered and addressed voice in writing: "We stated our case for this event with a formal, if somewhat dry definition ... Detectable in the style of every original writer is a special sensibility, a personal manner, a unique intonation-the writer's voice" and "...the matter, the substance, the *it* of fiction cannot be separated from this clear and omnipresent voice" (Wier & Hendrie, 1985, p. 4-5).

The theme of voice being omnipresent comes up again when Hodgins (1993) quotes Wright Morris as saying "Voice is the presence in the style of what is most personal to the writer. Through voice, the writer is invisible omnipresent..." (p. 192). Hodgins also wrote that "this voice ... will be there, in different degrees, whether it's thought of or not" (Hodgins, 1993, p. 193).

Lorna Crozier in an interview in The Claremont Review (Floor, 1993) when asked about voice answered "Does it mean image patterns, the rhythm that you write in? Surely it also means the content that you keep going back to again and again" (p. 114).

There is a sense that voice is present in the most original writing, that it is significant. As to what it is exactly, we are no clearer.

Voice: Development or Discovery?

If we accept that voice in writing is a characteristic of the best writing, then the development or discovery of voice in writing is equally enticing to us. However, ideas for development or discovery seem as varied as ideas for definition.

Fletcher in What A Writer Needs (1993) wrote that to develop voice in writing requires both awareness and diligence. He added that a "patient, supportive mentor or writing teacher" would help (p. 68), but then provides only very general advice for the teaching of voice in writing.

Linked with the development of voice in writing is the ability to listen: "But the writer is different from everyone else; the writer listens" (Fletcher, 1993, p. 68). Patrick Lane suggested something similar when he spoke of the importance of being a voracious reader: "what usually happens is your voice changes through your reading" (Ishiguro and Allen, 1995, p.85). Graves (1990) made strong connections in his writing about voice between the voice in writing and the speaking voice. He claimed that "the written voice is first heard in speech" (Graves, 1990, p. 83). Graves emphasized the importance of

listening, that all voices need audiences, and even advocated developing a "listening voice" which he described as being a sense of self (Graves, 1990, p.87). For Graves there seemed to be an unclear distinction between the speaking and writing voice, but the importance of knowing self and listening were strongly stated. He argued that through listening writers know themselves, and when self knowledge is evident, voice is possible (Graves, 1990, p.96). Teaching listening skills is where Graves would have Fletcher's patient writing teacher step in. Rico (1983) also argued for the importance of listening to the development of voice because it helps tune the ear: "helps you learn to distinguish between resonance and flatness of voice" (p. 140).

Also mentioned in discussing voice is the role of maturation, or time. In Writing With Power (1981) Elbow wrote "the attainment of real voice is a matter of growth and development rather than mere learning" (p.302). Patrick Lane suggested agreement with the idea that voice in writing develops over time (Ishiguro & Allen, 1995). In that same interview Lane said "so really, the first big change was finding my own voice again" and "it was a big change for me to go back and to trust my initial voice" (Ishiguro & Allen, 1995, p. 84). Lane suggested that voice was part of the process in the development of his writing. Murray would agree with Lane that one's voice in writing changes over time, adding that this could mean both time in the life of the author and time in the drafts of the story. He wrote "I have to try and hear the soft but true voice hidden under the loud but clumsy voice in an early draft" (Murray, 1982, p. 57). Murray (1982) added that if the writer listens carefully the story will develop its own voice. The theme surrounding the importance of time and maturation becomes linked with that of listening. O'Leary (1993) argued that the development of voice in writing should be experienced as a process, not as an end.

Kamberelis and McGinley (1992), in their research on voice in writing, created strong links with intertextuality based on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. Their argument may fit with O'Leary's that voice should not be an end. Further to the multiplicity of

voice as they present it, Kamberelis and McGinley (1992) wrote that a writer's voice continues to develop with each new social or cultural experience (p.212). Voice then is both multiple and fluid as it moves through the living contexts of the individual. Perhaps then it is impossible for voice to ever be the end, as voice is never fully developed but always changing.

Lee Smith wrote that a final thought in examining any writer's voice should include the question "how present is the author in the work?" (Wier and Hendrie, 1985, p. 99). Would this be the author-as-self surfacing again?

Skills or Attributes and Voice in Writing

It is suggested that the development of certain skills or attributes in writing develops voice in writing. Rico (1983) suggested that rhythm and resonance were crucial to voice in writing (p. 136). John Irving, when talking about Flaubert, wrote "... what is always established in a great writer's voice is pity, is sympathy ... what is always established in a minor writer's voice is bitchiness ..." (Wier & Hendrie, 1985, p. 87-88). In the same chapter Irving suggested that word choice is also part of voice (Wier & Hendrie, 1985, p.92). Smith agreed with Irving: "Even the small considerations of language contribute to any writer's voice: such prosaic questions as the length of the sentences, the favored grammatical constructions, the imagery, or the lack of imagery" (Wier & Hendrie, 1985, p. 99). Smith also suggested that voice comes from subject: after finding the subject and point of view an author has "already gone a long way toward finding a voice" (Wier & Hendrie, 1985, p. 95). Graves (1990) described his "writing voice, which I establish by writing about literate occasions" also suggesting a link between voice and subject (p. 44).

Frank and Wall (1994) described the qualities of a childhood voice as "fluid, uninhibited access to language, connection to breath, natural cadence, and the automatic ability to discern what is important" (p. 31). They went on to suggest that as adults we

lose that harmony with our breath and often develop a public voice and a private voice as a result. We need to relocate that harmony in order to write with voice. But this is a private activity, this search for voice. Frank and Wall (1994) stated quite clearly in their writing that voice is discovered, not developed. The craft of writing can be developed but only the writer can insert the life, the breath, what we call voice. Frank and Wall (1994) wrote that "to develop your voice over the long haul, you have to develop a life that supports your voice" and "this commitment to the self as a writer is crucial to the development of your voice" (p. 213-215). Voice then, if we think of it as being developed, is developed through competence at craft which can be aided by external means, and competence in life which is individual. Frank and Wall (1994) wrote that "working with yourself in your life ... is as important to voice as working with yourself in your fiction" (p. 218).

There are strong connections in this literature that link voice in writing with listening and the oral voice, and also with the maturation that occurs within people over time which will also seep into the writing. As writers develop certain skills or attributes these will contribute to the voice in the writing, and any experiences or new understandings that occur in the life of the writers will also be brought to the writing. Perhaps as we discover ourselves we discover our writing voice, and as we develop ourselves we develop our writing voice.

Function of Voice in Text

What is the role of voice in text? What exactly does it do? The answer, of course, is many things.

Irving, in his address as published in Vocelust, described the role of voice in relation to the reader. What does voice in text do to/for the reader? It can move the reader, it can enlighten or nurture the reader's spirit, and it can grab readers tightly and hold their

attention (Wier and Hendrie, 1985, p. 88-89) Beck, McKeown, and Worthy (1995) wrote that "the role of voice is to engage students [readers] in a text" (p. 233).

Voice can establish character, tone, and conclude or end things (Wier and Hendrie, 1985, p. 90). Graves (1994) wrote that "voice shows how I choose information, organize it, select the words, all in relation to what I want to say and how I want to say it" (p.81-82). In 1990 Graves had written "Through voice, we show what we know, what we think, and how we think it" (p. 102). Hodgins (1993) wrote that "when we hear voice we hear word choice, cadence, attitude, personality" (p. 193).

There is also the suggestion that writing with voice reveals a self-understanding on the part of the writer. Certainly this was suggested in our discussion on definition. Elbow (1981) was clear on this relationship: "If you start letting your writing lead you to real voice, you'll discover some thoughts and feelings you didn't know you had" (p. 309). O'Leary (1993) wrote that voice in text "reflects significant aspects of a student's identity: her socio-economic and cultural background, ethnicity, race, age, gender, all that the student has experienced thus far" (p. 2).

Graves (1994) described voice as necessary to the whole process of writing, even stating that voice is what sustains the writer through the hard work of writing (p. 81-82). So, aside from what voice can give the reader, voice can also contribute to the writer. Albers (1989) wrote that writing with voice "becomes a central source of empowerment for students ... in and out of the classroom" (p. 3-4). Voice is often used as a metaphor for empowerment, however there is not always a connection to voice-in-writing being made. When voice is linked with power, it has often become a politicized term connected more with point of view than something in the text. Voice in this sense is not discussed in this paper. Voice in writing, however, can empower if writing with voice does mean self knowledge, or increased knowledge. Surely, increased knowledge of any kind is empowering. Working toward writing with voice can also make better writers: "students overwhelmingly cite activities and coachings directly bearing upon voice and

voice acceptance as those most beneficial to developing their writing" (Albers, 1989, p. 4)

Voice: Multiple, or Single?

We have two seemingly divergent views here. One view holds that voice in text is singular, belonging to a single individual. This view is countered with the argument that voice in text is multiple, made up of many influences which can be identified, perhaps even intertextual acknowledging many authors, not singular. This latter view would allow a writer to have more than one voice, a choice from which the writer could choose a voice appropriate for the situation.

Fletcher (1993) wrote that "when I talk about voice I mean written words that carry with them the sense that someone has actually written them ... a single human being" (p. 68). The idea that voice is singular and unique to each individual has much support in the literature (Beck, McKeown & Worthy, 1995; Murray, 1982). When Macrorie (1968) described writing without voice he wrote "no individual person seems to be speaking" (p. 10). Thus voice is seen to the unique thumbprint of a writer on the page. Frank and Wall (1994) wrote "unlike style, voice can never be imitated. It is like a fingerprint, unique and singular" (Frank & Wall, 1994, p. 6). Recognizing voice in text then is tantamount to recognizing the individual author that wrote the text.

Elbow (1981) wrote that being able to write in many voices was a skill of a great writer. He added "you are not ultimately stuck with just one voice forever" (p. 313). However, Elbow wrote that a writer may start out with just one voice, suggesting that the attainment of additional voices may be part of a writer's development. Irving would agree (Wier and Hendrie, 1985, p. 90).

O'Leary (1993) identified three voices in writing: the voice students are born into, the voice they can often feel forced to adopt in certain institutions, and finally the voice

they achieve or grow into. O'Leary argued that one voice is not more important than the other, but rather that all three work and change together (O'Leary, 1993, p. 12). There is an implication here that one begins with a voice born into, others are developed, and all continue to change throughout a writer's career. In his book Writing With Power Elbow (1981) specifically identifies the "impersonal, public, and corporate voice" (p. 311). Danish (1981) wrote that "sometimes one voice is more appropriate than another" (p. 5). In these arguments writers have more than one voice and seem able to choose between them.

The nature of a multiple voice forms much of the basis of Bakhtin's work on voice as it is associated with writing. Bakhtin argued that "multiple authorship is a necessary fact about all texts, written or spoken" and "there is no such thing as a voice that exists in total isolation from other voices" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 49 and p. 51-52). Booth in his Introduction to Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics by Bakhtin (1984) wrote that one voice can authoritatively suppress other voices also present in the text. Booth gave as an example lyric poems that "tend toward becoming monologues with the poet inventing a single voice, one that belies the actual polyphony of his own inner chorus" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. xxii). He further explains Bakhtin's fascination with the novel form, and with Dostoevsky in particular, that "offers the possibility of doing justice to voices other than the author's own" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. xxii). Bakhtin purports intertextuality and would always argue that writers' voices cannot be theirs alone but a blend of all voices they have ever contacted, including their own (Kamberelis, & McGinley, 1992, p. 199). Thus no text is ever the result of a single writer's voice but rather a result of a process that encompasses the life long encounters and development of each writer. Bakhtin would argue that this is even true for the best writers; "voice is [always] construed as intertextual, social, and political" (Kamberelis, 1992, p. 201). In Bakhtin's argument writers seem to write from a multivoicedness that is unavoidable. Bakhtin's argument does not suggest multiplicity means choice in voices.

Educational Implications

Kennedy, in Developing Verbal Talent: Ideas and Strategies for Teachers of Elementary and Middle School Students, wrote about debates currently held on political correctness and cultural criticism as they pertain to the writing classroom and notes "one theme that recurs in these debates ... is the presumption that the student's voice ought to be central to the writing classroom" (VanTassel-Baska, Johnson, Boyce, 1996, p. 134). It is most relevant to this study that this assumption about the place of voice in the writing classroom exists.

Elbow (1981) wrote that he attempted to help students write with voice by drawing lines in the margins of his students' work where he felt they had written with voice. He encouraged them to reflect on those lines which resulted in students wondering what lines would be marked in their next submission: "searching for more voice starts them on a journey--a path toward new thoughts, feelings, memories, and new modes of seeing and writing" (Elbow, 1981, p. 284). Elbow (1981) added that when students begin to work on voice in their writing two things happen: first, process affects subject matter, and second, it leads to experimentation in their writing (p. 284-5). Elbow (1981) offered some exercises/suggestions to help get voice into writing: frequent and regular free writing exercises, writing with a focus on quantity, practice revising for voice, reading aloud, writing for an audience also committed to adding voice to their writing, and experimenting in the writing (p. 304-306). Fletcher (1993) suggested teachers working with student writers encourage their students to explore their "inner writing voice" and to keep some of that voice when publishing, (p. 68). He was not more specific than that. Danish (1981) wrote that "at the very base of our writing instructions should be the encouragement to be aware of and develop our own personal voice, to say something the way we would naturally say it" (p. 6). Danish suggested as an exercise having students write to someone as a way of getting student writers to use and trust their writing voice.

The idea of encouragement surfaces again in Madigan (1992) where he wrote "more importantly is the fact that we as educators must discourage the practice of silencing those whose voices beg to be heard" (p. 98). Graves (1990) would concur with Madigan: "starting with our first days in school we have been conditioned to leave our own voices and our interpretations of texts at home" (p. 41). Do Graves and Madigan imply that to encourage voice in writing we need more than writing exercises, we need a new philosophical approach to our job of educating?

Graves (1994) suggested getting students to add voice to their writing by getting them to do a reading/research activity. Students conduct their own research on a topic, are then interviewed for content by a student peer, and then the student researcher writes without notes on the topic: "This allows the child's own voice and sense of authority about the subject to get into the text. ... It is better to have him insert information he has forgotten rather than try to adopt the voices of others" (Graves, 1994, p. 323). O'Leary (1993) wrote that to help students write with voice educators need to help students see the link between voice and identity. This can be accomplished through carefully chosen texts and topics. In particular, O'Leary (1993) wrote: "one topic that I have found consistently effective is the relationship between public and private identity, particularly between public and private language" (p. 6). Later, in the same essay, O'Leary wrote that another topic that proved successful was that of education wherein students were invited to reflect upon the process of being educated.

Reading other texts was often recommended for its potential contribution to writing with voice. Fletcher (1993) wrote that "reading is a critical step in fostering voice in students' content writing" (p. 76). Rico (1983) also advocated reading to foster voice in one's writing stressing the importance of closely attending to the rhythm, the cadence of writing that contains voice (p. 140). Ronald and Roskelly (1986) wrote "we wanted our students to learn to hear the reader-voice in external texts, so that it might become internal in their own texts--and so that they might hear their own writer-voices as they

compose and revise" (p. 32). The "oral reading of models" as a way of developing one's own writing voice was also advocated by Albers (1989, p. 12). Schneider (1992) recommended students read their own text aloud: "reading aloud attunes beginning writers to their own voices, helping them to establish an easier, more natural voice in their writing" (p. 9).

Fletcher (1993) advocated encouraging student writers to revise for voice by having them read their work aloud to identify which parts sound most like them. Those are the passages with strongest voice. Frank and Wall (1994) concurred when they wrote that it is helpful to read the first draft aloud for "the spoken voice doesn't lie" (p. 167). Frank and Wall (1994) explain that when the tongue trips over words or stumbles over certain sentences, that is a clue to the writing struggling with its voice.

Fletcher (1993) cautions teachers that students can lose the voice in their writing. Older students making the shift from expressive writing to expository writing, and upper grade writers (term is not qualified) writing for content that includes research are claimed to be at particular risk. Elbow (1981) cautions students about getting too much feedback on voice in their writing. Elbow writes that the safest method is to get the audience to read and then to ask them a week later what they can remember; "passages they dislike often have the most real voice" (Elbow, 1981, p. 311). As an interesting aside, Elbow (1981) also tells the story of the U.S. draft board and how they had applicants for conscientious objector status write essays on why they were opposed to fighting in wars. The only criterion for receiving required status was whether the board felt the writer believed his own words. Is this voice?

Schneider (1992) wrote "what she has in her writing is her own voice; her writing sounds like her talking, and that's not something you teach" (p. 9). However, his earlier cited comment suggests an exercise to help readers insert voice into their writing. Perhaps educators can help, or nudge students toward writing with voice, but cannot actually teach it? Kamberelis and McGinley (1992) wrote that the "insistence on the

need for the child writer to 'find' his or her own unitary voice may be a mistake" (p. 213). I believe their argument arises out of their belief that voice is not monologic but rather intertextual and reflective of the writer's whole environment, thus a child writer is not ready to 'find' voice owing to a certain immaturity. Murray (1982) wrote about the importance of "lesson plans, syllabi, and course outlines" to teaching and then wrote that "This does not work in the writing course, because there is no great body of knowledge to lug into the class. There are only a relatively few simple principles..." (p. 115). Frank and Wall (1994) suggested that writing with voice is a private activity and not one that can be taught:

This is very important to remember. You can learn the concepts of craft by taking classes and reading books. But you won't know how to work with them and they won't have concrete meaning unless you discover them in the outpourings of your own voice. This is because the craft of fiction wasn't invented by critics and teachers. (p. 74).

Baumbach (1970) wrote "The question comes up: 'Can writing be taught?' ... noting, nothing worth knowing ... can be taught. It is what every serious teacher finally discovers" (Baumbach, (Ed.) 1970, p. 1). Wendell Berry concurred "... can one teach writing? I don't think so" (Baumbach, (ed.) 1970, p.23). George Elliott wrote "to teach writing is to help to rewrite" (Baumbach, (Ed.), 1970, p.55). George Garrett (Baumbach, (ed.) 1970) answered the same question in the affirmative (p. 74) as did Denise Levertov (p. 193)

Hawkes, when writing about the teaching of writing, and voice in particular, wrote "we really do not know very much about this process" and in a later paragraph advocated that: "Future projects should include on their staffs not only writer-teachers but also psychologists whose interest in language, group behavior, and learning processes should help to define concepts of voice more specifically" (Baumbach, (Ed.), 1970, p. 102).

Commentary

Although it may appear that much has been said, or written, on the topic of voice, very little actual research on voice in writing was unearthed. Most of the literature cited above is derived from reflective opinion pieces of the authors. Most of the authors cited are scholars whose expertise lies in an academic area that may include the education of writers.

A closer look at the actual research studies may be helpful at this time. McAlexander and Marston (1994) completed a case study designed to identify ways they could better help students struggling with writing. In particular they took what they deemed to be unengaging, voice-less, text and, understanding voice as comprising activity, orality, and connectivity, attempted to add voice to text to make the text more engaging for students. A look at the importance of voice emerged as an off-shoot of that study; it was not the primary purpose for the study. Beck, McKeown, and Worthy (1995) conducted a comprehension research study, not dissimilar to that of McAlexander and Marston, in an attempt to measure "the effects on students' comprehension of voiced versions of more and less coherent texts" (p. 225). In neither of these studies is voice clearly defined, and 'voiced' passages seem to be deemed so by the authors who also wrote them. Both studies concluded that voiced passages were more engaging than all other text. Kamberelis and McGinley (1992) conducted a research case-study of the written work of one elementary aged student to offer support for Bakhtin's theory that voice in writing is intertextual, and in particular inclusive of the author's sociohistorical and economic background. Murray stated "I know of virtually no studies going on now on how people write" (Zirinsky, 1993, p.16).

The literature review above has obvious gaps that further research could address. First, much of the literature that addresses the development of voice in text looks at the elementary school aged student, and sometimes the middle school student or the college

student. Little writing on voice includes the high school student writer. Second, most of the literature cited is opinion only with no foundation in research or classroom study. Third, the perspective of student writers on voice has been neglected in the literature. Adult writers have similarly been neglected with their opinion only sought occasionally as it fit in with a longer interview. Writers could be a tremendous source of knowledge regarding what constitutes voice in writing, as well as its development, or discovery. As well, although scholars are also teachers, the perspective of the teacher of writing has been omitted. Such practitioners could contribute much to our understanding of voice and its implications for the classroom.

The absence of focused research that seeks to more clearly address the definitive nature and development/discovery of voice in writing is clearly missing. This is in part why I have decided to pursue this thesis in this way. It is towards a better understanding of this significant aspect of writing that this research leans.

Aluminum Wrists

I want to write about
the colour of pain
but I keep getting stuck on
the rusty nail of things I don't know.

I want to tell you about neon lights but
there is only the clarity of a small flame
in the shaking hands of an old man
and his last cigarette.

I wish I had some
conversationally gay relatives.
Instead, a teacher with her second dying child
takes the "e" off Heroine
in its jagged popularity.

A bus stop gets very cold
when you have to wait all night
but sometimes its static walls
present a safety which aluminum wrists
can not.

by Nicole Matte

Chapter Three

Methodology

The research methodology I employed was that of an interpretive study using a semi-structured interview format. The underlying rationale behind this methodology recognizes that respondents see the world from their own unique perspective, which the researcher would want to clearly understand. Borg and Gall (1989) state that research in education usually favors the semistructured interview as it moves from structured questions to open-ended questions. This combination of questions allows researchers the opportunity for objectivity, depth, and to obtain data otherwise hard to obtain (Borg & Gall, 1989, p. 452): objectivity in that structured questions allow for some standardization, and depth because the semistructured interview allows the researcher opportunity for following up comments that invite further exploration.

I used the four styles of questions recommended by Berg (1989): essential, extra, throw-away, and probing (p. 20). An essential question was "What do you think is meant by voice?". An example of an extra question was "Do you agree with that?". A throw-away question was "How would you describe yourself as a reader?". A probing question was "Tell me more about that" or "How does that relate to your own writing?".

Questions were designed to be non-leading, to require more than a monosyllabic response, and to be clear and focussed. These questions were used to build the interview by establishing a rapport, setting the pace of the interview, helping to change the focus when necessary, and eliciting more information about something the respondent had already said. Thus, the interview questions served a variety of functions, and not all interview questions asked were expected to lead directly to a research question.

Therefore, not all types of questions, or all questions, were included in the analysis.

A proposal outlining the questions that drive this research study and including an abbreviated review of the literature, methodology outline, and suggested interview questions was presented to my thesis committee and an oral defense of the proposal was held February 27, 1997. During that meeting the committee and I reviewed each suggested interview question for appropriateness and capacity to contribute to the research focus. Questions were changed and added at that time. Then the proposal was accepted by the committee. The Request for Ethical Review was forwarded to the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Committee and when permission to proceed with the study was received arrangements were made to do the Pilot Interview and to contact possible participants.

Description of Participants

The study proposed to interview three groups of people:

- published student writers (published meant written work published in print form available to the public, excluding internet publications; student meant school or university student);
- teachers of writing (teachers meant high school teachers teaching, or having recently taught, the British Columbia Writing 12 curriculum); and
- adult writers who had received literary awards for their writing.

Although the last two groups suggest a distinct division between teachers and the adult writers, this was not the case. Some teachers were published writers and some writers were also teachers.

It was proposed that six participants would make up each group and that groups would be equally representative of both genders. As well, an effort was made to draw on a range of participant backgrounds within each group. For the students this meant an attempt to garner participants from different educational settings and to try and include at

least one non-fiction writer. For the teachers this meant drawing upon teachers from different schools or school districts. For the adult writers this meant interviewing writers of fiction, poetry, and non-fiction, writers who had achieved success fairly recently, and writers who had achieved their first success more than a decade ago.

Participants were contacted either by e-mail, a faxed letter of request, direct phone calls from the researcher, or phone calls through a third party where direct access was not available. After a brief description of the purpose of the study and what their involvement would entail, participants were invited to participate.

Informed written consent was sought from each participant in the study, as well as permission to audio-tape interviews, see Appendix A. Parental consent was sought where required, see Appendix D. Participants were ensured confidentiality surrounding their particular contribution to the study.

The student and teacher groups were homogeneous in that they were residing in middle class communities in a large urban area. However, the participants were associated with different educational settings and institutions. Choosing subjects from different educational settings was intended to negate any particular individual influence that might have occurred had all students had the same writing teacher, or all teachers come from the same school.

Unexpected difficulties arose in locating participants for the student and teacher groups owing to the paucity of Writing classes offered at the school level. In British Columbia a formal course on writing is offered at the grade 12 level in schools where there are enough interested students to merit a class. However, for many students in grade 12, choosing classes is not based solely on interest. Students must choose enough grade 12 classes to give them credit for graduation, and/or to allow them university entrance in their area of choice. Students interested in scholarship programs are often restricted to taking Grade 12 courses that are recognized by the province through the administration of a provincial exam. Writing 12 does not have that status and so many

students who may be interested cannot fit Writing 12 into their timetable. A minority of schools were able to offer Writing 12 and so teachers and students were more difficult to find. In addition, a few teachers of writing were too busy to participate. Surprisingly to me, it proved much easier to locate awarded adult writers willing to participate than high school teachers of writing. Not one of the awarded adult writers approached for this study gave any suggestion of an unwillingness to participate.

The Student Writers

The student group consisted of two male and four female participants ranging from 12 - 22 years of age. The youngest was in grade 6 and the oldest was in third year university. These participants were drawn from three different school communities: a private elementary-secondary school, the public school system, and a university. Each participant had published some poetry and one student writer had also been published in non-fiction. It is relevant that student participants were comfortable describing themselves as writers, and all were very knowledgeable and eloquent about their own work. All but the youngest student had taken a writing class in school. They reported these classes were pivotal experiences in their lives, and strengthened their perceptions of themselves as writers.

Khalid had been writing poetry for three or four years. He described his early poetry as "*ramblings of nothing*", without images, and echoing his rebellious stance at the time. His favourite writers are Hemingway and Ginsberg.

Stacey started writing poetry five years ago and described it as bad poetry that he never kept. He is a keen reader who will read anything except mysteries, particularly enjoying fantastical or myth related literature. He described himself as a reader that appreciated the images the words created in his mind, and as having a keen appreciation for wit and clever puns.

Pat had been writing for 12 years, and also began her career writing poetry. In addition to having poetry published, Pat has had two papers published in a scientific journal. Pat's career plans are very focused and currently all her reading and writing are geared to that career end.

Chris started writing short stories in grade three, but said she had been writing independently for only four years. Her favourite writers were Patrick Lane, Margaret Atwood, and Guy Vanderhaeghe for their realistic portrayal of daily life. As with many writers Chris began writing poetry that she felt was very personal, a lot of feelings on paper, and that she never showed anyone.

Sveah said she had been writing for five years, and remembers *"when I was like five and six years old, I wrote millions and millions of letters ... I wrote a letter to Air Canada to say thank you ... and I wrote to the TV station if I didn't like the programming."* She stressed her belief in the importance of having varied reading, of consciously choosing her reading material, and thus consciously choosing her influences. One of her favourite writers is Margaret Atwood.

Sandi had been writing seriously for about four years. Some of her favourite writers include Louisa May Alcott, Francis Hodgson Burnett, and Karen Cushman.

The Teachers

The teacher group consisted of one male and three female participants. Each teacher had been teaching for more than a decade and was a respected professional within the school community. Each teacher participant was from a different school, and the group spanned three school divisions.

M.B. was a published poet himself, and taught English and Writing classes to senior level students. His commitment to writing and literature was evident in both his conversation and the work he does to promote an interest in both in his students. M.B.

was instrumental in founding a journal publication for the teen-age writer, and this publication, which now attracts literary and visual art submissions from around the world, consumes much of his and his colleagues' time. M.B.'s passion for connecting students to writing, and making the English department within which he works even more successful at reaching these students, bubbled into our conversation repeatedly.

K.J. held the position of English Department Head at the high school where she taught English Literature and Writing classes to senior level students. She is pursuing her Masters in Education at the suggestion of colleagues who recognized her leadership qualities. K.J. is an avid reader and somehow finds the time to keep up with the latest novels, the newest writers, and works to integrate this new material into her classes.

J.P. said she had been teaching for 28 years although her energy and enthusiasm, her youthfulness and spark, made me consider asking for proof. I did not, however. J.P. described herself as an addicted reader, and that adjective seemed most fitting. J.P. always has five books on the go at one time, with an additional 30 on hold at the library. Her addiction is a bonus for her students who share her in-class library stocked with recent work J.P. has collected.

D.N. has a Masters in Counseling, is school counselor at the large grade 11/12 school where she works, and teaches senior level Writing. Like all the other teachers D.N. is an avid reader and thus can bring current literature into her classroom. Even before D.N. mentioned that she was mentor to a student, the first impression you get when you meet her is that she would be a great mentor, a super role model for some lucky individual.

The Adult Writers

The adult writers interviewed included five women and two men offering a variety of professional writing expertise including children's fiction, adult fiction, poetry, and

non-fiction. The strength of this study, in part, follows from my ability to interview some of the best Canadian writers. Proof of my being able to do so lies with the adult writers' willingness to have their participation acknowledged. Their names, and their writing, speak better than I can for their writing careers and accomplishments.

The Interviews

The range of personalities and experience that were brought to this study provided many rich and varied interview possibilities. Interviews ranged in length across the three groups from approximately 25 minutes to approximately 90 minutes. Although each participant was interviewed individually, on one afternoon it was convenient for three participants to be interviewed one after each other. Most interviews were conducted in person, although owing to convenience three interviews were conducted over the telephone. Meeting places for interviews were suggested by the participants and interviews took place in personal offices, staff rooms, over kitchen tables in private homes, in a neighborhood pub, the hallway of a university building, and in the garage of a private home with us balanced on broken bus seats and surrounded by metal paraphernalia.

Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted in April 1997 and provided some indication that the research interviews would produce findings that could be significant in addressing the research questions. The pilot interview, conducted with an adult writer who had received considerable recognition through literary awards, proved most beneficial in evaluating and improving upon the interview question guide, and provided an opportunity for me to

reflect upon and improve my own interview technique. Thus, the pilot study proved valuable in a number of ways.

First, the pilot study revealed inadequacies in the interview question guide. It became clear that different questions, although similar, would be needed for each group. Some questions needed to be made clearer, more focused, and some needed discarding. A meeting with one of my three committee members helped me to re-word and re-formulate questions for each of the three participant groups. Questions were also re-organized, although the original division of the questions under the two headings of 'writing as experience' and 'writing as text' remained. An example of a change in question would be "Do you read a lot?" which was changed to "How would you describe yourself as a reader?." An example of an added question would be 'What sort of things did you write when you first started writing?'. The proposed interview questions are exposed in Appendix E; the revised interview questions are listed in Appendix F.

Second, the pilot participant helped formulate the interview questions. The pilot participant was asked for direction to those issues that should be addressed in the interview questions, but were overlooked so far. As well the pilot participant was able to help with the wording of several questions. For example, one original question read 'Tell me what you know about writing that you learned from yourself'. The adult writer improved upon the question by suggesting the question read 'How much of what you know about writing did you learn from yourself?'

Third, data recording techniques were examined. Each interview was to be audio-recorded with no notes taken during the interview. It was thought that this would produce a more 'conversational' atmosphere. However, the pilot proved helpful again in that it revealed that certain things should be noted during the interview. In particular, names and/or titles mentioned that I may have been unfamiliar with were often extremely difficult to get off the tape. As well, during my post-pilot meeting with my committee member, it was recommended I jot down my own reflections after each interview

indicating how the interview went, etc. These reflections proved helpful when I wanted to remember the interviews for the analysis.

Fourth, the pilot afforded me the opportunity to reflect and improve upon my interview technique. I learned I would need to follow-up more on leads given in response to other questions. I was familiar with the work of each adult writer I hoped to interview and the importance of this familiarity I found to be critical as the writers would often refer to their work as an example of an issue being discussed. I believe references to their own work were made as it was perhaps safer to assume that that was literature we both had some familiarity with.

The vast majority of the discussion in the pilot interview revolved around issues pertaining to the research questions and not the work of the writer at all. I felt somewhat uncomfortable speaking to a writer and not really speaking to their writing, which was what had drawn me to each of them in the first place. This discrepancy was something I never did come to terms with.

Research Design and Procedures

Data were collected through personal interviews, one interview with each participant and interviews were conducted between May and July, 1997. Each participant was told that the purpose of the interview was to help me better understand what 'voice' in writing meant, how such an understanding might develop, or change, over the course of a writer's career, and the role, if any, teachers, or education, play in that development. Participants within each group received similar interviews.

Berg (1989) explained that the use of multiple research strategies, or triangulation, increases the depth of understanding a research study can provide. Borg and Gall (1989) wrote "triangulation is simply a form of replication that contributes greatly to our confidence in the research findings" (p. 393). Lancy (1993) argued that using multiple

data collection methods is the qualitative researcher's best defense against the suggestion that findings may include researcher bias, or be too subjective. An attempt to address these same goals was made by including three different groups of individuals in the interviews, by inviting participants to read and approve the transcript of their own interviews before analysis, and as well to read and approve the final analysis to check that they had not been misrepresented. Although this is not strictly triangulation, the goals behind this method were the same: to increase depth of understanding, to increase confidence in findings, and to eliminate, or reduce, researcher influence on the data analysis.

Thus, transcriptions of interviews and a copy of the final analysis were offered to participants to make whatever changes or deletions they may choose. I tried to stress that an example of a change would be if they had said something that they later felt didn't represent clearly what they believed, or if they had changed their mind about something they had said. I didn't want participants to feel they were to edit their interview for language mistakes. Some participants chose to see both their transcript and the analysis, some chose to see neither, and some chose to receive a copy of the analysis to read for their interest. This varied response was present within each group, meaning not all one participant group chose the same option.

Examples of changes some participants chose to make to their transcriptions would be as follows: from 'But I like literature that's you know all across the range' to 'But I like literature from a wide range of genres and subjects'; words like 'stuff' were changed to more specific nouns; phrases like 'you know' were often deleted; phrases repeated in casual conversation were deleted such as 'I wrote, I write poems a lot, I write, well' was changed to 'I write poems a lot'.

I entered this research study with no pre-conceived ideas as to what the findings might reveal. Participants were truly viewed and honored as those who knew more than I did about the topic and who were generously giving of their time to help me better

understand. Perhaps rather than entering the study with any assumptions, I entered the research harboring a tiny niggling grey fear in a back corner of my mind. A tiny fear that even after the study's completion I might not better understand 'voice in writing' at all - that after interviewing writers and teachers I would be faced with the reality of my literature review: that 'voice in writing' means different things to different people and none of it any clearer to me. My tiny grey fear would become the color of my understanding.

Data Analysis

Although all interviews were transcribed verbatim, transcriptions were cleaned up somewhat which meant eliminating 'ums' and those interjections of 'yeah' we make when we are listening. Some phrases were edited to protect the confidentiality of participants. Punctuation was added to make reading for meaning easier. However, editing was restricted to a minimum to retain the essence of the interview, and each audio-recording was kept for future reference if needed. Transcripts used for the analysis were thus my original transcript when the participant had not requested to view it, or the transcript received back after participants had made whatever changes or deletions they chose. An excerpt from a student transcript is included in Appendix G. Appendix H contains an excerpt from a Teacher's transcript, and Appendix I an excerpt from an Adult Writer's transcript. These included transcript samples are pre-analysis.

Transcripts were first analyzed by group. Each transcript was subjected to several readings. In the right margin, during successive readings, I drew pencil lines beside comments I thought significant and often made one or two word notes in pencil if I thought I may have detected a critical response. This was done for each transcript within each group.

Then, I assigned numbers to the three driving research questions on my own interview question guide. Questions in each transcript designed to address these three research questions were given corresponding numbers in the left margin. Each transcript was then re-read and responses made to these questions were given the same corresponding numbers. Transcripts were further studied until all quotes that I wanted to include in the analysis had been assigned a research question number. Thus, quotes were used in connection to one of the three main research questions that may have been given in response to a different question, but that was deemed relevant to understanding of the research question. This process was completed for each interview group.

A similar process was completed for questions that ran across all three groups. Common responses as well as diversions in perspective were noted so that this section of the analysis drew together the ideas each group contributed to each question.

Lancy (1993) wrote about discovering the appropriate level of analysis. He explained that at one extreme there is almost no analysis, rather a mere accounting or description is provided. At the other extreme is "analysis to the nth degree" (Lancy, 1993, p. 21). This research study posed a series of questions in which exploratory responses were anticipated. The responses, and even the ambiguity in response, serve as the 'answer' to many of the research questions. In the analysis, responses were reported in an organized way under the appropriate research question and insights were drawn from those responses.

It is relevant to note that the insights gleaned through the analysis were experienced through the writing of the analysis, and not through the reading of the transcripts. Cooper and Odell (1978) in Research on Composing: Points of Departure argued that the process of writing helps to discover meaning. Murray wrote "I believe increasingly that the process of discovery, of using language to find out what you are going to say, is a key part of the writing process" (Cooper and Odell, 1978, p. 91). Murray (1987) argued in his book Write to Learn that "the more you write the more you will discover about your

subject, your world, and yourself" (p. 266). Murray also argued that writers of non-creative works especially find it hard to admit to the discovery process that occurs through the actual writing (Cooper and Odell, 1978). Thus, although I do not consider myself to be a writer, I felt I experienced some sense of the discovery through writing that my participant writers often alluded to. The experience that sometimes when you sit down to the keyboard you do not know exactly what you will write, but the act of writing brings the message. For me, the meaning in the transcript and the understanding gleaned through analysis were only made clear when I started writing.

Strengths of this Study

Two aspects of the design of this study may enable it to make a contribution, however small, to understanding specific aspects of writing.

First, the research study is very focused on the participants' perception of voice in writing. The semi-structured interview style strengthened this focus and made analysis of data by research question possible because participants received very similar questions.

Second, the study design provides for multiple perspectives. The three interview groups each offer a valid contribution to the study. This researcher was unable to locate any study where individuals were surveyed for their understanding of voice. Research done by Kamberelis and McGinley (1992) on the issue of 'voice' examined the writing only. This study looks to the writers - which raises an interesting question: Is 'voice in writing' connected to the writer or the writing?

Limitations of this Study

This study is limited to the perspectives of the participants and the small geographic area, the west coast of British Columbia, from which they come.

Group samples were homogeneous.

Participants, for the most part, were either fiction writers or teachers of writing fiction. Thus, responses and understandings may have been different if a participant group had a focus on non-fiction.

Considerations of Validity and Reliability

Borg and Gall (1989) describe external validity as the degree to which the findings can be generalized to the population from which the participants were drawn (p. 400). There are no claims of generalizability beyond the participant population. Internal validity is the degree to which the research findings can be distorted by extraneous variables (Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 405). These variables were not perceived as a threat to this study as this study was not longitudinal and participation involved only one data gathering interview. An awareness of the opportunity for the researcher to slant the data was monitored by using direct quotes of longer length, and by allowing for participant checks on transcriptions and the completed analysis.

Reliability of this personal interview study was obtained by allowing for participant checks on the data. Participants were given the opportunity to verify their individual transcription, as well as to verify the analysis and to ensure that the researcher has not misinterpreted the data. In addition, the use of a semi-structured interview with question guides increased the reliability as each participant experienced as close to the same interview as possible. Support for such reliability checks is found in Borg and Gall (1989).

Privacy

Do not invade my space.
I must have time to think
And sit quietly behind
The borders I have created.
Do not cross my lines.
I must rest my ears
And wash them out
With silence.
Do not talk to me.
I must replenish my energy
And strengthen my aching body
Without movement.
Do not invade my space.
I must be alone.

by Tessa Campbell

Chapter Four

My Participants' Voices

In this chapter I analyzed the data obtained from all the interviews. Data were first analyzed individually, then within groups, and finally across groups. Data are organized around the three questions that drove this research study.

Order of presentation of data follows the order in which the majority of the questions were asked in the interview. However, please note that all interview questions asked under one research question were not necessarily asked together. Although a more logical order for presenting the research questions, and consequently for asking the questions, may be obvious - definition, development, teaching - I believe that both a sense of the interview and a sense of the progression of thought would be lost had the presentation order deviated from that in the interview. In particular, I felt in the interview I could not jump right in and ask my participants for a definition of a term. Defining is a difficult skill and defining voice has proven very difficult indeed as the literature review shows, (Elbow, 1981; Wier & Hendrie, 1985). Hawkes, in Baumbach, (Ed.) 1970, stated that the lack of a specific definition for voice needs addressing. Thus, the interview began with a discussion of the writers' development as writers, and moved gradually towards a question on definition.

Question: Is voice in writing developed, or is it discovered? What is the role of the English teacher in the development of the writer, or is there one?

The Teachers of Writing and their Responses:

The question in the interview question guide, addressed to teachers of writing, and designed to address this research question was:

- Do we help students to write with voice?

Throughout the interviews with the teachers of writing the role of teachers was mentioned more often than only when the specific 'teaching' question was asked. Thus, comments that follow were not necessarily made in response to the direct question about the teaching of writing.

M.B. confirmed my initial thinking that because voice is seemingly hard to define, it must be difficult to teach: *"so I think that whole personal voice thing is, you're on the right track, that's what you're looking for, but because it's hard to define it's hard to deliver to students."* He described voice as something personal to each writer and so writers discover their individual voices. The implication is that there is no one voice, but rather a voice for each of us. M.B. said that *"the difficulty we have in perhaps not turning out more students who have it is -there's no formula."* M.B. stated that writing with voice demands hard work, that some writers may get it in five months, some in a decade. When asked if voice could be taught M.B. answered, *"I think you can teach people to work toward a voice, but not in terms of here's what you do and you'll get it."* M.B. explained that the Writing class offered in his school helps students to create a personal voice in their writing because the course, by nature of its design, encourages students to take risks in their writing and *"that is a very strong component of having a strong voice."* M.B. argued that writers are always experimenting, trying new techniques, new venues. Teachers try to teach students to write with voice, M.B. said, in fiction and in non-fiction. M.B. said that he tells his students that on government exams only those pieces that have a strong personal voice will get full marks.

When asked how we might teach voice in our Writing classes K.J. was quite specific in her response. First, we share good literature, literature that we feel has voice, showing students what it sounds like, what it looks like. Then, *"the trick is to get them to trust their own voices."* K.J. approaches this last daunting task in a methodical way. K.J. has her students free write in journals, which she takes in, and a conversation between her

and her students often develops on the page: *"and that I think does something to help them, it's a matter of self-esteem and confidence."* K.J. explained that this conversation validates the writing for the students, and validates their opinions, encouraging them to continue thinking and sharing. Friday is a sharing class and students have been taught to respond in a positive way; inquiries about the work shared are welcome but negatives are not. K.J. encourages students to use their oral voices to discuss literature from outside as well as from inside the classroom. K.J.'s aim in this oral voicing exercise is for her students to *"begin to understand their own experience and give voice to it."* K.J. explained that when students have developed the confidence to voice their own experience, their own world view, then they can begin to struggle with doing this in their writing as well. Thus, K.J. makes a strong reading/writing connection using models of good literature, and makes a connection between the oral voice and the writing voice of the individual as having the courage to experience one can lead to the courage to express the other. Connections between oral voice and voice in writing are made frequently in the literature (Fletcher, 1993; Elbow, 1981; Frank and Wall, 1994; Graves, 1990; and Rico, 1983).

In our discussion of voiceless writing K.J. mentioned the importance of teaching against this type of writing. When asked how she would do this she answered:

by giving lots of feedback, by giving examples of your own writing, by giving examples of other people's ... By showing how textbook writing is ... unengaging. ... But mostly by talking, by going back and forth, back and forth, responding to journals...

Connections between the oral and writing voice, between reading and writing, and between the person of the writer and the writing, are reaffirmed. K.J. said, *"By the end of the semester I always hope that that's one thing I would have taught them - that their ideas are valuable and they need to have the guts to put them down on paper."*

J.P. also reinforced the difficulty with voice not being defined: *"I think voice is probably the most abstract of any of the labels that we can give to literature."* She mentioned how problematic that is to students who are often more concrete and sequential.

When asked how we might teach voice in our writing classes, J.P. answered, *"I don't think you can teach voice per se. I think you can talk about it or read things to people or recommend books that you think have got a voice."* The reading/writing connection is implicit here. J.P. said *"in my classroom I do a lot of work, showing them different forms of writing and encouraging them to think about the shape, not just what they're saying but how do they want to put it together."* Offering models of good literature, teaching craft, thinking about the desired end result, all contribute to teaching voice.

But teaching voice is problematic. J.P. stated, *"It's like asking how Leonard Cohen learned how to be Leonard Cohen."* That voice is undefined makes it difficult to discuss in any knowing sort of way. The relationship between the self of the writer and the voice in the writing is suggested. J.P. felt that student writers would discover, more than develop, voice in their writing because *"it's almost an act of faith."* J.P. referred to the hard work and devotion to writing necessary for writers to achieve. J.P. also said that as teachers we do a much better job now that we make our students aware that there are no right answers. There is a connection here to K.J.'s assertion that we need to give students courage to look inward and voice their own answers.

When asked about teaching voice D.N. answered *"it's a difficult thing to teach in as much as every writer brings their own background to what they write and creates their own voice. And if they become good writers, it's exclusively and recognizably their own voice."* Voice then is connected to the person of the writer, and one cannot teach that. However, D.N. did tell an anecdote of a student writer she was working with *"and I knew from reading what she wrote that what she needed to do was read more ... so that she could get that same flavour or voice in her writing that she was looking for."* D.N.

helped this student in her struggle for voice by directing her to read particular authors. D.N. wanted the student to "*see the difference between her prose which was trying too hard and their prose which had the voice but didn't feel like it was trying too hard.*" Each teacher interviewed mentioned that beginning writers often 'try too hard' or over-write and stifle the voice in their writing. This writing lacked the 'seamlessness' often noted in better writers' work.

D.N. also mentioned the difficulty of trying to teach what is not defined: "*Voice, you can't even give them the definition, you just have to hope that they're going to know what that really looks like.*" For D.N. then, the role of the Writing teacher seems to be providing models of good literature, teaching technique, listening, and offering encouragement.

Summary of Teachers' Responses:

The consensus here was that voice in writing cannot be taught directly. The teachers seemed to feel that voice is something discovered, or created, on one's own through a lot of hard work. Voice is the result of the strong connection between the self of the writer, and all that writers bring to their writing, and the writing itself, and this of course cannot be taught. The role of the English teacher is to teach what one can (technique), and to offer a supportive and encouraging environment. Of particular importance to this group of respondents was creating a reading/writing connection that would include the best literature available from outside the classroom, and the students' own writing. By sharing good literature teachers can show what good literature looks like, and what voice in writing sounds like. When students share their own work they gain confidence to take risks and experiment in their own writing. Confidence will help them to be more introspective, and to develop the courage to give voice to their own experience. The courage necessary to take risks in writing and to put some of themselves on the page was something the teachers tried to develop in their students. Good writing requires

confidence as the teachers noted. McAlexander and Marston (1994) concluded from their case study that a lack of self-confidence can truly undermine voice in students' writing. The teachers acknowledged that a lack of a definition for voice was problematic for teaching, and also in helping students to be able to discuss voice, and to recognize voice.

The Student Writers:

Questions in the interview question guide asked of student writers, and designed to address this research question, included:

- What can you tell me about your development as a writer? Have there been stages in your development that you could identify? How has your writing changed over time?
- What has helped you to develop as a writer? Where did you learn what you know about writing? How much of what you know about writing did you learn from yourself?
- Could somebody teach someone else how to write with voice?

Khalid connected his growth as a writer to the changes in his reading material.

When he was younger and reading rebellious writers he tended to write full of angst, and

as I started reading better works, and better works with more merit, it kind of came down on paper too as well. And once I was able to put thoughts concretely into my head and not just thoughts that I didn't really know if they had any ground.

When probed further Khalid mentioned his increased self-knowledge, and the development of a sense of audience as contributing to his development as a writer.

Khalid listed five things that helped him to develop as a writer: reading, music as it helped get him in the mood for writing, life experiences, school, and he named his writing teacher specifically. When asked how much of what he knows about writing Khalid learned from himself he answered:

Probably about half and half. About half and half, because I was writing before I learned how to write and then once I learned how to write, of course, I was still writing, but then I was just writing better.

When asked about whether someone could teach someone else to write with voice, Khalid answered that, "*writing comes from experience and education ... I guess you need a good balance of both to write great poems.*" This is a more general answer that addresses the teaching of writing as opposed to the more specific teaching of voice, but it is relevant because it stresses the importance of experience and education, or a blend of self and teacher.

Stacey immediately mentioned school and the Grade 12 writing course when asked about identifiable stages in his development as a writer. Of profound importance was one particular realization that came through his writing course:

I just realized that that's what has interested me all along. Like if I liked a line it was because I could see it, but I didn't know why before and I was like 'of course, that's why I liked that line because it gives you a clear picture!'

Perhaps stages in his career could, at this point, be divided into a pre-writing-course stage, and a post-writing-course stage.

Stacey mentioned two things in particular as having helped him to develop as a writer: practice, and the support of friends and school. Stacey is a member of a writing club in which a few of his peers gather and share what they have been writing. The encouragement and friendly pressure to write are helpful. School referred to both his writing class and his literature class. Writing class gave him confidence to write and to share his writing; the literature class provided him with opportunity to read good poetry and literature and consider what he liked and did not like about what he read. The literature class also allowed him to examine what he read from the writer's perspective he'd gained in writing class.

Stacey also felt he learned about writing from himself. When asked where he learned what he knows about writing Stacey answered:

I think a lot through the process of writing a poem and saying 'here, what do you think of this? oh, you don't like it, then I won't write a poem like that again.' And a lot of that and a lot of reading and deciding what I like about other people's poems.

He stated that *"I think outside sources compelled me to learn about it from myself. Like people criticizing poems and stuff like that and I sort of had to learn more about writing because I wanted people to like my poems."* When asked to consider how much of what he knew about writing he had learned from himself Stacey answered *"I think a lot actually ... I think more than I give myself credit for."* The importance of practice and learning to edit one's own work are suggested in his answer.

When asked if someone could teach somebody else to write with voice Stacey answered: *"You could imitate people. Like I could teach somebody to write like me but I think it would be distinctly different."* Asked further about this Stacey explained that:

in teaching someone else how to write with their voice you would be teaching them technique because you'd have to teach them how, like if I was teaching you to write like me ... I'd have to teach you my technique for writing.

If we can teach people to imitate others, do they write with that other's voice? Perhaps we can teach technique but not voice.

When asked what has aided her in her development as a writer Pat mentioned school, and the influence of family and friends. School because, *"from the very beginning really you are forced to write in many different ways ... I think you need all that background experience in order to be able to produce something that is of value later."* Pat credits family and friends for pushing her to do better, and for encouraging her to strive for excellence.

When asked if there were stages in her development Pat answered "*basically the elementary school stage, and then the actually starting to express slightly more mature writing in high school, and then the university stage. I don't have any other break downs; that's how I think of it.*" In elementary school Pat was encouraged to write different forms of poetry. In grade nine Pat took a writing class from an enthusiastic teacher and this experience encouraged her to write and pushed her writing into longer pieces such as short stories. Her university stage is marked by the course requirements for papers, and her own desire to continue to be published in her area of interest, biology. Her pursuit of publication has developed her sense of audience, or as Pat said:

I knew which audience I was planning to tailor to, so now when I have my focus quite a bit more narrow then I think that I can expand more in that area and learn more to focus or direct it to that audience.

School has played a major role in Pat's writing, both as contributing to her development as a writer, and as delineating the stages in that development.

Pat very eloquently expressed the importance of self-motivation and learning from oneself when asked how much of what she knew about writing she had learned from herself. Her response was:

I think that school is a catalyst, but you have to take that beyond, you have to push yourself. I don't know how much I learned from myself, I just know that from myself I, that's where the motivation came from. That's where the motivation came from to do a good job, and to look up avenues that possibly weren't open before or weren't open at the first level if you just take it straight at the school level, or just what you learned from lecture or class.

Pat's maturity and the competitive spirit that propel her toward excellence are evident in the above response. The idea that to be a writer one must do much on one's own, beyond what might be asked in class, is a recurring one.

At the end of the interview, Pat stated that what she believed would be most helpful to students would be for English teachers to show students what good writing is. She felt that examples of good writing were lacking from her instruction, and that such models would be helpful in providing direction for students' own writing. Albers (1989) advocated the use of models in writing instruction.

When asked for any identifiable stages in her development as a writer Chris's response suggested two stages: her pre-writing-class stage, and her post-writing-class stage. Chris mentioned her move from very personal poetry before her writing class, to poetry "*about everyday stuff that had happened to me and things that affected me a lot, but I didn't get all emotional in the poems.*" In her writing class Chris said she learned how to edit and that seems to have had a major influence on her. In support of the identification of these two distinct stages, when asked what has helped her to develop as a writer, Chris mentioned her writing teacher immediately, and of course, learning how to edit and let go of bad writing. When asked how much about writing she learned from her writing class Chris answered "*almost everything.*" When probed further Chris stated that she learned about writing from reading and from her writing class. When asked how much of what she knows about writing she learned from herself Chris answered "*only that I like it.*" The writing class had a profound influence on Chris's writing career.

When asked whether writing with voice could be taught Chris answered:
I think everybody can write with voice. I don't think everybody chooses to. I don't think it's something that's really taught, you're just taught how to write with voice well. So that other people can read your poems and like them more. I don't think voice is taught; I think it is enhanced and bettered.

When asked why some writers would choose not to write with voice Chris suggested a fear of criticism and that "*some people just may not care enough about writing to bother to put voice into their work.*"

Sveah said that development of a sense of audience marked a stage in her development as a writer. Like many beginning writers Sveah began writing poetry, and never showed anyone, writing only for herself. Then:

I started wanting to share it with other people but they didn't always understand it, and so I went through sort of a period where I thought that they shouldn't understand it because it was just me. And then I came to the point where I tried to write so that other people can understand it because that way I have to get into it more. Like if I'm the only one who understands my poetry then it's useless because it probably isn't really saying what I'm thinking anyways.

Here, Sveah described stages that many beginning writers seem to go through - a period where the writing seems unshareable, the period where you share but the writing speaks to no one, and then the period where the desire to share and be understood takes over and a sense of audience develops. Perhaps at this time craft becomes studied as seriously as content has been, a more universal truth can emerge, and communication can take place.

When asked about what has helped her to develop as a writer Sveah said she got most assistance from her writing class at school, second, the writing group of her peers that she belongs to, and third through her reading. Of her writing group's contribution to her development Sveah said the group meets weekly and *"it sort of keeps us in line. Because if we haven't written anything for three weeks we know it because we see what everybody else is doing and it helps us to get opinions and editing and things like that."* Reading helps to give one a *"better feel for just flow and how things work."*

Sveah also felt she learned quite a bit about writing from herself. She felt it was important for her to consciously pay attention to others or she would only listen to herself. She summed up saying, *"So I guess most of it I learned from myself and then from other people I learned how to communicate it out."* Sveah became a writer on her own, and only polished her craft with outside assistance.

Sveah said that she thought she would discover, as opposed to develop, her writing voice one day when she was older, as who she is changes, and she has more life experience to draw upon. The role of time or maturation in developing voice in writing was mentioned by Elbow (1981) and Murray (1982). Sveah stated that there were definite things that could be learned as well to make one's voice stronger, "*and if you never learn them then you might just be going on instinct and your instinct might be wrong.*" When asked to explain further Sveah answered:

well not necessarily stronger but more suited to the character. Like if you're having the voice of an eight year old you definitely have to speak with different sentence structure than if you're going to have an eighty year old. So I think it's a good exercise to look at how voices are different and consciously think about that.

Sveah suggests that voice, or exercises toward voice, can be taught. As well, in her answer, she linked voice with the oral voice of the character. The connection between voice in writing and an oral voice is relevant here, as is the subtle suggestion of the importance of listening for voice. The importance of listening recurs in discussions with some of the adult writers and is supported by the literature review. Does her answer also suggest a link with point of view, as in is the voice in the writing connected to the point of view the story is told from?

When asked for any identifiable stages in her development as a writer Sandi referred to how the content had changed. When she first began writing seriously she used her classmates for characters, as well as for an audience. Then she became interested in period literature and wrote stories set in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Later she became interested in fairy tales and tried writing those. Next she tried writing stories set in the mid-1930' to mid-1940s. She also experiments with characters and writing stories about animals. Sandi felt her experimentation with content marked stages in her development. Sandi also referred to her improved vocabulary as helping make her stories

better and more interesting. She also mentioned her use of detail as something she had grown to do which, when coupled with increased vocabulary, might make her writing more difficult than it had been before.

When asked what has helped her to develop as a writer Sandi mentioned her reading as being a source of information and inspiration, and the people she meets "*make interesting targets for stories*". When asked where she learned what she knows about writing Sandi mentioned her English teacher, and her own reading.

Sandi's response to how much of what you know about writing did you learn from yourself suggested the importance of practicing the craft, and life experience as a source of ideas for content. She answered, "*I think a lot, because when I do something, like walk down the street and sit down I imagine my life, or what I'm doing, as a movie. And in my head I'm kind of writing the script, setting the scene, and that teaches me little things, and gives me ideas for stories.*" Sandi's answer suggests the importance of pre-writing which would include creating sketches in writing of what interests her, and these one can do on one's own, thus constituting learning from oneself.

When asked if somebody could teach someone else to write with voice Sandi answered affirmatively, but only if the student had talent in writing. However, she added, if students had talent for writing they would already be writing with voice.

Summary of the Student Writers' Responses:

Although there was not total consensus in the students' responses it is relevant to note the themes that kept recurring. When speaking of their development as writers, and what aided them in that development, these responses were repeated: the influence of Writing/English teachers, the importance of reading, writing courses taken, and the support and influence of family and friends.

The strongest influence in each of the student writer's lives came from their school. All but one student had taken a writing class. The writing classes had considerable

effects on the students, and their involvement with writing continued well beyond the end of the class. Some of the students interviewed are in the process of trying to self-publish their own book of poetry. (Some of the poems from that expected publication grace the pages of this thesis.) For many students their lives can almost be divided into pre and post-writing class stages. Many used their school experience to describe their development as writers.

Nearly all of the students indicated that they had learned a significant amount of what they knew about writing from themselves. Students learned from the practice and writing they did, from their own experimentation with content, style, and language, and from the peer writing groups they formed. Learning from oneself was necessary in order to be a writer.

When we look at these responses and try to determine the role of the English teacher in a writer's development, we can see some suggestions. Although it was recognized that technique could be taught, students were ambiguous about teaching voice. However, the role of the English teacher needs to be further examined as it was claimed by these writers as having had the largest impact on their careers thus far.

The Adult Writers:

Questions in the interview question guide asked of adult writers, and designed to address this research question, included:

- What can you tell me about your development as a writer? Have there been stages in your development that you could identify? How has your writing changed over time?
- What has helped you to develop as a writer? Where did you learn what you know about writing? How much of what you know about writing did you learn from yourself?
- Could somebody teach someone else how to write with voice?

Smyth, when asked if there were stages in his development as a writer that he could identify, identified three things, albeit with some uncertainty. First, he mentioned that he

had needed to learn to write for different audiences, and for different media. Second, he mentioned that as he wrote more, as his writing career developed, he gained more confidence. This increased confidence helped him develop his own individuality in his writing:

I suppose that what happens is you do over time develop a voice that's a little more your own, that's a little less self-consciously imitative, where whatever influences might have been brought to bear in your writing get folded into something that becomes a little more specifically your own.

When asked what had helped him in his development Smyth's first response was acceptance: "*Probably acceptance more than anything else ... If I were not published I probably wouldn't have persisted.*" After acceptance - perseverance. Smyth also mentioned that he had never taken a writing course, had only attended one friendly workshop, and so formal instruction in that sense had not been a source of guidance in his writing.

Smyth learned what he knows about writing from writing: "*Just by doing it I suppose. And by kind of listening to what you do and by seeing if it works.*" I asked him to explain listening:

I try to hold the thing in my mouth as it were and see how it all works, how it fits into the broader context of what's already there, how one thing leads to another. I think of it as a kind of listening. For me a lot of writing - it's about listening initially, it's about listening to ... wherever it is ideas come from, being tuned into that to know when something settles in you that this is something you can explore. It's about listening so that you catch your own habits, and try not to get caught up in them. ... So that's what I mean by listening - by listening critically to yourself in some way.

Fletcher (1993) said that writers, unlike others, know how to listen. Graves (1990) advocated the development of something he called a "listening voice" (p.87). Rico

(1983) also argued for the importance of listening to tuning the ear to real voice. It is relevant that part of Smyth's answer to this question was, "*I have always known that this is what I in some way could do. When I say always known I mean always known.*" This must in some way also have bearing on where Smyth learned what he knows about writing.

When asked if writing with voice could be taught Smyth said he did not know: "*I just don't know because I can't imagine setting out to do that.*" Later he added:

I think maybe if I were teaching what I'd probably want to do is just give everybody room to feel that it's something they could do if they felt like they wanted to. You know to be as encouraging as that, and whatever voice is I imagine would come...

This idea is in keeping with how Smyth described the one workshop he attended. When asked about the workshop Smyth described the teacher: "*she was an extraordinary teacher in that she found something that was positive to say about everybody's writing and that was what she focused on.*" The need to be positive, encouraging, and supportive surfaced in discussions with the teachers of writing as well.

Robins had also never taken a formal writing course after high school, and never went to workshops. When asked about her development as a writer Robins described herself as "*self-taught*" and said: "*I basically developed as a writer by writing.*" Robins said: "*the key element in my development as a writer - simply by doing it, by making mistakes, by trying not to make the same mistakes again.*" Robins also mentioned the importance of reading, and mentioned that she has read a lot of books about writing which has also helped. These responses were also answers to the question of what aided her development as a writer. When answering that question Robins mentioned reading and what she has learned through her own experience writing. In particular Robins spoke of the importance of trying different types of stories, styles, and genres. Robins said writers have to be prepared to take risks in their writing, and that taking on new

challenges helps writers develop their writing. She also said "*reading out loud really, really is something that helps. Listening to the cadence of the language.*" Robins also mentioned the assistance and guidance she has received from editors.

When asked how her writing has changed over time Robins mentioned some of the things about writing that she has learned that have helped change her writing. She said, "*one of the things that I've learned is simple writing is often better than very effusive, expansive, flowery purple prose kind of writing.*" She said she has learned to spend more time looking for just the right words, and to be more original in ideas and imagery. Robins said she also learned from experience that sometimes ideas will find their own genres.

When Robins teaches workshops on writing she advises her students to write every day, and to believe in themselves as writers, to even visualize themselves as successful writers being published. She added, "*I think writers all have their own internal voice. I'm not sure it can be learned. I think it's something that's maybe intuitive, or instinctive.*" She explained: "*I don't think you can make [voice] happen. I think it's something that has to come naturally.*" However, Robins did say that "*you can sharpen the voice, you can make it clearer*", and that is technique, which can be taught.

When asked about possible stages in her development as a writer Hogan mentioned the struggles that have been part of her career. She mentioned that "*part of the struggle is to retain who you are amongst this great world of literature you're in.*" Second, "*there's that struggle with the market.*" Here she talked about the struggle to make it financially as a writer, and to write things with integrity and individuality and that offer something people will want to read. She added, "*Before that it was trying to get published.*"

Hogan said that what really aided her in her development as a writer was "*having one good teacher in high school and later a good editor.*" She explained that the biggest turning point for her in her writing was having an objective person look at her work and give her some constructive feedback, not the happy answer she might like to hear.

When asked where she learned what she knows about writing Hogan answered everywhere, and then added that one of the most important places was through reading. She also said that having a good editor has taught her a lot about writing, as has being a part of a group of writers who meet regularly to discuss their writing and craft generally.

Like many other writers Hogan said she learned a lot of what she knows about writing from herself: *"I think it always comes down to you. And that's one of the integral things about writing; the bottom line is you are on your own ... Everything comes from you."* Hogan made an analogy to running: *"You can be a great runner by studying other people's running style but inevitably you have to get out there and run."* Writing is learned by writing.

Hogan seemed to believe that some people would excel at writing or running, and some people, regardless of all the coaching, would not. She said:

I don't think you can turn non-writers into writers simply by giving them all the materials and having them practice. I think there has to be some core there. It isn't simply a matter of learning about plot or character or narrative. These skills, once learned, make competent writers, not great writers.

Although Hogan would argue that one cannot teach everyone to be a great writer, she did identify that technique could be taught. She said:

there are a range of people who have the ability to learn to use some of those technical skills and yes I think that can be taught. And I think largely what you have to do is teach people to listen to themselves.

However, some skills necessary to be a great writer Hogan said would be hard to teach including:

Listening to yourself, telling your own stories, these are hard to teach. Then, teaching someone to observe is a little more difficult too - the subtleties of the way people use language, the motivations behind their

actions, etc. their quirks of character. These things are much harder to teach.

What we teach, Hogan said, are the technical skills of writing like *"how to put together a paragraph, where plot points should come, etc.."*

At the end of our interview Hogan added:

I would like to see a little bit more care given to less concrete writing skills in education rather than just technical skills I think we're always looking for the rules and the structure to fit things into and those are all the short and easy ways around things. Some of the more difficult parts of writing really relate to what successful writers do well and that is to integrate some of those observation skills, and communication skills into the stories they want and need to tell. I'd also like to see young people write from the place inside themselves rather than focusing on technical structures. This can be learned later. I think that a good story is a good story is a good story and it doesn't matter what technical wizardry you apply to it. If there is no core, the framework that you're trying to fit a story into won't matter. You can learn those other parts later. It's the core of really telling a good story that we sometimes lack. I see it a lot in young people's writing. Particularly in high school. They want their work to be fast and jumpy and edgy but there's nothing at the bottom of it. The few young writers that are getting published are tapping into something real. That makes us want to read it. Even if it's got a few technical errors, even if we can see that this is a writer that's developing, who's not quite there yet, we are willing to forgive that. We are not willing to forgive a story that really doesn't have anything at its center.

Browne identified a few stages that she experienced on her road to becoming a writer, also identifying that many of these experiences are typical of many writers. She began by saying:

I knew I wanted to be a [writer] when I went to a summer school of the arts and took a workshop in my mid-twenties. At that time I went very tentatively with just this old interest in writing and met some people who became mentors and who really encouraged me. ... One of the stages of writing is knowing that this is going to be a life work and not merely something you do on the weekends.

Robins had mentioned experiencing something similar, of coming to that point where a decision and commitment had to be made. Browne continued:

That first summer school was a step in my learning process. I learned that poetry was what I could do, what I wanted to do, and that it meant a lot of sacrifices - steady work, security, retirement plans and all that stuff.

Now, Browne suggested, stages are marked by stages in her own life, and by what she continues to learn through her writing. She said her learning comes through her reading, and that what she is interested in learning has changed and that also marks a stage in her development. Browne explained:

I'm no longer concerned about the kinds of things I can write about. I learned about the possibilities of content when I was younger. ... Now it's a matter of what's a different way of constructing a poem, what's a different way of bringing words onto the page ... I probably wanted a well-made poem more than I want that now. I'm more interested in how you can bring imperfection into the form and keep it going...

Browne suggests that continual development as a writer marks stages in a career.

Changes in her writing are also indicative of her development as a writer. Browne said that the issues she writes about now are more complex than before, thus content has

changed. She said she has developed a sense of humour in her work that was absent before. Also, Browne said that she experiments with form and structure more now.

Two things in particular really aided Browne in her development as a writer: *"First of all it was the support, the nurturing that aided me. And I had almost instant success, and that was really lucky."* As well, Browne said that living with another writer has been a great aide to her writing: *"it was partly having the affirmation of another person who believes in the same thing you do, and has the same passion."* Support surfaces repeatedly as being helpful, even though many writers describe writing as a solitary activity.

When asked where she learned what she knows about writing Browne answered, *"I would say I'm an autodidact in that field. I mean just reading and reading and thinking about it."* Browne agreed that she learned most of what she knows about writing from herself, but she added, *"there are crucial stages in my writing life, and I see that in my students' writing lives too, where you need a good editor, where you need an outside eye."* Again the importance of reading, the importance of an editor.

Browne, although known first and foremost as a writer, is also a teacher of writing. When asked if one could teach someone else to write with voice Browne said:

You can't say 'here's an exercise, go write it with voice'. You need to create a comfortable enough space that people can dare to show who they are and how they really feel. ... A teacher needs to make them feel comfortable enough to say these things and not to use clichés and generalities and the kind of language that obfuscates. That's one way of teaching them about voice.

When talking about her own teaching Browne said:

the work I do is to try and show them why this writing, although they may have a skill that they've been praised for for many years and won the

yearbook prize, that this writing shows me nothing about them and nothing about language. I'd call that voiceless writing.

Teaching people to write with voice, for Browne, means encouraging people to put themselves into their writing. To write from inside themselves, and to be themselves in their words. As well, Browne said she tries to show her students that writing is hard work. She said she tries to encourage her students *"to be honest and authentic and not to take the easy way out and dig deeper, and work harder, and read, read, read."*

Browne explained that the good high school writing she has read happens because *"they're taking risks because they have teachers who are telling them that it's okay to do so. If the teacher takes risks, the students will as well."*

Browne also said that teaching writing, teaching voice, is hard to do. She said: *"it's why writing in some ways is so hard to teach. You know, you can only teach certain things but other stuff is serendipity. Or aging. Whatever, life experience."* Later she added, *"what makes writing so difficult to both teach and talk about is that most of it is instinct."* Perhaps this is that 'core' that Hogan talked about. That without the core, we are trying to turn non-writers into writers.

When asked if voice was developed or discovered, Browne answered developed: *"When you begin writing you don't have the courage to speak as who you are."* A lack of self confidence and an insecurity about craft at the starting point in a writer's career often stifle the voice.

Norris identified stages in his development as a writer, stages that younger writers also have to go through. He said, *"first of all ... it's just simply an emotional outlet and an intellectual outlet ... usually [young beginning] writers are terribly idealistic and writing is a way to express that."* He added, *"then one has to go through a whole bunch of stages that I have to take all my students through. One is learning craft, which is a long hard process."* Another stage, or important learning step for writers, Norris said, was *"learning the difference between criticism of the work and not taking it as criticism"*

of the author." Stages in a writer's development are sometimes demarcated by things learned.

When asked what aided him in his development as a writer, Norris mentioned three things in particular. First, a writing group he belonged to as a university student when he was first learning to write. Within this group there were professors who acted as instructors, and fellow students who were all in a similar position as novice writers. Secondly, Norris said that "*the fact that one finds mentors and acceptance is tremendously important.*" Third, Norris mentioned "*the fact that you need to write and to write and to write, just as you need to practice the piano, just as you need ice time if you want to be a gold medal figure skater.*"

Norris said that he learned most of what he knows about writing from himself, adding, "*unfortunately. It would have been so much easier if I had had a mentor, but there weren't any.*" Norris mentioned how that has changed with the emergence of better known Canadian writers, and writing classes and departments that can offer support, direction and encouragement to young writers. He explained:

I tell my students I can't teach you to write, I haven't the faintest idea of how to teach people to write, but what I can teach people is how to rewrite which most people have no idea how to do, and that's the critical thing. And what I can do is I can accelerate time so instead of my having to struggle all by myself all those long winters ... trying to teach myself craft and I have no idea what I'm doing, people can come here and I can maybe just simply show them something that maybe took me years to learn on my own.

When asked if teachers could teach their students to write with voice, Norris said "*I tell my students don't worry about voice. Worry about craft. Learn the things you can learn.*" Norris added, "*I don't teach them to write with voice. ... I wouldn't know how. What I teach them to do is to discover who they are.*" For Norris there is a definite

connection between the self and voice, and this understanding of self is something he directs his students to learn. He explained:

people go through the natural process of defining who they are, realizing through their fiction, discovering through their fiction what it is they really believe, and I believe that's a process of discovery. I don't write to tell people what I believe; I write to discover what I do believe.

For Norris, then, voice seems more discovered than developed.

When we were talking about voice, and the teaching of voice in classrooms, Norris said:

I went to the National Council of English in Chicago and I did a workshop but what I heard was very frightening. Two basic things for students are write about what you know about, and write about what you care about. And if what I was told by the teachers, and I assume it's true, then the students, they cannot tell the students those two things. Their students must not write what they know about, and they must not write what they care about because with this wave of social engineering over us in recent years we have found new ways to be authoritarian, and in these classrooms, if, it's law, if students write about things that in any way indicate that they or somebody else might be being abused it has to be reported. Legally. Now that means, now that is no different, that is just another way of approaching what goes on in countries like China and in countries in Africa; it's just another way of suppressing voice. ... that means a kid that comes from, you know, let's say that kid comes from a part of the city that is a lot of people are unemployed, a lot of people are on welfare, a lot of people are on drugs, that's what the kid knows about, that's what the kid deals with every day, and that's what the kid cares about. So if writing also can be therapy, and if also, if writing is a way out

and if the way to get the people to write is to purport to be real then you shut it down right there. And that is no different than what goes on in a totalitarian society in which if you write about something they'll put you in prison. That's exactly the same forces, the same people are at work, we're just approaching it differently. The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

The voice of authority, be it our educational institutions or government, is heard loud and clear, is powerful and pervasive. This voice, which cannot be denied, can stifle the voice of a child in a classroom, and the voice in the adult he turns out to be. Albers (1989) wrote that writing with voice can be a source of empowerment for students. Kennedy had argued that the students' voices ought to be central to the writing classroom (VanTassel-Baska, Johnson, Boyce (1996)). How does one respond then when someone from outside the classroom speaks to silence the voices within?

Douglas, a writer and a teacher of writing classes, said that she felt voice was over-rated, particularly in schools. She said:

I find young students coming in here ... who have been encouraged so much to develop their voice, whatever that is, that they have, they end up with almost no ability to express that voice in written form. By which I mean that it seems that, some teachers at any rate, think that voice is quite literally voice, and that if a student can in some way write down or cobble together a memory, a distressing memory or a happy memory, that that is sufficient. Students who come through that pedagogy are, they have very few choices in how they write.

Douglas argued that her job as a teacher of writing "is to give students the tools to move freely from one [discourse community] to the other, and that has very little to do with voice. Voice would be a by-product there." She continued:

My job is to give students tools so they can decide what kind of writer they want to be. ... It certainly decenters the teacher, because a writing teacher becomes more of a coach. You show them strategies, techniques. You give them feedback but you're not in there at the center.

Douglas explained that part of the difficulty with attempting to teach a writing class is coming up against the romantic pre-conceived ideas of writers that students often carry with them. She said:

we've gone through 200 years of the Romantic writer, that's the sort of writer-as-hero, by the way that carries a terrible fright for young people because there is this sense that writing is not something that can be taught, writing is the product of a noble mind or an artistic sensibility and I think far too many youngsters come to me with that idea from high school. And it's not just high school where they get it, you know the suffering artist, the artist trembling to find a voice. If people have bought into that view of writing there's not a hell of a lot you can do to help them.

However, Douglas said that she thought there were some intangibles involved in writing. She added:

you know, I think beyond a certain level of professional competence, there are intangibles of I don't know, maybe temperament, I don't know, maybe disposition. I'm much more inclined to look at the practical things - the number of books you've read before the age of 18, there are a whole lot of things like that, the kind of culture, family culture you come from, very talkative. I mean how rich was it? Did it value reading and writing? I mean all of these things obviously give certain people an edge when it comes to writing. And then there's the whole issue of commitment, you know, the difference between this is a very good athlete and an Olympic athlete. Clearly there's something there that's more than teaching and

learning. I don't know. But you don't have to get, it's not a very deep and tragic soul issue. It's some other gap. ...

So there is something there, some gap, that technique alone cannot explain, that makes great writers great? Reading, the importance of commitment, and the importance of writing, and writing, and writing that other writers have already mentioned, are again acknowledged as aides to becoming a writer.

Allen described her development as a writer in personal terms. She said, "*I am much more at ease now. ... And I no longer [care] what the critics have to say.*" About her writing she said that she has learned to let the story tell itself. Perhaps that comes with being more at ease, with being more confident in yourself as a writer. When asked what aided her in her development as a writer, Allen answered:

I think that the majority of writers that we would say have 'made it' (in quotations) and are successful, whatever that means, have been born. A large number of us have taken what some might call a curse, and turned it into a blessing. Lots of people want to wake up tomorrow morning and be professional writers but they won't, and they will never be because they don't want to put in the 25 years hard work it takes to get there. They won't want the loneliness and the criticism of others, mostly loved ones and those dearest who feel you are wasting your time, and wish you would do something more concrete, something more worth while...

Allen stresses in her response the singularity of purpose, solitude, and hard work that lead one to excel at writing.

Allen explained that she learned most about what she knows about writing from herself. She added that as a writer she learned a lot from reading, and she mentioned the influence of her high school English teacher who encouraged her reading. Allen said:

If I was going to give a beginning writer any advice it would be 'don't take a creative writing course - write!.' And also, don't expect to be published

until you're 33, and expect a difficult and lonely time, especially from your family who won't understand what you want to do.

Repeatedly, from writers, we hear the idea that writing successfully, requires a solitary pursuit of reading and writing. Some writers would argue that this pursuit can be augmented by writing classes that may be able to teach technique and shorten the road to success. Others would argue that one must go the whole distance alone.

Summary of the Adult Writers' Responses:

Many ideas were repeatedly mentioned by the adult writers when talking of their development as writers, and what aided them in that development. The importance of reading was mentioned. The importance of writing and writing was stressed. Having a good English teacher in high school was mentioned, as was receiving assistance from an editor now. Both of these offer the advantage of an outside eye and thus constructive criticism. Support and acceptance from colleagues and dear ones were mentioned more than once. Acceptance here also suggested success in that some writers felt that had they not achieved publishing success they would not have persevered. The two most mentioned aids in developing writing voice were reading, and writing. Writers mentioned the need to make a commitment to writing, to be willing to put in lots of time and hard work, and to be prepared to experiment with content and style.

All of these writers learned most of what they know about writing from themselves. A few of them had taken one workshop, although many of them teach writing in some form now. Writing, they said, is learned through writing, through perseverance and hard work. Writing was described as a solitary activity that, because it was so connected to the self of the writer, required self-knowledge and the pursuit of craft.

Technique can be taught but voice cannot. Voice is more innate, instinctual, something that can be discovered or developed after one has discovered who one is. However, technique can be taught that could help sharpen ones voice. Writing teachers

should provide an environment of support, and encourage students to take risks with their writing.

Summary of Responses Across All Three Groups:

Both groups of writers mentioned the same points when asked what aided them in their development as writers. The writers mentioned reading, their own experience writing text, school and their writing course, teachers and/or editors, support from friends and family, and success. What differed was the order in which they were mentioned, or the relative strength of influence attached to each one. For example, both groups mentioned reading as a strong influence, however the students would put reading behind the influence of their writing teacher, whereas the adult writers would balance the influence reading had on their development with the influence their own experience writing had. At this early stage in their careers the student writers do not separate as clearly as the adult writers do the influence of their own writing and the influence of their teacher or writing course. It appears that the more entrenched one is in their writing career the more influences are internally drawn, for example through reading and writing. Earlier in ones writing career perhaps one is more subject to external influences like ones teacher or friends. Many of the adult writers alluded to this same thing. They said that one of the things that they had noticed in their development was they were not so concerned about what others thought, in particular critics, and that this indifference had strengthened their writing. As well, for the adult writers, their own writing symbolized the commitment they had made to writing, their dedication to craft, their adherence to working hard at their writing. The student writers did not seem to have that same sense of commitment.

Both groups of writers stated that they had learned most, or for some student writers a significant amount, of what they knew about writing from themselves. Most of the adult writers had no formal training in writing; most had not attended more than one

workshop in their lives. Both groups of writers said they had learned from their own writing practice, from experimentation with language, style and form, and from their own maturation (adult writers used the term aging) and life experiences. Both groups acknowledged that it was necessary to learn from oneself. It was explained that included in this idea of learning about writing from oneself, was the importance of learning about oneself as well.

There was some ambiguity about whether voice could actually be taught, but after some hesitation both groups of writers, and the teachers, stated that voice cannot be taught. Technique can be taught, and improved technique can strengthen voice but voice is a more instinctual or naturally occurring thing. There was some common agreement across all three groups that voice required a mastery of craft [where mastery does not necessarily mean flawless] and an understanding of oneself, accompanied by a willingness to put something of that self into the writing. Thus, because voice for nearly all of the participants was connected to the person of the writer, voice cannot be taught.

Of relevance to the discussion of whether voice could be taught was the comment by several of those involved with teaching writing, that the lack of a definition was problematic. It was hard to get concrete thinking students to understand something like voice that could not be concretely presented to them.

Question: What is voice in writing?

This question is asked here, part way through the interview, as questions that ask for definitions are difficult to answer. The previous question on development of voice allowed the participants to warm up their thinking on voice, and perhaps reminded them of their own context or background for answering this question.

The Teachers:

All participants in this study were asked the same questions under this focus.

Questions in the interview question guide designed to elicit the teachers' understanding of what voice in writing means to them included:

- Some scholars believe 'voice is the essence of the best of writing'. What do you think they mean by that?
- Would you say voice is simply a matter of technique or is it something else?

M.B. began his answer to the question about definition by stating that it is very hard to define. Voice, for M.B., is personal, unique to each individual and so it could sound different for each writer. M.B. added that writers can achieve their voice in a variety of different ways, suggesting that within the work of one writer, voice may not always look the same either. He said, "*personal voice could be some kid in a ghetto and that voice could be expressed one way, and another voice in a poem could be someone crying out for help and the whole tone of the language and everything would be more sophisticated.*" M.B. seems to be saying that voice includes how ideas are expressed, in particular tone and language.

When asked whether voice was a technique M.B. answered that yes, it was, and then gave a picturesque analogy to sport:

It would be like if we could take the analogy of a sport, like say tennis, you know tennis is composed of a lot of skills: footwork, a good strong forehand, flat shot, top spin, back hand, a good serve ... I mean there are so many skills and the more of those skills you have the better equipped you are to come and create a strong voice. But I'm just saying you don't need all those skills to play a half decent game of tennis. And you don't need all the skills that might be possible for a writer in order to create a strong personal voice, but when ... someone learns how to write and somebody

learns many of these skills they are just bringing more ammunition to the battle, that's all.

Our arsenal of writing skills contributes to our writing with voice; the more skills we bring to our writing, the stronger our voice will be. M.B. is not saying the more skills we have the more likely that we will write with voice, because when asked if there was such a thing as voiceless writing M.B. answered:

That would be like saying is there any kind of a tennis shot that's not a shot at all. It could be a terrible shot and dribble off your toe and not even make it to the net let alone over, but it's still a shot. ... an attempt is a shot. ...And if you put your pen to paper it's writing and it inherently has some voice.

M.B.'s understanding of voice as individual, and his belief that everyone writes with voice, reinforces his tenet that everyone could write. Writing well is linked to how hard one wants to work, he explained.

K.J. also understands voice in writing as being something uniquely individual. She said voice is:

the ability to establish an individuality ... passion would have to come through an individual and that would create that person's voice and here's where I stand, here are my values, this is what I believe ... It's a belief strongly held.

K.J. sees voice as so individual that she explained "when you write, if you're a good writer, you write the inside kernel of yourself ... you write from your soul and that's where the voice comes from." Certainly when we read these comments, K.J.'s previous comments about the importance of developing confidence and courage in our students is re-inforced. Voice for her demands writers know themselves and be willing, and strong enough, to express that self. K.J. explained: "your voice is a combination of all, a part of all I've ever met - that's your voice." Voice is the whole self on the page.

When asked if voice was technique or something else, K.J. answered that *"technique is something that would shape the voice"*, but added that *"technique is secondary but technique is part of how you recognize voice."* K.J. explained that the writer's use of technique was how the writer would communicate voice to the reader. K.J. sees the relationship between voice and technique like this: *"you can have all these things to say, you can have the ideas, but then you have to shape them so they become palatable for other people to understand what you are saying."* K.J. has said that voice is the belief system of the writer, the soul, or the ideas, and technique is how that is communicated to the reader. Thus, when we talk about recognizing voice in writing we would be talking about technique.

In our interview we talked about paper back fiction as a quick read and I asked K.J. if that sort of writing had voice as well: *"I think he would have to have voice because he has something to say right?."* However, when asked specifically if there was such a thing as voiceless writing K.J. answered that science books were voiceless. She said that non-fiction does not have to be voiceless, but some of it is. When asked to describe the voiceless non-fiction K.J. answered *"the ones that don't have voices ... are the ones that are unwilling to relate their own experience to make the connection between their own experience and what they're writing."* K.J.'s response here re-affirms her earlier connection between the person of the writer and the voice in the writing. She added that in voiceless writing the writer is *"standing on the outside and being anonymous."*

J.P. described voice in writing as *"first of all mastery of content, their revelation of characters approximates real life ... There aren't any tricks or surprises."* She described the writing as *"seamless."* As well she said, *"they're so true, you read them and you believe because you're right there, because he's found his voice."* J.P. explained that there is a feeling that the writer can be trusted. Connections are made between the voice in the writing and content, technique, and a sense of truth. J.P. used an analogy to explain voice:

I talk edto my class at school about voice ... I used the analogy of finding my teaching style, that when I started teaching all I had seen was people stand up at the front, lecturing and give notes, and basically criticizing. ... so when I started to try and do things differently it was terrifying ... I didn't know where I was going anyway. And that when I suddenly started to do lessons and I knew that I was right it was pow, it was oh God...

Attaining voice in writing then is an individual pursuit, like venturing into uncharted territory.

J.P. mentioned again the distance felt between the reader and the writer: *"a voice is, a person having a voice is like knowing somebody so well that you can anticipate what they would say, it's like having a close friend, you would know them that well."* Thus, no surprises. J.P. also stated that to determine whether a writer had voice readers would have to read more than one book; readers would have to become familiar with more or less the body of the writer's work to determine voice.

When asked if there was such a thing as voiceless writing J.P. said yes. Sometimes writers don't achieve a voice because *"they're trying too hard."* Perhaps the seamlessness, mentioned earlier, is missing then. J.P. said she felt that very few authors actually had a voice, and that when people discuss voice they often mean *"they're clear or they're strong, or they're definite or something. I think to me it's something different."* Good writing does not necessarily have voice for J.P..

D.N. found it difficult to offer a definition of voice, but noted that it *"permeates every aspect of what you're reading."* Being more specific, D.N. said, *"I suppose something about the believability, consistency, point of view, the atmosphere that's created by the voice in writing ... setting, character, all of those sorts of things."* This comment suggests that voice is comprised of a truth in the writing, and the skill or technique as well. A later comment confirmed this: *"I think it has to do with a*

naturalness in the writing, a believability or naturalness that comes through in the writing ... - the skill and technique involved there has to do with dialogue, description, and all those kinds of things." D.N. was even clearer when later she explained that *"voice is an umbrella and point of view is one of the things that's under the umbrella. One of the tools for voice."* When asked what else was under the umbrella of voice, D.N. answered atmosphere and characters. Technique, or craft, then, contribute to the voice in writing. Besides including technique, D.N. also sees voice as including the personality of the writer. She said: *"part of who they are, especially if they are good writers, comes through in what they've written and it has voice anyway."* When asked if this meant voice was linked to the personality of the writer, D.N. answered *"inescapably."* Perhaps then, for D.N., voice is how the personality of the writer is portrayed through technique on the printed page in a way that is believable and consistent.

When asked to consider voiceless writing, D.N.'s answer re-affirmed everything else she had said. She said, *"sometimes the frustration of getting it right takes the voice right out of it, takes away their personalizing of the writing."* Writing that struggles to get it right can lack the personality and seamlessness required for voice. When this happens, D.N. said, you have to send it back to the student and say *"nooo, I don't want you to write just the technical part, I want you to write the creative part too."* So, technique is part of voice, and you can be a good writer, technically sound maybe, and still not write with voice. The presence of the writer must be felt in the writing.

Summary of the Teachers' Responses:

Some consensus existed among the teachers as to what voice was. The two strongest connections from this group linked voice with personality of the writer, and with technique. Voice was a result of mastery of technique, with an element of truth as well. Technique included language, tone, dialogue, style, sentence structure, - all that makes up the craft of writing. Voice also required the felt presence of the writer, which made voice

unique and individual to each writer. Two teachers felt voice was very much the personality on the page. The word "soul" was mentioned. It was suggested that the self of the writer is felt so strongly on the page that the reader feels trust, a sense of truth in what is being read.

The question about voiceless writing showed a lack of consensus. One teacher asserted that there was no such thing as voiceless writing. One teacher said voiceless writing happens when writers are trying too hard; it is the absence of seamlessness. Three teachers identified some form of voiceless writing.

Voice is not simply technique. Technique shapes voice, is part of voice. Technique is how one recognizes voice; it is what we use to communicate our voice to others. It was noted that a writer can have great technique, but no voice, and yet one cannot have voice without good technique.

The Student Writers:

All participants in this study were asked the same questions under this focus. Questions in the interview question guide designed to elicit the student writers' understanding of what voice in writing means to them included:

- Some scholars believe 'voice is the essence of the best of writing'. What do you think they mean by that?
- Would you say voice is simply a matter of technique or is it something else?

Khalid linked voice with content when asked about voice:

K: *Voice? I guess if you've got something to say.*

Interviewer: *Content? Is that what you're saying?*

K: *Yeah. Content with meaning.*

Khalid said he would agree that voice is the essence of the best of writing if scholars say so. When reminded that scholars are not necessarily poets Khalid re-affirmed his connection between voice and 'content with meaning':

the best works have been revolutionary in a sense you know look at Wordsworth, look at Ginsberg, look at like Shelley. Look at different poets through time, and the poems that have the most impact have really been wonderful poems or they've made some kind of difference to society and I think that's, that really does make a difference here.

In discussion over another question later Khalid further advanced the above argument:

great poetry, it always has had a voice you know, like people have always looked at it and they noticed that the poet actually had something to say, you know. Like he's writing his poetry with an intent, with meaning.

Khalid argued that science textbooks also have voice because of the 'content with meaning' connection. He argued that "*they still have a voice cause they're trying to change something, like make someone know something. I mean as long as someone can take what's on the page and interpret it in their mind then it has voice then.*" When asked to qualify 'interpret' Khalid said as long as readers can understand, take their own interpretation out. For Khalid there is no such thing as voiceless writing.

However, when asked to discuss voice in terms of his own writing, Khalid related voice to the individual person of the writer: "*I mean it's all coming from a different person and if their writing is personal or if they are taking their writing from experience then I think it definitely does have voice.*" Later, he added, "*as long as I'm a different person [than the person who is sitting next to me], and as long as I put my heart into something then it will have voice.*" Voice, then, is as unique as the person of the writer is unique. When asked if voice was technique, or something else, Khalid said he didn't know.

When Stacey was asked about voice in writing he answered, "*they're talking about the poet's voice ... and not just the poet saying it, but something more than the poet saying it, like a part of the poet saying it.*" When probed further Stacey said:

Like what I mean is when I write a poem it's not, like I don't think of it as all the different facets of whatever I am as a person going into the poem, like I think it's some small part of me blown up really big and jammed onto a piece of paper.

Later, he spoke definitively: *"I think voice is how you feel and what you do with how you feel."* Stacey added later that *"like you're sort of your voice, your personality."* Stacey connected voice in writing to the person of the writer, but added that *"your technique is what you do to express it."* Stacey suggests that one without the other is useless:

Because I'm sure some people have some profound feelings but they can't write so they just all go to waste. Or some people can write really well but they just haven't done enough to be able to share anything of interest to anyone.

Therefore, without technique one does not have voice. As well, without the personal connection to the subject matter there is no voice. Stacey described voiceless writing:

it's obvious he's not writing because he has some intense desire to express what it was like in the plague years, he wasn't alive in the plague years ... He's obviously writing because he wants to appeal to his audience. He doesn't care that he's expressed something that he's never experienced.

Thus, a connection between voice and technique and the person of the writer is reaffirmed. Macrorie (1968) would concur that the absence of the author from the writing produces voiceless writing.

Pat defined voice succinctly: *"the opinions, the view expressed in the content."* Pat did not seem to waver in her understanding of what voice meant to her. Always her responses reinforced her own definition: *"good writing has to have a voice and the voice is the opinion that is being expressed and that the whole purpose of the writing is to express that voice."* Pat, published in fiction and non-fiction, explained that voice was

the same in both; the opinions, the view expressed, constitute voice. Thus, voice is content, or more specifically, theme.

When asked if voice was simply technique Pat argued that voice was more than just technique:

You can have great grammar but not have any voice. You can have great technique but you can use that technique so that you're not necessarily expressing something out of the paper ... I think it's the whole is greater than the parts so there's the idea plus all the techniques behind the idea.

Voice becomes theme plus technique. When asked if she agreed that voice was the essence of the best of writing Pat responded yes,

because you can tie every aspect into voice. Like you can say that technique is voice, every aspect of the writing is a component of voice so basically what you're saying is that if every aspect is good then it's going to be good writing, that's the whole point of the writing is to express something, which is what I'm calling voice....

Thus, for Pat, voice is the successful union of theme and technique with the product being greater than the sum of its parts.

There was some ambiguity in Pat's understanding of voiceless writing. When asked if voiceless writing existed Pat said no because *"the purpose of writing is to say something"* and she could not imagine a situation where a writer would not have something to say. However earlier, when discussing voice, Pat stated that if the reader could not *"get anything out of the novel, you don't really see that it's expressing an opinion then there isn't any voice in that novel."* This suggests the strongest connection for voice lies with theme, and a weaker connection links voice with technique.

Chris struggled with the question what do you think is meant by voice:

C.: *Can you define voice?*

Interviewer: *No. Can you?*

C.: *No. I have no idea. Voice....hmmm (pause)*

When asked to consider voice in relation to technique Chris answered, *"It probably goes beyond technique. It probably goes, you know, how much you believe in what you're writing."* When asked to discuss voice in relation to her own writing Chris explained that if her understanding was correct then her writing had voice because she wrote about things that really mattered to her. Thus, voice becomes linked to content.

When asked to consider voiceless writing Chris did not think that voiceless writing existed because everybody writes to say something, perhaps something that they cannot speak, and that then gives their writing voice. Chris stated, *"writing is your voice in a way."* Again, voice is linked with content, with what you want to say.

Sveah talked about voice in writing: *"I think it's important to know what you're talking about. If you're going to say something you should know what it is and how to say it."* Sveah suggested a link with content, and perhaps with craft, or technique.

However, later in the interview there is this exchange, which suggests some ambiguity:

Interviewer: *So, you've linked voice ... now tell me if this is what you said or if I'm misunderstanding, the personality of the writer and the life experience of the writer? Correct?*

S.: *Yeah, I would say that's where you draw your voice from, cause where else are you going to get it from? Unless it's inside you in which case it doesn't last very long cause you're only one character.*

Could it be that voice comes from personality and life experience of the writer, but evidences itself through content, and perhaps technique?

Sveah discussed voice in terms of her own writing: *"most of my fiction has a weaker voice than my poetry where I usually have a definite thing to say. So I think it's just knowing what you want to get across and how to do it."* Again, the link between voice and content with technique, with the questioning of voice in her fiction. However later, when Sveah was asked how she would know if her own writing had voice, she

responded, *"I think I can tell it more in fiction. I don't know how you establish voice in poetry actually."* Here she questions voice in her poetry. However, most student writers in this study found it difficult to discuss voice in terms of their own work. The student writers seemed to feel that it would be presumptuous of them to say their writing had voice, and any such connection was always made with hesitation, or humour.

When asked if Sveah agreed that voice was an essential quality of the best of writing Sveah was unsure:

I've read some pieces where voice is absolutely essential and it definitely brings it to a higher level than it would have been otherwise. But I've also read things where voice isn't so important as something else. I think it depends on what aspect the author is concentrating on.

When asked what might have been more important than voice Sveah answered character development as *"weak characters wouldn't be able to express themselves."* Does this suggest a link between the oral voice of the characters and the voice in the writing? Sveah said theme might be more important, but then said *"I suppose that the voice is important in bringing the theme forward so maybe it is the most important part."* Sveah said voice is important, but struggles with how important.

Sandi related voice in writing to an oral voice: *"they could maybe mean something that sounds good out loud, maybe how the person's speaking it if they're reading it to someone"* and *"how it sounds like somebody actually worded it instead of somebody wrote it down."* How her writing sounds out loud when she reads it is also how Sandi explained she evaluated her own writing.

When asked if she agreed that voice was the essence of the best of writing Sandi said no, that she thought any research or work that went into making the story true and correct would be more important than voice.

Summary of the Student Writers' Responses:

The students explained voice by making three strong connections. First, voice was linked with content, which included the opinion or view expressed by the author, the theme or idea the author was expressing, and also the meaning the author was able to imbue his subject with. Second, voice was linked with the personality of the writer, or at least some sense of the author in the writing was deemed necessary. Third, voice in text was linked to the oral voice. Writers talked about the importance of reading aloud. One student suggested that the written voice may be able to express what the oral cannot. Only one student admitted to not understanding what voice in writing referred to.

There was less common ground in the discussion of voiceless writing. There was a lot of uncertainty and ambiguity. Some students could say for certain that voiceless writing did not exist. One student identified voiceless writing as the absence of personal experience in the writing. Most were uncertain.

Nearly all students said that voice was more than simply technique. Technique expresses your voice they explained. Technique plus what you believe voice to be (content, theme, personality) equals voice. Some students suggested that technique without voice, or vice versa, was useless writing. Thus, a strong connection between voice and technique was presented. One student did not know if voice was technique.

The Adult Writers:

When asked what is meant by voice, Smyth answered: *"I don't really know what I mean when I talk about voice, I do talk about voice but"* Later, Smyth said:

it's kind of a world view, or personality, or a life-take that comes through just in the overall reading. It's like there's a sort of spirit that's lifting up from between the lines almost, that's what voice is to me. ... it's mechanical stuff, sure it is, it's how somebody uses the language, it's peculiarities of turn of phrase, it's particularity of vision, it's all those kinds of things. ...

we're talking here about questions of spirit ... I think that is what is wafting off the page in a way.

When asked specifically if voice was technique, Smyth said that voice was in some ways technique, but also much more than that. He answered:

It's just some kind of, like I say, ineffable sense of spirit. ... it's particular to the reader and there's some kind of communion that you feel with the writer that happens in that way.

In nearly all of the interviews conducted for this study, participants shared their understanding of what voice in writing means with hesitation. In some interviews I sensed frustration with being asked questions about something undefinable. For example, when I asked Smyth about whether voiceless writing existed he responded: "*What is difficult here is I don't understand what you mean by voice.*" Indeed, I wasn't sure myself. Smyth added:

If it's a piece of writing that is in any way creative, whether it's fiction or non-fiction then it should betray something I would think about the person who took the time and trouble to actually put the words down on paper. I think. But I'm not absolutely sure that I understand what you mean by voice.

Voice then is linked here to the person of the writer, and some of that personality slips into the writing and is the voice in the writing.

Robins said that readers need to read more than one book by a writer before they can discuss the voice in the writing. She described voice as the author's way of looking at things: "*I guess part of what the voice is, when you're describing something, what sorts of things are you going to focus on, what are you going to concentrate on, what's important.*" In this sense then, voice is related back to the person of the writer.

However, Robins also linked voice with technique: "*It's also the way ... of putting words together, the rhythms of the language, cadence, you know, the flow of the*

language, the use of vocabulary, what kinds of words are used, style" But then the hesitation comes into the conversation, an uncertainty: *"it's really hard for me to talk about voice because I'm not sure I really understand it all that clearly"*, and then *"... it is a whole lot of things coming together."* Then the momentary tension is gone, and Robins added:

So maybe it is that unique way the author has of looking at things, the way they describe characters, the way they get into the characters' heads, the way they put the words together, the way the words flow, the way they speak to the reader in some way, maybe all of that when it all works, then that's the voice coming through loud and clear and you'll put the book down and you'll say 'wow, that's wonderful, that really touched me' and you may not be able to articulate that. It's because the voice was such and such and such. But maybe that's what it is.

For Robins, technique is part of voice. She also included in her understanding of voice the decisions a writer makes as to what material stays and what goes. That means, Robins explained, that content is also part of voice as those decisions about text involve content. When asked about voiceless writing Robins answered that *"every author will have a voice."*

Hogan described voice as *"something that everything follows from."* She said, *"Voice is really almost the structure upon which story rides"; "the way that you tell stories really centers around voice, but voice is such an elusive thing."* Hogan connects voice then to technique and elements in a story. But, she explained, voice is not just technique: *"if you only have the technique and no soul, it's clearly not enough."* Later, she connected voice to the person of the writer: *"because I am who I am, because I've had the range of experiences that I've had, there are certain stories that are going to be the stories that I tell ... I will have a distinctive voice because of who I am."* Everything

that writers bring to the writing contributes to making up their voice. Hogan used an analogy to acting to describe voice:

There are occasions when you see an actor who acts a whole range of different parts. Now sometimes you see that actor and you think, you know, 'I had no idea'. Anthony Hopkins is someone who comes to mind. He can play such a range of characters - from "The Remains of the Day" to Hannibal Lechter. There are huge distances between the two ends of the pole. And yet you can still see Anthony Hopkins in there, you can still see that that's him acting that role, even though he is so submerged in his roles. He does such a good job that you can't imagine another person acting that character as well. I think writing is a little bit like that. Voice is a little bit like that.

When asked specifically what about the writing would help a reader to know it's a particular writer's work, Hogan answered "I don't know."

About the possibility of voiceless writing, Hogan seemed unsure. She said: *I would say no. I would say there would be writing whose voice is very poor, but I would say it all had some voice. It's all being told from some point of view. It's got to have something in it. Well, I take it back. I think of Dick and Jane books, and they're pretty voiceless. So, I mean, I guess that becomes technical. I think any piece of writing worth its salt, even poor writing, has some level of voice, if simply an ineffectual one.*

Browne told me, "The best definition I ever heard [of voice] comes from Seamus Heaney and he said that your voice has to have the feel of you about it." She added: *voice has to be almost tactile so that if you are speaking ... we hear you speaking ... we hear your diction, your vocabulary, your concerns, your accent. Where you come from is in it, a bit of where you are going is in it,*

the details of your day-to-day existence, your thought processes, and emotional life are there in the words.

In this definition voice is omnipotence on the page. I asked if voice was more connected to the writer than the writing, and Browne answered:

I don't know how you can split them. It's like Douglas' wonderful lines:

Oh body swayed to music

Oh brightening glance

How can you know the dancer

From the dance?

In the best of poems you can't know the dancer from the dance. They're inseparable.

For Browne, obviously, voice is more than simply technique. It has to do also with the person of the writer, and that felt person in the writing. But voice includes technique, the unique skill of the writer, for without technique there is no communication, no connection to the reader. Voice is also content. When asked about the relationship between voice in writing and a speaking voice, Browne answered that again, you cannot separate the two. She explained:

When I write I read out loud all the time. Every draft I write. If I even take a 'the' out of the poem I read it again from the top. So I'm always hearing it. It starts to have its own voice, I guess, which I try to craft into pleasing sounds as well as all the other things I'm trying to make the poem do.

Browne said *"push for something that shows who you are and reveals your individual take. If your writing doesn't have that then its got no voice."*

Browne said that voiceless writing was a synonym for bad writing, and gave as examples Harlequin Romances and Reader's Digest pieces. Browne described voiceless writing:

The personality of the writer doesn't show through at all, the writing is full of clichés and no surprises, there's no turn in the poem, no place where you suddenly see the writer make this wonderful shift that gives you a new way of seeing the world. All of that I would call voiceless writing. It's no-name writing, generic poems. And they're everywhere. And they make people feel comfortable. They never disturb or discomfort or challenge anyone.

Browne's description of voiceless writing is in keeping with her description of voice.

Whereas voice requires the person of the writer to be felt, the absence of the writer's felt presence is noted, and known as voiceless writing.

Norris said "voice is the final outcome of the putting of all of the ingredients together." He said, "voice is the outcome of ... all the inputs. Of everything you put into it and then you get voice." He gave an analogy:

it's like baking a cake. I mean you put all the ingredients in and you end up with a cake. You have all these different things on the counter and in a sense you end up with more than the whole. You don't open the cake and say now there's the flour, and there's the salt.

However, Norris made it very clear that writing with voice is not as simple as baking a cake, as putting all the ingredients into the whole. He said:

I have students who are very concerned about voice way too early, way too early. It, voice, I believe isn't something anyone should strive for. It is simply, that if you do all the other things right it will appear. It is the product of everything. It is not something you try to create, because no one knows themselves well enough to create- All our self images are wonky... And so to try to create our own voice is an act of absurdity. Because we first of all have to know ourselves in a way that only you know the subconscious and unconscious level - it is impossible.

The knowledge of self, and the knowledge of craft, together can create an individual voice. More specifically, he said that as students begin to learn the craft of writing

as they develop this, who they are underneath will begin to create the language, will begin to determine vocabulary, sentence structure, paragraphs, paragraph structure, how much dialogue they use or don't use, how they treat narrative, how they treat exposition, what their attitude is toward description, how active or passive their language will be, I mean they're just in it. All of that will come together to create voice.

Voice, then is more than personality. Voice is how the person of the writer, and everything that they bring to their writing, influences how they use what they know about craft to write. Norris said, "*voice is a reflection of who we are.*"

Norris also said of voice:

a lot of writers like to believe that voice is somehow separate from subject, but I simply don't believe it. I think that's an illusion in that part of our voice, when somebody reads one of my stories and says that's an [Norris] story, I mean part of it is they're reacting to my use of vocabulary and sentence structure. And toward the tone, toward the attitude I have toward the subject matter, but I think it's also a reaction toward the subject matter.

Voice is also content. When asked if there was such a thing as voiceless writing, Norris answered no.

Douglas, at the very beginning of our conversation, immediately stated:

There is no such thing as a writer's voice. When we talk about a writer's voice we are talking about a metaphor. We're talking about the impact an individual writer makes on an individual reader. But it's a useful metaphor because I think it allows us to understand something about the

quality of a writer's writing. What makes one writer sound, if you like, like that writer and not like another writer.

She added, "what you need to do when you think of voice in writing is to think about a human voice ... a writer's voice is not unlike that. It is a product of a great many influences." Douglas is both a writer and a teacher of writing. Of the academic environment in which she teaches, Douglas said:

voice is very controversial because there are many people ... who would argue that you can imitate just about any voice. There is no sort of authentic individual behind the writing, there's simply a writer who uses various devices to achieve a particular kind of end. And as a professional writer I can imitate just about any voice you want.

For Douglas then, voice in writing exists only as a metaphor. Douglas added, "I'm suggesting that there is no such thing as an original voice. There is simply a kind of selection of styles, a selection of language, a selection of sentence structure." Voice is not original and not unique. Douglas argued that she could give me three different pieces of writing and I would not be able to tell that they were by the same author. I agreed with her. Voice then is not singular, but writers have many voices in their repertoire. The most skilled writers can choose between those voices, opening opportunities for crossing genre and style boundaries. Elbow (1981) concurred when he argued that the ability to write with many voices was the skill of a great writer. Much support for the idea of voice being multiple and not singular can be found in the literature review (O'Leary, 1993; Danish, 1981). The work of Bakhtin in particular is built upon the understanding that voice is not singular, does not represent a single individual or influence, and is not uniquely or originally constructed (Wertsch, 1991; Bakhtin, 1984; Kamberelis, 1992). Bakhtin therefore, would agree with Douglas about the multiple influences that come to bear upon both the spoken and the written voice. Bakhtin explained that we are born into a world already imbued with language, that as writers we take in the voices around us and

we learn to construct meaning in text, and this construction of meaning contributes to the construction of the writers as well (Kamberelis & McGinley, 1992, p.200).

Douglas said that the issue of uniqueness in writing is not important, although she believed that writers could write uniquely when they so chose. She said, *"There is no supernatural writer's character behind all of this; there's simply a mastery of form, mastery of style."* When asked if she was saying that voice was simply a matter of technique then, Douglas answered, *"I would argue that. It is. It is. And it's not simply. The mastery of technique is, it's an enormous challenge, and one that very few writers in a generation ever achieve."* A straight connection then between technique, or mastery of craft, and voice. Douglas said, *"voice certainly sheds a kind of light on an attribute or a series of qualities that we associate with writer's style, but it's not real."* There is a subtle suggestion that voice is more than technique, that there is another attribute there, albeit unnamed.

Douglas mentioned some influences on writers and their work. She said: *there are cultural forces at play too in writers' lives that weigh one kind of technique more than another perhaps. And certainly exposure to books, texts of all kinds, will give certain kinds of vocabulary. Perhaps if I were to put any money in voice it would not be in style so much as in the range of a writer's vocabulary and that varies enormously from writer to writer.*

Style then is also part of voice. Douglas confirmed this: *"Style, diction, the word choices we make, form - the kind of literary forms we use to express whatever we meant to express."* Voice, for Douglas, perhaps, is visual and auditory. Is it the choice of words and form and how all together this presents an accomplished finished product?

Voice is not connected to the writer. Douglas said:

I think form is a much more significant determiner of what we call voice than say personality, and you undoubtedly have had the experience of reading a writer or a poem that just, you thought this was wonderful, this

is a very sympathetic, kind, generous, noble person and then you discover subsequently that they're quite the opposite. So you know, voice and personality - I'm just very dubious about mixing personality too much with voice and so distinctive characteristics maybe, but distinctive characteristics we detect in a piece of writing - that would work better for me.

Anything distinctive or unique that would be associated with voice, then, would have to be characteristic of the writing, and not relating back to the writer. Nothing about the writers, except their skillful manipulation of the techniques of their craft, enters into voice.

Douglas spoke about the world of non-fiction, in particular the world of newspapers and magazines. She said, *"particularly in newspapers the last thing in the world you want is a voice. You want the voice of the newspaper."* Douglas explained, *"one of the arguments against voice, particularly in journalism, is that if you're distracted by the accent of the voice, or the gender, the pitch of the voice, that you're not hearing the story. So I would think that my professional life tries to be as transparent as possible."* Douglas told the story of a writer she much admired writing a piece for newspaper publication. The gentleman gave Douglas the article to read and she praised him for his beautiful use of language, his imagery. He tore the article in pieces telling her that if she had noticed the language she had not noticed the story, and therefore as a writer he had failed. He would write it again. Douglas and I talked about textbooks and voice. She explained that voice was not necessarily something that such text would strive for. The important thing was not uniqueness or personality, but getting the information across clearly. Douglas said, *"We don't write to express; we write to communicate."*

When asked about voiceless writing, Douglas answered that *"All writing has voice, by definition."* She elaborated:

all writing has a voice, even if it's only boring, drone you know. I don't know what, god help us, bureaucratic or legalistic or, yeah, but it certainly has a voice just as most of us certainly have voice. The question is what kind of voice it is. ... there is no such thing to my reading ear as a voiceless piece of writing.

In non-fiction text that we talked about earlier then, we are not saying that they have no voice, we are saying those texts strive for a subtle voice that will not detract from their content.

Allen said that voice means *"integrity. ... Voice is knowing."* She said that it is her *"identity."* Voice has a truth. Allen said, *"There's not really much to say about voice. Voice is what happens when the writer stops trying too hard, when the writer stops trying to force their consciously conditioned ego on people."* More than one of the teachers interviewed also mentioned this quality. That voice can exist when the writer relaxes, ceases to try too hard. Of a piece of writing Allen described as having voice, she said, *"It spoke to me ... his voice resonates so clearly for me."* However, *"voice is not technique. You cannot learn it."* Voice then becomes something separate from the craft, and becomes something connected to the person of the writer. Perhaps that something that great writers are born with, that Allen alluded to earlier.

When asked if there was such a thing as voiceless writing, Allen answered:
yes - Macleans magazine is full of it. So is the Globe and Mail. It is work done by hacks. Barbara Cartland writes voiceless prose. Harlequin romances and all those bodice rippers are voiceless.

But then she added, *"But maybe it has voice - maybe those writers are really as boring as all that."* As voice is hard to understand, so is voiceless.

Summary of the Adult Writers' Responses:

They gave me a collage, their answers balancing and contrasting and mingling and jousting. But, there is some clarity in the collage. Some ideas were repeated, and, perhaps, we are seeing things in similar ways, we just choose to paint what we see in different colours.

Voice is not simple. Frustration with the lack of a working definition surfaced on two occasions. Strong connections between voice and personality, and voice and technique, were made. Voice is mastery of craft mixed with the person of the writer. The words "spirit" and "soul" were used. The word truth was also used, as it was by one of the teachers. For one writer reading with voice was like a communion between reader and writer. Voice includes content. Voice includes everything writers bring to their writing so that it is an identity, a reflection of who we are. Knowledge of self plus knowledge of craft equals voice. Voice then is unique and individual. Voice in writing was also connected to oral voice. One writer alone differed with these opinions. One writer argued that there was no such thing as voice, that the best of writing reveals mastery of craft and nothing about the person of the writer. This writer argued that writing was neither unique nor individual as writers, through their use of craft, can create many voices for themselves. She argued voice was a metaphor. Beck, McKeown and Worthy (1995) suggested the term voice was a metaphor used to refer to style, or rhetorical purpose. Albers (1989) argued that when the term voice was used as a metaphor it was more inclusive. In Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind the use of the term voice is linked with empowerment (Belenky, Clinchy et al, 1986).

There was a lack of agreement as to whether writers have individual voices, or multiple voices. It is relevant that there was also a lack of consensus in the literature as to whether voice was multiple or single. There was disagreement as to whether authors had one unique and original voice (Fletcher, 1993; Macrorie, 1968; Frank and Wall,

1994), or more than one voice and thus they could put on different voices for different writing occasions (Elbow 1981; O'Leary, 1993; Danish, 1981). Bakhtin's argument is unique in itself (Kamberelis & McGinley, 1992). He argued that an author's voice is multiple by influence, intertextual, and yet that does not mean that authors have more than one voice.

Voiceless writing did not exist for most writers. Some were unsure. One writer described voiceless writing as lacking the personality of the writer. Other writers argued that all writing, by definition, has voice, even if it is an ineffective or boring voice.

Only one writer felt that voice was simply technique, and nothing more. The rest of the writers felt voice was more than technique. They said that technique was part of voice, but that voice also included the writer. Technique can be taught but voice cannot, one writer said. Norris said, "*...if you do all the other things right it will appear.*" J.P. had compared writing with voice to an act of faith. Norris's comment suggests agreement.

Summary of Responses Across all Three Groups:

Most of the participants argued that voice in text was connected to the person of the writer. For most participants voice involved the coming together of technique, content, and the person of the writer in a way that was truthful to a reader. For all participants voice was hard to define. There was more uncertainty and ambiguity in the student writers' responses than in the adult writers responses suggesting that an understanding of voice is developed as one develops as a writer. Only one participant argued that there was no such thing as voice.

Most of the participants agreed that there was a strong connection between voice and technique. However, ambiguity arose over whether voice was part of technique, or whether technique was part of voice. One participant saw voice as strictly technique, but most participants saw voice as being more than technique. Most participants said that

technique was how writers expressed their voices, that technique helped readers to identify voice in what they read.

There was no agreement as to whether voiceless writing existed, either across all three groups, or within any one of the groups. The argument for voiceless writing existing stated that the text had no personal connection back to the writer, that the writer was remaining anonymous. Without the felt presence of the writer there is no voice. The argument for there being no such thing as voiceless writing stated that all writing had voice. That if an attempt had been made to communicate then that was someone's voice coming through. The voice may be ineffectual or boring, but there would be voice. Some of the participants struggled with this question offering arguments both for voiceless and against voiceless writing existing. These camps were quite evenly divided.

Research Question: How can one recognize voice in text?

The Teachers:

Questions in the interview guide designed to elicit teachers' understanding of what voice in writing means to them included:

- Who decides that a piece of writing has voice - the reader or the writer?
- As a reader, how do you recognize voice in something you read?
- What should we be teaching our students to look for in identifying voice?

M.B.'s answer to how does he recognize voice was that such recognition of voice is also individual. What he considers writing with voice, I may not. He said that if the writing makes it through the filter system that each of us has and into the "*real heart and soul*" then it has voice for us. M.B. added that this is why voice in writing is so difficult to define, because it is individually determined.

When asked who decides if a piece of writing has voice the reader or the writer, M.B. initially answered the reader, but then added:

theoretically it's both because if a writer writes a piece and they like it then for them it has a strong personal voice. ... If the readers read it and say 'this is great; you've got to hear this' then it's a voice that has more universal appeal.

Ultimately however, M.B. said, it is the reader that decides. In the interviews, the reader has often been seen as the final judge. As teachers of readers, do we teach our students to recognize voice? M.B. answered that *"when we work with them to cherish a literary work that's what we are doing."* M.B. compared recognizing voice in writing to recognizing voice in movie criticism. When the students discuss how the movie spoke to them, what it made them think of or question, or see differently, that is the voice in the movie, and that is the voice in writing.

When asked who decides if a piece of writing has voice - the reader or the writer, K.J. answered both. When asked to explain she answered, *"I guess both have a responsibility to voice ... Like if I respect you as a reader then I would think it would be up to me to make my voice heard."* However, K.J. did account for what she called incompetent readers that may be unsophisticated in their reading and not recognize an ironic tone, for example, and thus miss the voice completely. K.J. said that's too bad when that happens, and maybe readers need to read other things first before attempting more difficult work.

J.P. said that she knows voice when she reads it: *"It has an honesty to it, it goes clear through the writing, that they're not searching for the words, that they're not searching for the ideas."* There is a suggestion here of the trust in the writer, and the seamlessness of the writing that J.P. spoke of earlier. For J.P. recognizing voice is done orally: *"I think I hear things when I read."*

When asked who decides if a piece of writing has voice J.P. immediately said the reader, *"I don't think the writer knows."* The reader has the ultimate control, *"a piece of literature isn't a piece of literature without the reader."* Important also to J.P. was the

idea that what has voice for her, might not have voice for someone else. As well, a writer may have voice for one generation but not the next generation. Voices and readers change. When asked if we could help our students to identify voice in what they read J.P. admitted that she didn't really worry about that. She explained that she was more concerned about teaching the curriculum, which contains mostly literature written for adults, to a teenage audience who still tend to be more fact oriented than metaphor or symbol oriented.

D.N. recognizes voice in writing by recognizing pictures the words have created in her mind. She said, *"I can just about picture the author and sometimes the character in the circumstances of writing the story."* D.N. further explained that *"that's how I've chosen to see voice, is by sort of picturing the voice."* This is very reminiscent of Sandi's comment wherein she also said that voice exists for her when she can picture the story in her head.

When asked who decides if a piece of writing has voice D.N. answered, *"I think a skilled writer decides the voice and the reader picks up on it."* It is interesting to note that D.N. said 'skilled' writer, but did not qualify reader. Perhaps, as J.P. noted earlier, a competent reader is necessary, and perhaps assumed.

Summary of the Teachers' Responses:

Ultimately it is the reader that decides if a piece of writing has voice. Both are involved in such decision in theory, but it is the reader who carries the authority. No one said the writer alone decides.

Recognizing voice, like defining voice, is different for each individual. However, all teachers referred to technique when describing how they recognize voice in text. One writer recognizes voice orally, another visually. Another writer said it carried an honesty, and appeared seamless.

Teachers that attempt to teach students how to recognize voice do so by teaching appreciation and skills to critique. One teacher admitted that teaching recognition of voice was not a priority for her.

The Student Writers:

Questions in the interview question guide designed to further elicit the students' understanding of what voice in writing means to them included:

- Who decides that a piece of writing has voice - the reader or the writer?
- As a reader, how do you recognize voice in something that you read?
- Discuss your writing in terms of voice.

Khalid re-affirmed his connection between voice and content when asked to explain how he recognized voice in something that he read:

I guess if it kind of takes a new twist to something, you know, like if it explores something that hasn't already been explored. And I guess it's just, if it's just interesting to me as a reader then I think it probably does have something to say, then its got voice.

Khalid felt that the reader was the one that determined whether writing had voice.

Stacey concurred that the reader was the one who decided if a piece of writing had voice. He explained:

reading and writing the poem are two separate things. Like I don't want to say they are 50% of one thing, they are both 100% of two distinctly different things. Like writing the poem is for one thing that is between the writer and his poem, and reading the poem is between the reader and the poem. I don't think the writer comes into it.

However, when asked how he recognized voice in something that he read Stacey answered "if I could identify the person writing the poem." Stacey recognized the apparent contradiction with his definition for voice:

I don't want to contradict what I said earlier, but what I mean is if a person has used their voice and enunciated themselves and just said what they really mean and what they're trying to say and they have a good technique to express themselves then their voice is uniquely their own, and you can identify the poem as being their poem.

Stacey then seems to be re-connecting with his earlier statement that linked voice with both the writer and their particular technique, or way of expressing that personality.

Pat explained that she recognized voice in something that she read by recognizing theme:

like an underlying theme that I think that's the voice. And I think voice is recognized by finding out what the unifying idea, what the purpose of the writing is so, ... recognizing voice is just recognizing what the writer was trying to say.

Thus, Pat concurs with Khalid and Stacey that the reader is the one who decides if a piece of writing has voice. Writers will always write with what they believe to be voice, but it is voice if the reader recognizes it.

When asked how she recognized voice in something that she read Chris linked voice with technique:

just like the careful placement of everything and you know, like well they've chosen this word over another word for the little connotation that it has, and you know, the way that they've obviously spent a lot of time trying to put a voice into it.

In another comment on recognizing voice Chris mentioned the time spent editing and re-editing and the "time the author's put into trying to make it a good poem and trying to get their meaning across." Although when asked about voice, Chris linked voice with content, she recognized voice through the writer's technique.

Sveah remarked that she only paid attention to voice when it was one of the main focuses in the writing. She explained that knowing whether voice was one of the main focuses was "*instinctual*". Sveah then said that voice could be recognized by "*the diction, and the style, the length of sentences, the structure, the level of diction ... if it's short sentence structure, if it's long, inverted, flattened, whatever.*" Sveah, like Chris, linked voice with content in definition, yet recognized it through technique.

When asked whether the reader or the writer decides if writing has voice Sveah picked the reader. In her answer Sveah suggested a link between the voice in the writing and the voice of the characters that she had alluded to in her discussion of what voice means:

It might be the author's voice so the author thinks that it's a strong voice but it might just be the same voice all the time and the reader's probably the only one that can identify if it is stepping out of the author and into the character, or the narrator.

Sveah mentioned that writers can manipulate their voice in writing. She suggested that voice is multiple, not single when she said:

when you're writing you're not sure if you're just speaking from your point of view or if you're actually stepping out until you've written quite a bit and you can see if this is the same voice as that one and so maybe I should work on that.

Later she re-affirmed this idea when she said that "*if you can step outside yourself and become a different voice then that gives you a higher quality of writing.*" Thus, voice becomes multiple with writers being able to manipulate and choose between voices in their repertoire, and the ability to do this improves one's writing.

When asked how she would identify voice in something that she read, Sandi explained that voice was a personal thing and so her answer would be personal for her. Sandi mentioned one of her favourite books and said:

I like it and I think it has a lot of voice and I can picture all the stories in my mind ... I have the whole idea mapped out ... and if that comes to me then it has voice, that's what I think.

It is interesting to note that this method of recognizing voice corresponds closely with how Sandi thinks when she writes, or is in a pre-writing stage. It also connects with her discussion about the existence of voice in her own writing. Sandi felt that her stories were more likely to have voice than her poetry, because her stories were more descriptive.

Sandi also linked voice with the distance she felt from the writer. She talked about a writer she believed wrote with voice and said *"she sort of writes in a way that sort of speaks to me"*, and when describing a work she felt did not have voice Sandi said the writing *"was more distant like, like he's shouting through a toilet tube or something, and I can't really figure out what he means. And I can't really picture it in my mind."* Later, Sandi described voiceless writing as boring or uninteresting as in a writer may write about the same subject continuously and thus bore readers. Thus, for Sandi, writing has voice when she can picture what the author is describing and she is interested; when this does not happen for her the writing seems voiceless, and distant.

When asked who decides if a piece of writing has voice - the reader or the writer, Sandi thought both because of voiceless writing. In voiceless writing perhaps the writer feels there is voice, but the reader does not. Again, when talking about her own writing Sandi said that she thought her writing had voice because she wrote it, but also said that *"some of it does and some of it doesn't."* Perhaps Sandi is re-affirming her idea that what might have voice for the writer, may not have voice for the reader.

Summary of the Student Writers' Responses:

All the students, except one, felt that the reader decided if a piece of writing had voice. One student explained that was because reading was between the reader and the

words, and no longer involved the writer. The dissenting opinion was based on a discussion of voiceless writing. This student explained that writing deemed voiceless for the reader, may still have voice for the writer.

When describing how they would recognize voice in something they read, most of the students' answers reflected technique. In particular, some mentioned language, imagery, the unique treatment of content. One person recognized voice mainly through content. One student mentioned being able to recognize the writer behind the writing. Two students who defined voice as content, admitted to recognizing voice through technique. Perhaps the influence of technique on content is such that at times they become inseparable.

It was also noted by one student that voice is multiple, that writers have more than one voice they can use.

The Adult Writers:

Adult writers participating in the study were asked the following questions on this focus:

- Who decides that a piece of writing has voice - the reader or the writer?
- As a reader, how do you recognize voice in something that you read?

In addition, the adult writers were asked specifically about the relationship between point of view and voice, as this focus had surfaced in many of the other interviews and I felt clarification was needed for my own understanding.

The writers that Smyth identified as writing with voice were writers "*where I imagine them out loud. It's almost as though I hear the spoken voice, and this is just me as a particular reader, I hear their spoken voice so clearly in my head.*" This is an interesting point for Smyth to make here as it seems to connect with how he writes as well. He identifies voice in the text of others by the spoken voice he hears in his mind,

and he works on his writing through the sound of the words he listens for. Sound and voice.

When asked who decides if a piece of writing has voice Smyth answered that it is the reader that matters. He said:

I suppose the writer would decide for him or herself whether ... I never think about that for my own writing. ... I can only suppose that if a reader doesn't find something that he or she likes in a piece of writing, ie: a voice that they find appealing, then they're just not going to persist with it.

Robins concurred that it was the reader who decided if a piece had voice. Like Smyth she said that as a writer it was not something she thought about with regards to her own writing. She explained: *"If everything's working the way I think it should then the reader will read it and the voice will come through."* Robins reiterated her view that voice was connected to the person of the writer: *"if everything is working, then you'll have a good feeling, you'll have a sense of who the author is."*

Hogan said both the reader and the writer decide if a piece of writing has voice. However, Hogan argued:

I don't know that you decide 'does it have voice?' cause I think every piece of writing has some sort of voice. I think you decide more 'is that voice speaking to me or not?'. Does it ring true or not? If you're conscious of it, it probably isn't working.

When speaking of a writer she was particularly fond of, Hogan said that she could identify her work always because of the author's distinctive use of language. Thus, even though this author was published in science fiction, non-fiction, and realistic fiction her use of language would always reveal to Hogan that it was her work. Voice is recognized through technique.

Browne said that it was always finally up the reader to decide if a piece of writing had voice. Browne also said that she did not think writers really thought about their own

writing in terms of voice. She said, "*You've always got a voice, though you may be borrowing someone else's.*" When asked how she recognized voice in something that she read, Browne answered, "*you can't hear any false notes or posturing. ... You shouldn't be able to hear influences louder than the initiating speaker/writer ... And the poem must ring true. And individual.*" Voice is recognized by its uniqueness, and by the ring of truth it carries. Browne explained:

it's like a signature. Your thumbprint is different from mine, and so is your writing voice, and yet it's the same thumb, it does the same thing. ... And it's the same thing with voice; it's its own print, its own signature. But, at the same time, voice has to be universal. It can't be so idiosyncratic that no one can recognize what's being said but the writer.

Does writing with voice mean then, that as a reader I would always be able to identify the writer? Browne answered yes, she thought so, but that there was a danger in always being so recognizable:

If you always sound like yourself then maybe you are writing the same poem over and over. ... So you want to keep the voice but you don't want to be so repetitive that people could read one of your poems and 20 years later be reading the same poem. Then you're not growing as a writer. You're not developing.

Voice can develop as can a writer's technique or skill with craft. Browne said, "*A voice can have more wisdom in it than it did before. It can be more insightful. It can take on new content, but it can also go deeper with the same content.*"

When asked who decides if a piece of writing has voice, Norris answered that it would depend on which voice we were talking about. He mentioned the author's voice, the implied author's voice, the narrator's voice, and the character's voice. Perhaps the reader decides the first two, and the author, as creator, decides or creates the voices of narrators and characters.

Norris said voice is difficult to discuss, or define, because *"people are going to react to rather odd things in any piece of writing. That often is what results in censorship, or attempts in censorship."* (Censorship came up earlier in my discussion on voice with Stacey. At the end of the interview, when asked if there was anything he would like to add, Stacey said, *"Yeah. I expressed my voice [at a community Friday night gathering held at the school theatre] and I got censored because someone felt my reading was inappropriate. And I'm very bitter. Because it was the principal of my school."* When asked for more detail, Stacey continued, *"[I was] reading some of my own poetry. And I said the word feces and that was inappropriate for the [school and community] setting. Good thing I didn't swear."*) This raises other questions: What is an appropriate response for readers when they hear a voice they don't like? A voice they disagree with? A voice that makes them uncomfortable? It is relevant in any discussion on voice, to recognize that some voices are always trying to silence others. Norris spoke powerfully about this when he said:

voice - whatever it is, it exists and it is very important. And people can argue and debate it like everything else but the fact of the matter is that people are prepared to die for their right to a voice. ... If voice didn't matter, why then are dictators terrified of it? And why are people, why is it so important to our identity that people will respond to a voice, to their poets or their fiction writers or their dramatists and say that's us, that's who we are?

Voice is often used as a synonym for power, or voice is an expression of having power (Elbow, 1981; Albers, 1989). As teachers we sometimes attempt to empower students by encouraging their voice, by encouraging acknowledgment of their position, and their experience. I mentioned this connection between voice and empowerment in education to Douglas. She didn't think that writing with voice necessarily empowers. She said:

I don't think it does actually because I think we're all a lot more empowered if we can write a really effective PR piece, a letter to the editor, a love letter, a proposal and all of those things. I mean I think I'm politically much more empowered if I can do those things than if I write really badly you know? It's an odd notion of empowerment. But I think looking back to the 60s the notion that students should be free to write about their own experience and to experiment with different forms and styles and so on was a wonderfully liberating one. I mean the question is - 'Is it still liberating in the mid-90s?' and I would think not. You know I don't think we need to release students from the same kind of prison they were in in the 1960s.

Douglas' comments remind me of the comments of some of the other writers. Others had also commented on the fact that young writers would benefit if they left writing classes having had a wide range of writing experiences, rather than just poetry for example. As well, Browne had mentioned that one of her progressions as a writer was in terms of content. She no longer concerned herself about what she could write about as she had learned that years ago.

When asked how he recognizes voice in something that he reads, Norris answered, *"Vocabulary and sentence structure. Subject matter. ... it is tied to subject matter, that you need that clue."*

When asked who decides if a piece of writing has voice, Douglas answered that the writer surely does not. She explained, *"the reader, you would say, constructs the voice, just as the listener hears the voice."* When asked how she would recognize voice in something that she read, Douglas said, *"I wouldn't look at ideas. I look at diction, grammatical structure, sentence structure, paragraph organization, development, that's where I would look and those would give me the voice."* I asked if by ideas she meant content. Is content part of voice? Douglas answered, *"what is content? Content doesn't*

exist independently out there. ... There is no such thing as content. There is, there is just what the reader reads. So in that sense content is of very little consequence to me."

When asked how she would identify voice in something that she read, Allen answered, *"It has truth. It resonates for the reader. Artifice exposes itself and voice has no artifice. When a writer has found voice there is freedom there."* Voice is again connected to honesty, to truth.

Summary of the Adult Writers' Responses:

The adult writers stated clearly that it is the reader who decides if a piece of writing has voice. They said that they don't think about voice in terms of their own writing, and thus one presumes they consider voice in writing only from their position as readers of other people's work. Readers have the final say. One writer said that the reader constructs the voice. One writer argued that both the reader and the writer decide on the effectiveness of the voice, in that all writing has voice.

Most writers recognized voice through technique - the language, the sentence structure, organization. Two writers specifically mentioned voice is recognized through a sense of truth in the writing.

Summary of Responses Across all Three Groups:

It was interesting that when asking the three groups about how they recognize voice in text, the teachers had the least to say. The teachers seemed slightly less sure of their responses than the other two groups. Perhaps this reflects the teachers' struggle with attempting to teach something that is so elusive.

A couple of participants stressed that just as the understanding of voice is personal, so is the recognition of voice. A text that has voice for one person may not have voice for another. However, most participants, when answering how they recognized voice, mentioned being able to sense the presence of the writer, or mentioned the writer's unique

way with technique. In particular, participants mentioned the writer's vocabulary, sentence structure, and content. Thus, voice in writing was recognized through the felt presence of the writer on the page, and the writer's unique way with craft.

Most of the participants agreed that the reader ultimately decides if a piece of writing has voice. Some participants said that both the reader and the writer decide, but that ultimately it was the reader that mattered. One teacher stated that writers would not know if their work had voice, and many of the adult writers confirmed this. They said that voice in text was something that they never thought of in connection with their own work when they were writing. The student writers were very uncomfortable talking about voice in connection with their own work, but more comfortable and verbose when talking about voice in what they read. Voice, then, is perhaps something that concerns readers, and concerns writers in their capacity as readers.

Point of View and Voice

When discussing literature and writing with teachers, the term point of view surfaced repeatedly. I asked the teachers and adult writers to explain the relationship between point of view and voice.

M.B. explained that he saw point of view and voice as being very similar. He stated that *"a point of view is probably, has a certain responsibility to create a certain kind of voice."* Thus, he argued, *"the point of view gives a certain vision of the world and that vision of the world, one way of looking at is responsible for reporting a certain voice, or in a sense that is the mandate that that point of view has."* The point of view chosen, (could this be the same as narrator's voice?) determines voice? Point of view and voice are inextricably linked. Is this what Sandi was talking about also? But, how then is the voice of the character, or the point of view, differentiated from the voice of the writer? Do they become one and the same thing?

J.P. explained, "*Personality is the first person or second or third person point of view, it's just the appearance of something. Voice is the character that's integral, internal, innate.*" Earlier J.P. had said, "*Personality is what you see, character is the internal, voice is the internal, the style is the personality.*"

D.N. explained the relationship between voice and point of view by saying "*point of view is part of voice I think.*" D.N. had explained that technique is part of voice, and point of view is another part of writing that contributes to a writer's voice.

In one of Smyth's books the plot progresses by different characters picking up and telling a little bit of the story. I asked Smyth how the voices of these different character narrators relate to the voice of the writer? Smyth said he didn't know, but then added that they all sound just like him. He explained, "*as I was writing it I was sort of aware of that as being part of the struggle, that why am I even bothering with it, they all just sound like I do.*" There is a difficult connection here between the voice of the narrator and the voice of the author.

When asked about the relationship between point of view and voice Robins answered: "*point of view is a little bit different from voice although again the author's voice is somehow going to come through with that particular character.*" She added, "*So there you have the author's voice is going to be recognizable but every character is going to be different ... it's that whole idea of voice - that indefinable thing.*"

Hogan said that "*often what happens is the story itself chooses the point of view. It dictates the author's voice. Point of view and voice though should not be confused. Point of view is only one part of voice.*" The point of view chosen for the story then, helps to reveal the author's voice that for Hogan is the core of all writing.

Browne said that "*one presumes that the lyric 'I', the first person singular in the poem is the writer, with some modifications.*" The point of view voice would be different from the author's voice if the character is not the author, not a similar character to the author. For example, if a middle aged woman is writing from the point of view of a

teenage boy, the two voices would/should be different. However, if the same middle aged writer was writing from the point of view of a middle aged woman in similar circumstances the voices might match, or be very similar. Often, the match, or mismatch, of these two voices leads readers to be able to discuss the authenticity of a narrator, the narrator's credibility. Browne gave an example:

In "My Last Duchess" you talk about the voice of the Duke, don't you, what he shows through his subterfuges and his arrogance and his not coming directly out and saying what happened. You're not talking about Browning's voice, and yet we know Browning wrote the poem. It was his signature underneath all of that and it is his imaginative view of a cold-hearted man, a murderer.

When asked how voice relates to point of view Norris answered that he wondered, but he wasn't sure. He said, *"there is the author, then there is the implied author, then there's the narrator, and then there's the character."* I asked him to clarify these for me. He said:

when the students write a story and they'll have a narrator who is discernible it is easier to be able to say listen to the way this person's talking here, and now, we'll say the easiest thing is to say they've created a child, maybe six, and say now listen - this child all of a sudden doesn't sound like six but sounds like a 20 year old university student. And there the change of voice is absolutely clear.

This is the voice of the narrator, a voice associated with point of view. Norris continued, *"Now, how do all those add up to the voice of the actual author? Well they don't. They never do. They, I think that they eventually add up to the voice of the implied author."* Narrator and author are heard as different voices, as are the voices of the author and the implied author. About the implied author Norris said:

I'll give a talk or a reading, and they'll come up afterwards when we're having coffee and they'll say 'you know, you're not at all like I thought you'd be'. Well, that's the implied author. And that's the voice of the implied author that they're talking to, or reacting to.

The difference between the author and the implied author is a very important one. Norris gave an example of this importance: *"for example in the Soviet Union where if you wrote a book and the implied author, you know, was anti-Soviet, and the real author ended up in prison."* In such a situation the distinction is critical.

When I asked Douglas about the relationship between voice and point of view she answered, *"point of view again is a matter of style. It's not a matter of the individual writer."* Point of view is part of technique, part of style.

Allen described the relationship between voice and point of view as an *"intermittent connection. The connection between voice and point of view is splintered."* Connections and definitions sometimes remain unclear.

Summary of Responses:

Point-of-view is described as being part of technique. It also requires that certain decisions on the part of the author be made; this contributes to the writer's voice. Point-of-view is part of voice; to some extent point-of-view can influence voice. However, Norris and Browne, in particular, argued that point-of-view is different from the author's voice. It could be argued that voice in text is a compilation of point-of-view (which is part of technique), content, and the person of the writer.

searching out Hades

staring out in the sky,
a cat on the picket fence waves her tail
and the moon shines like the black tulip
among cigarette ashes at my feet.

the screen door whistles in my ear,
its rips rustling with every move I make.
I can feel the sandpaper of my humid breath
and the burning eyelashes while my neck rests
on the back of her lawn chair.
my toes find their way through cracks
in the floor and for a moment,
while seeking warmth in dusty ashtrays of gravel
I remember shaking hands with native monuments,
in awe with the accusing realism of totem poles
pointing their fingers across from a bus depot.
but now, black coffee is brewing,
and the pipes groan the relief
only a shower can bring.

the sap-filled door handle rustles gently in the breeze,
but it's only the wind and the rust.
While the cat moans to Pluto once again.

by Dave Lukowicz

Chapter Five

Revisiting the Questions

This study was an attempt to further understand what the term voice in writing means, whether it is developed or discovered and the role of the English teacher in that development or discovery, and how voice in text can be identified. This study does not attempt to unequivocally define voice. As this research shows, different people involved with writing understand voice differently. However, similarities in understanding did exist for the participants in this study and a better understanding for this researcher has been achieved.

Of relevance to this research was that all participants but one insisted that there was a connection between voice in text and the person of the author. The connection made between the oral voice and the voice in text perhaps illustrates this. Many participants felt this connection to the speaking voice, and stated that voice in text required the feeling of a person actually speaking to the reader, that the 'soul' or 'spirit' of the writer was present in the words on the page.

This was supported by the participants' explanation of how they recognize voice in something that they read. Voice in text was recognized by the felt presence of the writer as expressed through the use of technique. Many of the participants stated that for them to recognize voice in text they must have a sense of the author. As well, participants felt that an author's unique use of technique revealed voice also.

A second key finding was that the participants stated that voice in writing cannot be taught, however voice can be made clearer through improved technique which can be taught. The participants stated that equally important to the development of voice was an improved understanding of self.

Perhaps for a clearer understanding of voice some other questions need to be addressed that came to light in the course of this study. Douglas explained that sometimes when readers believe they have met the person of the writer on the page, they are totally taken aback to later learn that the writer is completely unlike the person they had imagined. Norris referred to the same thing in an anecdote saying that when readers meet him after he does a reading they sometimes say that he is not like they imagined. He believed they are reacting to their perception of the implied author. Perhaps voice for readers is more connected to our perception of the implied author's personality, than to the author's real personality which any talented writer could mask anyway. This must be so if, as my participants maintained, good writers have more than one voice to choose from in their writing. Perhaps skilled writers can create more than one implied author for us to respond to. The direct connection between voice in writing and the personality of the author becomes questionable.

Voice then becomes technique, but more than technique it becomes a skillful writer's way of manipulating all that is technique, and content, to create an implied author the reader can believe in. Recognition of voice, as participants explained, is directly connected to the writer's use of technique. Voice can be taught in so much as technique can be taught, and my participants argued for the importance of self-teaching through writing and reading. It is this latter exercise with reading and writing that teaches writers how to manipulate and create with language to create an identifiable spirit on the page. Voice is achieved through teaching only if we mean teaching to include that which is learned in a classroom and that which is learned from oneself. For this same reason voice is both developed and discovered. Writers develop the technique they consciously strive to master and improve. They discover through their own private experience with writing and reading a voice that they believe in enough to recreate on the page. As writers develop their technique, they develop their voice. As writers discover themselves, they discover their voice.

Voice, then, is borne out of our individuality, and singular, albeit with many ways of expressing that one voice open to writers. Just as speakers have many ways of expressing their speaking voices, so do writers have different registers available from which they can choose their voice in writing.

Recommendations for Teachers of Writing

Recommendations for teachers of writing were gathered from transcripts of participants. These recommendations could be loosely catalogued under three headings:

- (a) environmental - which includes suggestions for classroom atmosphere and publishing opportunities
- (b) method - which includes suggestions for specific teaching, and
- (c) literature - which reinforces the connection between reading and writing with specific reading suggestions.

Environmental recommendations:

- provide a safe and comfortable environment
- encourage students to take risks in their writing
- provide opportunity for students to share their own writing with the class, and teach class members how to respond only positively to work read
- encourage students to read out loud, to listen to the language; read out loud to them
- work on building the confidence of your students - ie: through sharing time, through journal writing where teachers can correspond with student writers, by highlighting in their work what is working when they cannot see it themselves
- make publishing opportunities known to students
- encourage students to go to local poetry readings, or form their own.
- encourage oral discussion of writing and literature to strengthen students' ability to voice their own experience

- let students know that there is no one right way to write
- always be encouraging, supportive
- tell students to write [something] every day
- tell them that a commitment to writing is necessary to be a great writer, and not everybody can do that
- teach students the difference between criticism of the work and criticism of the author
- teach students to discover who they are
- tell students that writing skills/technique can be taught - that they can learn these things
- tell students not to expect too much too fast; tell them writing really is a solitary activity, not a glamorous social party

Method recommendations:

- model writing and risk taking
- teach technique - tell students definitely the things that are definite
- teach, and require from students, many different kinds of writing, for example: essays, poems, letter to the editor, short stories, public relations memos
- teach them that writing is hard work; teach them how to re-write, how to edit and let go of bad writing
- give lots of feedback; respond to what students do
- teach them that their ideas are valuable and they need to have the guts to put them down on paper
- listen, and teach listening skills (listening to both oneself and others)
- teach students how to observe (observation skills)
- teach communication skills
- tell students to write about what they know about and what they care about
- give students tools so that they can write in more than one genre - allow students to choose what kind of writer they want to be

Literature recommendations:

- share the best literature you have available with students; show them what good writing looks and sounds like
- make special effort to share modern literature, Canadian literature, and to introduce students to writers from their geographical region to show that people from places like theirs do write
- share non-fiction and other genres besides novels, short stories, and poetry
- recommend books to meet the needs/interests of individual students
- encourage students to read

The Issue of Censorship: Silencing the Voice

The issue of censorship arose during the course of my research, but was not something I originally considered as being part of voice. Of course it is. This issue was raised by Stacey who spoke of experiencing censorship first hand at a poetry reading. Kirby and Liner (1988) wrote "Be frank and honest and realistic about censorship, not prudish" (p. 246). Some voices will always try to stifle, or correct, others. Perhaps Kirby and Liner offer good advice.

Norris shared his thoughts on censorship in classrooms. Teachers are required to reveal abusive situations or potentially harmful situations that their students may bring to their attention. Perhaps this does serve to shut down certain student writers who wish to explore certain personal experiences. At the same time it reminds us that we could teach our students to explore their own lives through the third person, and to help them consider what response they are expecting from their audience. As responsible adults we cannot ignore a call for help if that is what we hear, nor can we ignore the abuse of children if that is what confronts us. Perhaps this is an issue that weighs an individual's right to expression against an adult's responsibility to secure safe environments for

children. A teacher's response to all student writing is dictated in part by the age of the student, and this includes response to both technique and content. However, a teacher's responsibility to report abuse of a child is legally more binding than a student's right to free expression.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Another study would benefit from using more cohesive respondent groups. For example, interview all poets in one group, non-fiction writers in another, and short story writers or novelists in another. This study showed that each of these different writer groups would have differing views as to how voice impacts their writing.
2. A larger study that interviewed more participants could look at the role that gender plays in voice. With my smaller group numbers and in my desire to protect anonymity of contribution, gender was something I could not address comfortably.
3. It would be interesting to do a study on voice from a working definition. As was evident from this research and the literature review, a lack of a definition is problematic. I sometimes wondered if some of my respondents used the term 'voice' as a synonym for the word 'writer'. As well, when there was uncertainty as to what exactly we were discussing, further questions in the interview became difficult to ask.
4. Another study could look more closely at the reader's role in connection to voice. Is voice a projection of the reader? How does the perceived voice in writing relate to the personality of the reader? If voice for the writer, as Bakhtin suggested, is intertextual in that it builds from all socio-historical and linguistic contexts then does this not also affect the reader?

Personal Reflections

I believe this study does contribute to the better understanding of voice in writing, the development and discovery of voice and the role the English teacher plays in that, and makes clearer how voice in writing is recognized. In addition to this understanding, other learning experiences were gleaned by this researcher in the process of completing this study.

In particular I learned the difficulty of effectively interviewing participants for a study. Although I knew that interviewing was a skill, and although I knew to be prepared for each interview with a question guide and having read each author's work, I cannot over stress the importance of being prepared. It is hard to be prepared for the unimaginable but that is what interviewing research seems to require. I think that only in being extremely prepared can one be flexible enough to always get a satisfying interview.

Of personal significance to me was hearing that the writing/English teacher was the most significant influence in the development of student writers. I must never forget this, but carry it with me into my classroom every day.

This research study was a rewarding experience for me. Meeting writers and teachers of writing to talk about writing is something people do for fun, not as part of their work! Writing has fascinated me since childhood, and I feel fortunate indeed to have been able to learn so much about writing from the participants in this study.

Recess

I tilt my head back as upside-down trees
melt into the faces of classmates.

In the soccer field kisses threaten the boy in the red jacket
while grass stains dance with the elegance of size 6 sneakers.

I marry boys with blond hair on the swings,
rescue maidens from pirates, find paths
through jungles Tarzan would never enter.

Alligators snap their scaled jaws together
inches from my foot while wooden fortresses fall
to invaders with banana swords and pine cone bullets.

We watch our reflections leap towards us in rain puddles
and press our cheeks against cold wire fences,
daring the world to enter our domain
and face the dodge ball, the well aimed stones,
to skip in blue galoshes and drink from knee high fountains.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Agreement for Adult Participants

Re: Research for a Master's thesis by Christine Roberts. The title for this thesis is "A Study of Recognizing and Developing Voice in Writing".

Christine has described her proposed study to me in detail and I understand that she hopes to learn more about voice in writing, as well as the influences that contribute to a writer's development. I understand that my participation involves a personal interview, and reading the transcription of the interview to ensure it is accurate before analysis. I further understand that I will have the opportunity to read what has been written from my contribution. I am also aware that my contribution is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without consequence. The information I contribute will be given anonymously, with a pseudonym being used in place of my name. Audio tapes, and transcripts, of the interview will be destroyed at the completion of this study.

I agree to participate in this research study accepting the above guidelines. I acknowledge that the researcher has informed me of the study and that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time.

Participant's signature: _____

Christine Roberts
4354 Okano Place
Victoria, B.C.
472 - 2606

Faculty Adviser:
Dr. Margaret Robertson
University of Victoria
721 - 7795

Appendix B**Permission for Publication of Name in Acknowledgments**

To: Christine Roberts

Re: A Study of Recognizing and Developing Voice in Writing

This signed consent gives Christine Roberts permission to publish my name in a thank you at the beginning of her thesis on voice in writing. I understand that this will only acknowledge my participation in the study, and that my individual contribution will be kept confidential.

Writer's Name

Appendix C

Letter to Parent

4354 Okano Place
Victoria, B.C.
V8N 5G7

June 16, 1997

Dear Parent:

Re: A Study of Recognizing and Developing Voice in Writing

I am asking for the assistance of your son/daughter in helping me to better understand 'voice' in writing, and how it develops over a writing career. I am proposing to do a research study that would have me interviewing 15 published writers at various stages in their writing careers. I am interested in finding out how these writers understand voice, how they believe voice can be recognized, and what might contribute to the development of voice in writing.

In particular I am asking your permission to interview your son/daughter, a published writer, about his/her views on voice in writing. I would ask that the interview be audio taped for later transcription and analysis. I estimate that participation would take approximately one to two hours of your son/daughter's time.

All of the information obtained will be kept confidential and will be stored in a locked cabinet at the researcher's home. Participants will be given a pseudonym in any publication in which this information might be used. All audio recordings will be erased once they are transcribed into written form. In addition, I would like to advise that this research project will follow the guidelines of the Human Subjects and Ethics committee of the University of Victoria. This research study is carried out as research towards my thesis for my Masters degree in English Language Arts, and will be supervised by my thesis supervisor, Dr. Margaret Robertson. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact one of us. Dr. Robertson's office number is 721-7795 and my home number is 472-2606.

Participation in this research study is purely voluntary. Should you or your son/daughter wish not to be involved in this study, that is acceptable and there will be no consequences for such a decision. As well, your son/daughter is completely free to withdraw participation at any time during the study. Please indicate on the attached permission form whether you do or do not wish your son/daughter to participate in this study. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Christine Roberts

Appendix D**Consent Form for Student Writers**

Parent: I do/do not (circle one) give permission for my son or daughter to participate in a study called "A Study of Recognizing and Developing Voice in Writing" conducted by Christine Roberts. I have read the description of the study in the attached letter.

Student: I do/do not (circle one) agree to participate in "A Study of Recognizing and Developing Voice in Writing" conducted by Christine Roberts.

We understand that:

1. Participation in this study is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without consequence.
2. All data provided will remain confidential, and that audio tapes and transcriptions of the interview will be destroyed by Christine Roberts when her research is completed.
3. Participants will have opportunity to read the analysis and conclusions based on their data, and the opportunity to request changes or deletions.

Signature of parent

Signature of participant

Dated this _____ day of _____, 1997.

Appendix E

Proposed Interview Questions for Student Writers

Writing as Experience

1. Do you read a lot? Who are your favourite writers and what makes them your favourites?
2. When would you say you started writing? How long have you been a writer?
3. What can you tell me about your development as a writer? Have there been stages in your development that you could identify?
4. What has helped you to develop as a writer? Why do you write?
5. Where did you learn what you know about writing? How much of what you know did you learn from yourself?

Writing as Text:

Tell me about your own writing - the pieces you have written.

6. What do you do to make your own writing uniquely yours?
7. How do you think you decide what is good writing, and what is not so good writing? What is it about your writing (your own text) that decides that for you?
8. When scholars write "voice is the essence of the best of writing", what do they mean?
9. In your mind, what do you connect a writer's voice with?
10. If scholars are right, and voice is very important to good writing - who decides that a piece of writing has voice - the reader or the writer?
11. As a reader, how would I recognize voice in something I read?

Appendix F

Revised Interview Questions for Student Writers

Writing as Experience:

1. How would you describe yourself as a reader? Do you have any favourite writers and what makes them your favourites?
2. When would you say you started writing? How long have you been a writer? What sorts of things did you write at first?
3. What can you tell me about your development as a writer? Have there been stages in your development that you could identify? How has your writing changed over time?
4. What has helped you to develop as a writer? Where did you learn what you know about writing? How much of what you know did you learn from yourself?
5. Why do you write?

Writing as Text:

6. What do you do to make your own writing uniquely yours?
7. When you evaluate your own writing, what makes you decide a piece is a good one or that it isn't?
8. Some scholars believe "voice is the essence of the best of writing." What do you think they mean by that? Would you agree that voice is the essence of good writing?
9. Would you say voice is simply a matter of technique or skill or is there something else? What do you connect a writer's voice with?
10. If scholars are right, and voice is very important to good writing - who decides that a piece of writing has voice - the reader or the writer?
11. Would whether the writer was male or female affect the voice in their writing?
12. As a reader, how do you recognize voice in something that you read?
13. Would you say your writing has voice? How do you know?
14. Could somebody teach a writer how to write with voice?

Appendix G

Sample from Transcript of a Student Writer's Interview

Interviewer: Where did you learn what you know about writing?

Student: Through school and family. My parents were into educating me when I was younger and they expressed the value of education, and through school. I am very competitive so I want to do well so I would focus quite heavily on academics, so I would try to excel, try to push myself. That's basically where I learned it, just from reading other books or novels or papers, you get ideas from reading those papers and you think, you find out what you think is good what you think is bad, you take all the good things together and try to put them into your work.

Interviewer: How much of what you know about writing did you learn from yourself?

Student: That's a really difficult question. I'm not sure. I think that school is a catalyst, but you have to take that beyond, you have to push yourself. I don't know how much I learned from myself, I just know that from myself I, that's where the motivation came from. That's where the motivation came from to do a good job, and to look up avenues that possibly weren't open before or weren't open at the first level if you just take it straight at the school level, or just what you learned from lecture or class. I don't know if I can say, if I can partition it and say 60% from myself or 40% I think it's just a combination of both. It's just a mixture just like genetics and environment mixing to influence your behavior I think that what you learn from other people and what you learn from yourself and your development is a feedback system and so I can't actually partition it out I just think that both of those are central components for writing.

Interviewer: In my research about writing I was very interested in finding out what makes some writing so much better than other writing. And when I was doing research on that the idea of voice kept coming up in the research. So that scholars were saying that voice is the essence of the best of writing. What do you think they mean by that?

Student: I think it depends on the audience that's hearing the voice. I think that voice is something that's clear and expresses a view or an opinion in a way that is understandable to other people. I think if you read a paper or say if you read a novel and you don't really get anything out of that novel you don't really see that it's expressing an opinion then there isn't any voice in that novel. I think if certain ideas are expressed clearly and all those ideas tend to tie in together to form a unifying idea that is the voice. And if that unifying idea is not able to be picked up from reading the novel or the paper then there is no voice. So I think that in order to write something that is good, then I think that good writing has

to have a voice and the voice is the opinion that is being expressed and that the whole purpose of the writing is to express that voice.

Interviewer: So, who decides if a piece of writing has voice - the reader or the writer?

Student: I think the reader decides whether it has voice. The writer obviously is writing it with voice and I don't see why anyone would write anything that doesn't say anything. I don't see why anyone would write anything without expressing their voice but I think it's the readers because the readers are the ones that typically say whether a writer will make it in the real world or whether there is anything meaningful in what is being written. I think it's actually the readers that say whether their is voice present, because the writer already will hopefully think that there is voice in whatever he or she is writing.

Interviewer: My understanding of what you are saying is that you are linking voice to content. Is that correct?

Student: Right. The opinions, the view expressed in the content.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there such a thing as voiceless writing?

Student: I think that that is bad writing. I don't think so because I think that some, that the purpose of writing is to say something and I think that whatever's being said is the voice. So I don't see any cases where there can be voiceless writing.

Interviewer: When we think about writing we think of technique, craft, skill, those kinds of things. Is voice simply a matter of technique or skill or is voice something else?

Student.: I think the basis of voice is the technique but its the whole idea that's, the voice is the idea and the idea is expressed through technique. So I don't think that the voice is just technique. You can have great grammar but not have any voice. You can have great technique but you can use that technique so that you're not necessarily expressing something out of the paper, so I think that voice is something more than just technique. Just like you're trying to break it down into the parts are equal to the whole, I think it's the whole is greater than the parts so there's the idea plus all the techniques behind the idea.

Appendix H

Sample from Transcript of a Teacher's Interview

Interviewer: So who decides that a piece of writing has voice - the reader or the writer?

Teacher: Both.

Interviewer: Can they disagree? Could I write something and say

Teacher: Well I guess but I think you'd have to come to some kind of agreement. I mean if you wrote something and you thought it had voice and I read it and I said no it doesn't, then I guess there's something wrong either with the reader or the writer because I think that the voice, the reader should be able to discern voice unless the reader is incompetent, or else the writer - you know I mean that's possible, like sometimes you just don't get it. Like if you don't understand tone you'll miss what the writer is saying, you'll miss voice right away.

Interviewer: Tone?

Teacher: Tone, yeah.

Interviewer: Okay, talk to me about the connection between tone and voice.

Teacher: Because tone is the author's attitude toward his subject matter right? And so sometimes a writer will take an ironic tone, and an unsophisticated writer, reader, won't get it, and he'll take that full irony seriously, like literally I should say, and won't understand the piece of writing at all, and will have missed the writer's voice altogether. Because they didn't understand. And so that's too bad. And so that's an incompetent reader as far as I, maybe read other things first before he gets to that too, I don't know. I guess both have a responsibility to voice. So if you were to write something, if I thought you didn't understand or you couldn't hear my voice then I guess it would be up to me to figure out a way to get your hear that voice. Like if I respect you as a reader then I would think that it would be up to me to make my voice heard, then I wouldn't have made a mistake in my writing or I wouldn't have made something clear enough, or it, you know the editor's job would then be to come back and tell me whoa, I don't quite know, you lost me here. Or I, or you're away, where is that place that you went?

Interviewer: Okay.

Teacher: Yeah, that's what I think.

Appendix I

Sample from Transcript of an Adult Writer's Interview

Interviewer: I am an English teacher and was drawn to study of writing because I was very interested in writing, and very interested in trying to discover what made so much writing so much better than other writing. And the more I read about that the more I read that voice was the essential quality of the best of literature. It was the essence of the best of literature. What do you think that means?

Writer: The best definition I ever heard comes from Seamus Heaney and he said that your voice has to have the feel of you about it. And I loved the word feel as distinguished from feeling. The latter is the expected thing to say, but voice has to be almost tactile so that if you are speaking to us (but your speech is heightened, because all poetry is really heightened speech) we hear you speaking. We don't hear your next door neighbor, or a writer that died ten years ago, but your diction, your vocabulary, your concerns, your accent. Where you came from is in it, a bit of where you are going is in it, the details of your day to day existence and thought processes, and emotional life are there in the words. And that implies a basic trust in yourself again. You can tell, in poetry certainly you can tell, in good prose too, the authentic voice from the inauthentic one. It's a sense of the genuine and the honest in a voice that makes us go back to a piece of writing and that makes us want to read it again and again. There are lies in fiction and there are lies in poetry but there is an essential truth which is always there. When it's not there the poem just flops no matter what other skills are in it. The reader won't live with it, won't listen to it.

Interviewer: So does that mean that voice is connected to the writer more than the writing?

Writer: I don't know how you can split them. It's like Yeats wonderful line:

Oh body swayed to music
 Oh brightening glance
 How can you know the dancer
 From the dance?

In the best of poems you can't know the dancer from the dance. They're inseparable. And so when you look at a poet like Sylvia Plath for instance, you hear her voice and her obsessions that maybe kept her alive for a while. She may have committed suicide earlier had it not been for her poetry. But you certainly see what's coming when you read her work, you see her and her trials and her depression. You also see her absolute love of language in spite of all that in every single poem. You know you hear a different thing in Margaret Atwood, there's no mistaking a Margaret Atwood poem from anyone else's. The coolness,

the vision, the intellectual breadth that she brings to her work - those are there in every single poem. The voice you hear is both her and her writing and I don't know how you can split them.

Interviewer: Do you believe that voice is the essential quality of good writing?

Writer: I think it's one of them. And it's almost a dangerous term. It can be used so broadly it can end up meaning nothing. Right? You know a word like tone is a similar word, which we always use to mean the writer's relationship to what is being written about, to the subject matter. And that's a hard one to distinguish from other elements of writing, to separate, and to talk about as well.

Interviewer: Is voice simply a matter of technique then, or is it something else?

Writer: No, it's technique but I think it's also something to do with personality.

Interviewer: Of the writer?

Writer: Of the writer. Yeah. It's got a lot to do with technique, because without technique you can't say anything well and therefore it's all unmemorable.

Interviewer: So, this, in my mind, goes back to what you just said about when you say it's technique and the personality, that's linking again the writing and the writer, isn't it?

Writer: Yeah, most definitely.

Interviewer: Okay. Who decides if a piece of writing has voice - the reader or the writer?

Writer: Well I suppose it's always up to the reader finally isn't it? But I can't imagine again, a writer deciding whether a piece of their writing has voice. I mean it's just not something I ever think about. I guess as a young writer I hoped that I had my own voice. You've always got a voice though you may be borrowing someone else's. When you begin you hear the phrase "finding your own voice" as if it's tucked away somewhere, under the bed, in a secret cubby hole, and you just have to search relentlessly and one day Zam! there it will be. But again it's never that easy. You write yourself into yourself. Every young writer probably begins by imitating other people when they're learning the craft the way you learn a multiplication table. You may be imitating Yeats without knowing it, or you may be imitating Phyllis Webb without knowing it. A good teacher might say to you 'I think you should stop reading Phyllis Webb for a while and try Ann Sexton, or try Gwendolyn MacEwan, or try Al Purdy instead, and imitate them for a while' and maybe the young writer will do that. But eventually in order for them to say what really matters to them, to say what they have to say to the world, they're going to have to say it in their own voice, or it's

`just not going to work. It's not going to sound authentic, and it's not going to be engaging.

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